

on these buffalo hunts, but as elephant numbers increased many of the Zambezi Valley's dense riverine vegetation areas started to open up due to increasing elephant feeding pressure. These were the areas favored by these secretive, highly territorial antelope. Eventually the bushbuck lost much of their habitat and when this happened they simply disappeared. By the early 2000s it wasn't worth purchasing a bushbuck license, so uncommon had they become.

A similar scenario has evolved in South Africa's well-known Kruger National Park. Up until 1995 the park's elephant population was kept below 8,000 by a regular, carefully managed, scientifically evaluated culling program. International pressure put an end to the culling, and since that time the park's elephant population has doubled. The result of this has been an 80 percent reduction in top canopy trees, very evident habitat change, and considerable public alarm and condemnation at the pending loss of the park's biodiversity. The park's rarer antelope species like sable, roan, and nyala have just about disappeared, which is most unfortunate.

To me the solutions to the Botswana problem is obvious — get the elephant numbers back to where they should be. Unfortunately this is something easier said than done because it is already too late for a massive culling program. Human sentiment, heated emotions, politics, and the greenies have long since entered the picture and the situation has become confusing, illogical, and directionless.

To me it seems that southern Africa's elephants have attained almost ambassadorial status. Culling to keep their numbers in check and to preserve the environment is now simply taboo, with threats of boycotts and even economic sanctions being levelled at countries when the mere suggestion of any form of a culling program has been raised.

In my opinion, a life is a life. Is the life of an elephant more important or sacred than that of a giraffe, for example, or a kudu, which disappears because it no longer has trees to feed on? Everything in nature needs to be in balance, and when the balance tips too far in favor of the mega-herbivores, everything else falls apart.

The sad situation is that everyone seems so paranoid about the elephants and their preservation at all costs that they appear to have forgotten about the other (and, in my opinion, equally important) African wildlife species. I can't help but wonder: Where are the greenies championing the cause of the giraffe, kudu, or bushbuck, or that of the many bird species which have lost their nesting sites due to all the trees being destroyed? Sadly, none of these species seem to stir the emotions strongly enough to rake in the gullible public's donation dollars. This, of course, elephant can do very well, and this is the root cause of the problem.

The worrying aspect is finding a logical solution to the problem and then implementing it. Banning sport hunting is not going to make all these problems disappear—that is for sure. You and I both know this. In fact, it is only going to make things worse. Subsistence poaching is going to escalate as rural communities lose the funds sport hunting once generated. When this happens, even more pressure is going to be placed upon the dwindling antelope numbers.

When wildlife loses its economic value, it is replaced with something that is valuable. Look at what has happened in Kenya, for example. This once wonderfully rich wildlife country has, since the banning of sport hunting, lost 80 percent of its wildlife. Only time will tell if Botswana walks the same path.

Unfortunately, I have no solution to the elephant problem. At their current rate of population growth it is predicted that there will be in excess of 500,000 of them in southern Africa by 2020. Is this likely to happen? I doubt it. Nature is smarter than all of us. Something is going to crash, and when it does I'm sure it will not be pleasant. Unfortunately it's going to be the other wildlife species that will be affected most. Massive environmental degradation and the loss of Botswana's biodiversity is a disaster just waiting to happen.

Sport hunting could have been part of the solution. Instead it is being used as an excuse for poor environmental management and now it is about to be banned. Where is the logic in this?

Rhino Conservation Isn't Just About Rhinos

Ben Carter, Executive Director [Dallas Safari Club](#)

"It's God's job to judge poachers. It's our job to arrange the meeting." That's what a South African game ranger told me in June as we followed rhino tracks—and boot tracks—through a remote area of Kruger National Park. I glanced up expecting to see a smile, but there was none. His eyes told me he wasn't kidding. That face, those words, and the violence they suggested, are still chilling. The ranger stared back and slowly described the escalating trend of enforcement against poachers.

In Africa's bloody war over rhinos and elephants, every lawman knows he might be murdered tonight. The International Ranger Federation website lists 32 African game wardens killed by homicide so far in 2013, and estimates the actual count is likely 2-3 times higher. Stressed, weary, undermanned and underequipped, frustrated by arrests that seldom end in prosecutions, more and more rangers are resorting to shooting on sight any poacher caught in the act. Deadly force is tolerated, even encouraged, by some agencies to help save the lives of their officers.

