THE WAR ON HUNTING - PERSPECTIVES FROM AFRICA.

By Willem P Frost

The conflict over hunting.

Throughout the Western civilisation a profound debate over hunting has escalated into an aggressive verbal brawl that is leading nowhere.

Hunting is often criticised by the animal rights- and anti-hunting fraternity as "unacceptable human behaviour" and as "a threat to conservation". They portray hunting as barbaric, unnecessary, wasteful, devoid of merit and without any deep meaning. These activists usually do not recognise the differences between the various forms of hunting and poaching. They also refuse to accept the concept of "conservation through sustainable utilisation".

Hunters and conservationists, on the other hand, find it rather astonishing that there are still people who do not understand the vital role of hunting in conservation and preservation of biodiversity in 21st century Africa. The anti-hunting activists are often accused of not understanding the real threats to conservation in a continent characterised by poverty, weak governments, mismanagement, corruption, etc., etc. Point is, however, that anti-hunters are usually not interested in the merits of hunting as a conservation tool or the fact that it provides healthy protein to many people or that it generates wealth in rural communities. The hunters often argue that it is their rights, and not the animal's rights, that are to prevail, and that since hunting does not harm fellow man, but benefits many, hunting should not be interfered with. Arguments that sustainable utilisation of wildlife in the form of hunting is beneficial for conservation, and for mankind, seem to make no impression on the anti-hunting fraternity. Most anti-hunters seem to be more interested in the 'suffering' on a single animal, i.e. the animal being hunted, than in the well being of the total population.

The conflict between hunters and non-hunters is thus serious and the respective positions seem irreconcilable. As will be shown hereunder, the value systems and/or beliefs of hunters and anti-hunters seem to be so far apart that reconciliation is probably not a realistic expectation in the near future.

Yet, hunters cannot afford not to put their case forward in the public arena. It is however no good to simply portray anti-hunters as misguided extremists whose bizarre views will cause grave harm to mankind should they be allowed to prevail (even though it is often true). Hunters would be well advised to take their case beyond the benefits that could be derived for conservation and man; they should also put more effort into answering the fundamental question: "Why do I hunt?" If the deeper meaning of hunting cannot be explained, then hunters should not be surprised if the negative public opinion against hunting continues to gain momentum.

The anti-hunting fraternity.

The animal activist movement can be divided into four different schools, namely

Animal welfarists. They focus on the prevention of cruelty to animals and accept that man may make use of animals, provided it is 'humane'.

Animal rightists. They believe that animals have inherent rights analogous to human rights and that the exploitation of one species by another is morally indefensible. It is important to note the difference in ideology between animal welfarists and animal rightists.

Animal liberationists. They believe that violence in order to 'liberate' animals is justified. Some of these extreme nut-cases apparently believe that man has outlived his welcome on planet earth and that the globe needs to be turned back over to the animals. Some western security agencies already fear that animal liberationists and 'green terrorists' may become the main terrorist scourge of the 21st century.

False conservation prophets. They claim to be conservationists but do not see the constructive role that hunting has to play in conservation. They often confront hunters with statements such as "......you kill the exact things we want to preserve". They focus mostly on large mammals and do not concern themselves too much with the conservation of eco-systems or with the effects of over-populations of destructive species such as elephants. Their main concern is that animals are not hunted, yet they often have little to say about poaching and the horrors of the bush meat trade.

Included in this group are anti-hunters who have no objection to eating beef, mutton and pork bought from a butchery, but who are strongly opposed to harvesting game animals in order to consume the meat. Although they have no intellectual or moral base from which to argue their case, they should not be ignored as they may influence those non-hunters who currently do not have an objection to hunting and conservation.

Whilst the animal welfare movement is about 150 years old, the animal rights movement only gained momentum when the Australian, Peter Singer, published his book "Animal Liberation" in the mid-1970s. The animal rights philosophy goes much further than being just against hunting; all use of animals by man is regarded as morally unacceptable. By "equal rights for animals", the animal rightists do not mean "equal treatment in all respects" but rather "equal consideration". In other words, the rights of animals require the same consideration as those of man and exploitation of animals by man is simply not acceptable. When animal rightists refer to an animal's rights, they usually refer to the right to life; the right to live free from human involvement; and the right to equal treatment. Singer states:

"If a being suffers, there can be no moral justification for refusing to take that suffering into consideration. No matter what the nature of that being, the principle of equality requires that its suffering be counted equally with the suffering of any other being".

Animal activists have adopted an extreme set of values that is not shared by the majority of people in the counties where they operate. Yet they are however skilled in the techniques of using the media to promote their cause and they consequently have the ability to influence large numbers of people who are currently not opposed to conservation and wildlife management.

The anti-hunting movements often degenerate into aggressive ideology that does not respect the views of others. Whilst they seldom have a view on soil erosion; habitat destruction by over-populations of certain species; invasion of alien plants; or pollution, they go out of their way to portray hunters as cruel, inhumane and contra-conservation. In the process they do more harm than good to the environment.

