

# Get Away from the Choppa!

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In the past few months, I've written about the dramatic increase in the use of drones, or unmanned aircraft systems, and the corresponding need for their regulation. The Federal Aviation Administration implemented strict rules for the use of drones, particularly in a commercial setting.

The U.S. Department of Transportation wants to require all drones to be registered, including those used by hobbyists. Once registered, the drones can be traced by the agency back to their owners if they collide with other aircraft or violate aviation safety rules.

Animal rights activists are now asking for those aviation safety rules to extend to the protection of wild animals.

The use of drones has been invaluable for naturalists. They can be used to locate lost hikers or campers. Drones are also extremely helpful in observing animals to learn about migration, mating, rearing of offspring and also their habitats, especially those difficult to otherwise safely reach, such as high nests, cliff sides or mountain tops. Drones are also an invaluable tool in guarding against and catching poachers, particularly those targeting endangered species.

But like any other situation, a tool used to protect can also become a weapon used to harm.

Some hunters have used drones to survey the land in the hopes of finding a trophy buck. If they spot one, they use the drone to keep it in sight and head out into the woods to find a suitable place to take the shot. Likewise, some unscrupulous hunters have flown drones at deer or other game, such as turkey, to fluster the animals and drive them toward the hunters' tree stands or blinds. Such use of drones gives these hunters an unfair advantage over their less tech-savvy competitors, not to mention aggravating the animals.

On the flip side, animal rights activists have used drones to disrupt hunters by driving game away before they could be shot. In 2013, People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals launched a campaign dubbed "Air Angels," where the group encouraged members to use drones to monitor hunting activities. Pilots were to collect video footage of "any illegal activity, including drinking while in the possession of a firearm; using spotlights, feed lures and other forbidden hunting tricks; and maiming animals and failing to pursue them."

PETA President Ingrid Newkirk explained that, "PETA's drones will help protect wildlife by letting hunters know that someone may be watching — and recording — them, so they should think twice before illegally killing or maiming any living being." But some animal enthusiasts went too far and instead of just monitoring hunters, they used drones to chase away game.

In response to these episodes, many state and local governments have implemented rules outlawing the use of drones for hunting. For example, the Wisconsin DNR issued regulations stating that "no person shall hunt with the aid of an aircraft, including the use of an aircraft to spot, rally or drive wild animals for hunters on the ground," which include drones in the definition of aircraft. Wisconsin law also precludes the use of drones to harass animals or people legally hunting them.

The National Park Service banned drones from all national parks after a person used a drone to harass a herd of bighorn sheep in Zion National Park in Utah. Violators face up to six months in jail and/or a \$5,000 fine.

Other than in national parks, there are no federal regulations protecting wildlife from drones. There are also no rules protecting drones from wildlife, so like celebrities, animals should feel free to destroy any drones harassing them.

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