For hunter-conservationists and all people who are interested in the conservation, management and sustainable use of Africa's wild natural resources. African Indaba is the official CIC Newsletter on African affairs, with editorial independence. For more information about the International Council for Game and Wildlife Conservation CIC go to

www.cic-wildlife.org

There's tragedy on both sides of the badge. In impoverished countries, good people—including rangers—can be sucked into the temptations of poaching. Many pay with their lives. Too much money dangles low. Powdered rhino horn is now 2-3 times more valuable per kilo than cocaine, and it's in high demand by affluent Asians. Some believe it cures cancer. Research has disproved any actual medical benefits. But for triggermen, black-market traffickers, drug cartels, and organized crime syndicates and even terrorist cells profiting from rhino poaching, the big paydays are worth wasting entire species along with anyone who stands in the way.

The ranger said if the war continued at the current pace, a thousand rhinos would be slaughtered by the end of the year, along with untold human lives that would never even be counted. That dark prediction was still fresh on my mind in October when the Government of the Republic of Namibia asked our organization, the Dallas Safari Club (DSC), to help raise crucial funding for additional law enforcement and other rhino conservation initiatives—by auctioning a permit to hunt a black rhino in Namibia.

Most poaching is in South Africa. Namibia is faring much better and intends to keep it that way. In fact, Namibia's black rhino population is doing so well, the country is allowed by science-based international treaties to sell up to five rhino hunting permits a year. Biologists say these hunts are partly responsible for the increasing rhino numbers. Black rhinos are aggressive and territorial. Old, post-breeding males are known to kill younger bulls, cows and even calves. They also consume food, water and space needed to sustain the breeding animals required for species survival. Biologists' call these "surplus animals" because removing them does no long-term harm to a population—and can actually help it grow.

But the people of Namibia also are part of the equation. The country is renowned for its unique conservation model. Local communities form and manage their own refuges, called conservancies, on surrounding lands. The citizenry is allowed to sustainably use the natural resources produced there. This community involvement helped build a nationwide grassroots commitment to conservation. Since Namibia gained independence in 1990, lands under sustainable management have increased from 13 to 44 percent of the nation's surface area. Wildlife now abounds. And black rhino populations have doubled.

Hunting provides the majority of income from most conservancies. Revenue supplements every household either directly or indirectly through community projects. Meat derived from hunting is equitably distributed to the neediest, such as the elderly and schools. Without well-managed lands and hunting, many rural communities in Namibia would fail. The International Council for Game and Wildlife Conservation (CIC) awarded its prestigious Markhor Award to the country and the conservancies to honor this conservation model. DSC is honored to help support this remarkably successful conservation model, and provide more funding for rhino conservation initiatives including anti-poaching patrols

The sale of a permit to hunt a surplus black rhino bull was in January during our annual convention in Dallas. The permit sold for \$350,000 — enough to pay the salaries of a good number of game rangers for a year! Along with law enforcement manpower, revenue from previous rhino hunting permits has allowed Namibia to develop an unmanned aerial vehicle equipped with an infrared camera to assist in rhino patrols. Electronic and specialized security equipment, helicopter surveillance, research and other projects also have been funded. The DSC auction will supplement all of these.

This was not the first time our organization has supported rhino initiatives. Since 2006 alone, to South Africa and other nations, DSC has granted more than \$175,000 for a variety of crucial projects involving rhinos. We've helped train ranger students, provided gear and fuel for rhino protection teams, funded the drilling of boreholes to supply potable water at ranger field stations, supported rhino research and habitat programs, and more.

The auction was merely the latest demonstration of hunters' longstanding commitment to conservation in Africa. It is DSC's fervent hope that with better habitat, science-based wildlife management and overwhelming law enforcement presence, more rhinos—and more people—will be spared.



About Dallas Safari Club (DSC)

Since 1972, Dallas Safari Club has been the gathering point for hunters, conservationists and wildlife enthusiasts. As an international organization has a grant in aid program that contributes hundreds of thousands of dollars each year to programs and projects promoting the DSC mission to conserve wildlife and wilderness lands, to educate youth and the general public and to promote and protect the rights and interests of hunters worldwide.

www.biggame.org

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