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"Species Conservation and Minority Rights: The Case of Springtime Bird Hunting in Aland"

Aaltola, Elisa and Markku Oksanen

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The article examines the case of springtime bird hunting in Aland from a moral point of view. In Aland springtime hunting has been a cultural practice for centuries but is now under investigation due to the EU Directive on the protection of birds. The main question of the article is whether restrictions on bird hunting have a sound basis. We approach this question by analysing three principles: The animal rights principle states that if hunting is not necessary for survival, it cannot be morally justified. Therefore hunting merely to engage in a cultural custom is morally suspect. In the light of the species conservation principle the hunting is questionable due to the fact that it seems to have a diminishing effect on the species populations. The formal principle of justice makes up a more difficult question since the special position of the minorities in regard to the use of natural resources is generally recognised so that they have the right to maintain their cultural practices. We claim, however, that even though cultural practices have substantial value and can be the object of special rights, they should be coherent with other principles. The springtime bird hunt in Aland does not accord with the relevant moral principles and for this reason we conclude that the basis for its continuation is weak.

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