

Law Breaking Hunters Under Science Study

By LARRY CARPENTER

A mixed-bag hunter stalks the Kuskokwim area during late summer. Moose, caribou and sheep are in season, but he finds a grizzly framed in his scope — with only two days remaining before grizzly bear season opens.

He may not see another bear for years. He yields to temptation, triggers his 30-06, and in that swift moment of decision he has committed a criminal act.

To an associate professor of sociology and psychology at the University of Alaska, this hunter's behavior can be typed with that of other occasional criminal offenders and represents a burgeoning crisis in law enforcement.

Prof. Sarkis Atamian, in a paper titled, "Criminal Typologies in Sport Hunting and Fishing," has tersely matched lawbreaking hunters and fishermen with these common criminal types:

Petty Offenders—occasional hunting or fishing violators.

Vandals — persons who wantonly kill animals in wasteful manner.

Career criminals—poachers.

White collar criminals—guides or outfitters who act illegally.

Stepping beyond the scope of sports violations, Atamian has added another category:

Organized crime—illegal commercial fishing and hunting.

Atamian's paper, presented last month before the San Francisco meeting of the Pacific Sociological Association, has attracted the attention of leading criminologists

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and is considered a pioneer study in the field.

In his paper, he describes situations and personal feelings that motivate sportsmen to break laws.

Writing about petty offenders in hunting, he explains that a short season for a big game animal "concentrates high levels of activity in a given area because if the hunter misses his opportunity he will have to wait another year for his next chance."

This situation, he says, creates a "sense of urgency and finality in the hunter's attitudes."

Atamian believes the urgency causes the situation to play upon the hunter's self-image.

"His friends, relatives and club associates often know that he is about to go on the 'big hunt.' There is an element of high order skill, courage and physical exertion involved and the 'big hunt' is frequently the testing ground for a hunter's mettle.

"Such a hunter cannot rationalize his failure as an angler can by saying, 'The fish were not biting that day.' The hunter is at a designated season and place precisely because the game is supposed to be there.

"With the services of a guide who has already re-

connoitered an area, the element of sheer luck and chancing on game is not the sole issue. Failure for the hunter, therefore, is a very real sense, elicits skepticism or disappointment from his peers and his personal prestige or self-image can suffer seriously."

Atamian further builds his case by explaining the hunter may have invested a significant sum of money for guide services and hiring of planes or boats. He may have spent fruitless days in physically exhaustive searching.

All this adds to the hunter's "proneness to take risks," he concludes. "It is not always easy to determine the sex and size of the game. Doubts concerning these are frequently resolved on the side of risks which may have criminal results.

"Violations concerning bag limits may also occur. The relative rarity of some species encourages the hunter to take the first specimen he confronts. If, shortly thereafter, a much larger animal is spotted, temptation is strong to take it in addition to the previous one which has already exhausted his limit."

Atamian contends the offender describes here is displaying typical behavior of a petty offender in other

areas of crime.

He continues throughout the paper to match criminal types to all his categories of hunting and fishing offenses.

In his summary, he points to immense enforcement problems facing undermanned fish and game departments as increasing numbers of hunters and fishermen take to the fields and streams.

He says, "There is relatively little recognition by the public at large concerning the magnitude of this sports activity, its unequalled recreational value, and the vast moneys and energies involved with their implications for criminality and law enforcement."

Atamian, an avid outdoor sportsman, calls Alaska "the last remaining big game hunting and fishing paradise on this continent" and believes the state's problems with sports criminality may reach major proportions.

He is particularly concerned with poachers who operate in Alaska and suggests they may constitute the state's largest criminal group among hunting and fishing offenders.

Atamian's paper was an outgrowth of a broader study he prepared in 1966 for the Alaska State Department of Fish and Game.

A fanatic is one who can't change his mind and won't change the subject. WINSTON S. CHURCHILL