

HUNTING IS A SETBACK TO WILDLIFE CONSERVATION

by Teresa M. Telecky



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Nearly 40 years ago, Kenya banned trophy hunting. Within the past two years, other African countries have realized the wisdom of Kenya's approach and instituted similar bans. Botswana and Zambia, once major destinations for pursuers of Africa's "Big Five" — African elephant, African lion, Cape buffalo, leopard, and rhinoceros — have also prohibited this biologically reckless activity because of the harm it causes to wildlife populations. Even the United States, home to the world's largest number of trophy hunters, has taken steps to join the trend. In April, the US Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) banned the import of sport-hunted elephant trophies from Zimbabwe and Tanzania over concerns that the hunts were driving down elephant populations already severely impacted by poachers.

It's about time. If the Dallas Safari Club auction for the opportunity to kill a critically endangered black rhino in Namibia proved anything, it is that trophy-seekers will pay an exorbitant amount of money for bragging rights and a head to hang on the wall, instead of using that wealth to preserve and protect wildlife.

The winner of the auction agreed to pay \$350,000 for the right to kill the black rhino — a creature highly desired by those who seek to add the rarest animals to their trophy collections. Contemplate for a moment what money like that could buy in poor countries that are often riddled with corruption. According to Transparency International, Zimbabwe, Zambia, and Tanzania are three of the most corrupt countries in the world, and money from trophy-hunters fuels this corruption. Corrupt officials allow animals to be killed in dangerously high numbers — to the point of harming the conservation of the species. Corruption that led to poor wildlife management is exactly the reason that

Kenya banned hunting so long ago and why others are following Kenya's lead today.

The Namibian government decided to allow the slaughter of a black rhino as a fundraising mechanism, but those funds will not necessarily go back to black rhino conservation as some claim. Instead, they will go into a general pot of money allocated to all manner of projects including those that have nothing to do with rhinos, or which could even be harmful to rhinos, such as "rural development."

Cashing in on the desires of some to shoot rare species and display their remains back home in lavish "trophy rooms" — macabre mausoleums filled with dead animals — is what is driving Namibia's approach, not the conservation needs of the species. The best way to conserve critically endangered species like the black rhino is to ensure that every animal remains alive and contributing to the genetic diversity of the species. Species with a diverse gene pool are more able to overcome challenges to their survival. The Namibian case proves, once again, that cold, hard cash undermines wildlife conservation.

Fortunately, the black rhino is listed as an endangered species under the US Endangered Species Act (ESA), meaning that the winner will need to get an import permit from the FWS to bring the carcass home. The ESA makes it clear that such permits should be granted only when the import will enhance the survival of the species in the wild. Once the winner applies for the import permit, there will be a 30-day comment period. We plan to provide evidence to the FWS that the recreational shooting of a member of a critically endangered species is harmful to that species. We invite you to sign a petition that we will submit along with our comments showing that people do not support issuance of the import permit.

The US government needs to understand that the American public does not support the Orwellian idea of killing endangered species to save them — even if it comes with a big cash payout. Where will it end? Will a Safari Club International member offer \$1 million for the opportunity to shoot an orangutan, \$2 million for an Asian elephant, and maybe even more for a Siberian tiger?

While those animals are highly protected because they are listed as endangered under the ESA, others are



wildlife survival and that is exactly what the presence of hunting accomplishes. Habitat loss and human-wildlife conflict are growing threats to wildlife populations. This is due to land-use change for various human purposes, such as agriculture. As long as wildlife attack livestock and eat or trample crops, local people will continue to indiscriminately kill intruders that they perceive as a threat to their livelihood. Scientifically based, regulated hunting provides value to wildlife for these local communities by showing the profits that can be generated by the legal harvest of a single animal. It is also conducive in creating socially acceptable population numbers, which ultimately decreases the possibility of wildlife conflict and therefore decreases the number of retaliatory killings, further conserving species.

Many opponents of the hunting industry ask: "If hunters love wildlife, why not donate the money instead of using it for hunting?" But no one asks a marathon runner to only write a check instead of actually running in a breast cancer awareness race. It is commonly understood that providing an opportunity for a person to contribute to a cause, while participating in something they love, increases the likelihood that a person will continue to contribute in the future.

Hunters respect wildlife and seek to conserve the wildlife that they hunt to ensure sustainable populations for the future. It is a lucrative form of tourism that not only creates value for wildlife, but also supports conservation programs, feeds local communities, provides jobs, and funds anti-poaching efforts. And, hunters also write checks for conservation, in addition to hunting.

Hunting is indisputably an effective form of conservation recognized by governments and wildlife organizations throughout the world. It generates revenue and provides tremendous opportunities for communities reliant on wildlife. Science dictates harvest numbers and research showcases its positive effects. Year after year, sportsmen and sportswomen demonstrate their impactful role in conservation and their efforts should not be stifled by the futile emotional arguments of those who harbor a moral grudge against the hunting industry. ■



not so fortunate, and the numbers killed by American trophy hunters annually are staggering. In 2012, the parts of approximately 600 African elephants, 750 African lions, and 698 leopards were imported into this country.

American trophy hunters belong to clubs, such as the Dallas Safari Club and Safari Club International, where they can compete to kill the most animals for the most awards. To earn every award that SCI offers, at least 171 different animals from around the world must be killed. Many SCI members have records for killing more than 400 different creatures that populate their trophy rooms. Hunters receive award trophies for shooting a prescribed list of animals. For example, the "Trophy Animals of Africa" award requires the hunter to kill 79 different African species to win the highest honor.

Animals like elephants and lions are much more valuable alive than dead, to the economies of African nations and to the entire world. An animal can be watched throughout his lifetime, and there's a growing pool of eco-tourism customers waiting for that thrilling experience. On the other hand, the creature targeted by the hunter dies, meaning the revenue gained is merely a one-shot deal. What's more, the pool of people who want to kill elephants, lions, or leopards for fun is comparably tiny, and it's declining. The pictures and the memories for the eco-tourists will last a lifetime, and it's a trip they'll never be ashamed to recount to their grandkids.

Make no mistake: Trophy hunting is setting wildlife conservation back, and there are better ways to save these animals than by shooting them. ■

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