The International Union for the Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources ("IUCN") adopted the World Conservation Strategy ("WCS") in 1980. This document,

can be regarded as a blueprint for the survival of mankind on planet earth. Most sovereign states are members of the IUCN and these member states obligated themselves to model their National Conservation Strategies ("NCSs") on the WCS template. Thus the objectives of the WCS also became those of South Africa's NCS and of many other countries.

The three principle objectives of what the WCS calls "Living Resource Conservation" are:

- To maintain essential ecological processes and life support systems;
- To preserve genetic diversity (i.e. to stop extinctions); and
- To ensure the sustainable utilization of species and ecosystems (notably fish and other wildlife, forests and grazing lands) which support millions in rural communities as well as major industries.

Animal rights organizations are constantly striving to undermine the efforts of responsible governments to achieve the objectives of its NCS and are thus working against the better interests of mankind – bearing in mind that the WCS is a blueprint for the survival of man on planet earth. The public should take note of this!

The post-modern civilised world can at times only be described as bizarre. Most people now live their lives without being part of the food chain except as consumers. They live oblivious of the fact that man is an omnivore at the top of the food chain, but an omnivore that needs meat as a basic source of protein. It is indeed bizarre that post-modern man can gorge himself on virtual violence in movies and video games, but

is horrified by sport hunting. Likewise man has the ability to turn a blind eye to genocide in far-off third world places, but sustainable utilisation of wildlife resources causes him to protest loudly. We live in a pluralistic, multi-cultural, multi-religious world where we tolerate a lot; yet some of us find hunting unacceptable social behaviour that cannot be tolerated - bizarre indeed. We also live in a world characterised by hypocrisy. The only people with some moral ground to argue against hunting are the true vegans, all other anti-hunters are tainted by varying degrees of hypocrisy.

It should also be noted that hunting in general has been recognised by the major international conservation agencies as a legitimate form of conservation through sustainable utilisation. All hunting associations also subscribe to the principles of fair chase, hunting ethics and conservation of biodiversity. Yet hunters are constantly required to defend and explain their position on hunting.

It is often said that anti-hunters, especially animal rightists and animal welfarists, should have the democratic right to argue their case. If that is the case, and bearing in mind the grave harm that animal rightists intend for man as a result of their bizarre ideologies, then it may also be argued (as Ron Thomson did in an article in *African Indaba*) that paedophiles, rapists, murders and other criminals should have the same democratic right to argue the case for their heinous activities.

21st Century Africa

Africa went through a phenomenal transformation over the last 150 years. Much of the continent used to be characterised by massive wildlife populations and relatively low human populations that had little effect on the natural environment. Wildlife populations were kept in balance with the carrying capacity of the habitat by natural cycles of drought, diseases and predation. When the continent was colonised by the European powers and the white population of the Cape migrated northwards, the vast herds of springbok and other free roaming antelopes had to make way for modern cities and towns, roads, railways, agricultural development and human settlement at an unprecedented scale. The growth in human population exploded and the conflict for 'lebensraum' between modern man and wildlife became intense.

Today Africa is characterised by small pockets of natural eco-systems in an ocean of urban, semi-urban and agricultural development. All wildlife species and subspecies are showing a declining trend in numbers – with one exception: the springbok of Southern Africa. Some species are already extinct (such as the bubal hartebeest, the quagga, the Barbary and Cape lions, the Kenya oribi and Roberts' lechwe) whilst others are on the brink of extinction (such as Aders' and Jentink's duikers, the northern white rhino, the mountain bongo, the giant sable, the West African giraffe, the Swayne's and Tora hartebeests, the Soemmering's gazelle, the Beira antelope, etc., etc.).

Not only have numbers of game animals been depleted, but the ancient migration routes have also been blocked by modern developments. It is thus no longer possible for wildlife to exist without managerial intervention by man. It is important to recognise that man is still dependant on animal life, plant life, water and soil to provide in his daily needs. These resources must now be managed in a holistic approach to ensure sustainable utilisation. It is simply not possible to manage one resource independent of the others.

Conservation is not only about the protection of wild animals; it is about the conservation of bio-systems to ensure responsible, sustainable utilisation by man of all renewable resources. Hunting has an important role to play in 21st century conservation – as will be explained hereunder.

Today there are only 23 countries in Africa that still offer trophy hunting. Countries such as Ethiopia and Malawi used to be regarded as wildlife paradises with vast game numbers. Today there is hardly any wildlife left; it has all disappeared into the cooking pots of the hungry masses in the absence of effective wildlife management programmes. Do not expect too much, if any, wildlife on a visit to Ethiopia's game reserves. In Malawi there is not much outside of the Liwonde and the Nyika, and all large predators are gone. There is not one Nyasa wildebeest (*Connochaetes taurinus johnstoni*) left in Malawi (formerly known as Nyasaland). Many other African countries are no different.

Kenya has banned all hunting in 1977 as a result of pressure by animal rights groups. The wildlife numbers in Kenya has since been on a steady decline and is currently crashing at an alarming rate. It is estimated that Kenya may have lost as much as 70% of its wildlife since the ban on hunting. The reasons are simple: unprecedented human population growth; people settlement in wildlife areas; overgrazing by domestic

stock; loss of habitat; poaching and poisoning of predators (particularly of lions); and the fact that wildlife is of no value to the local peasant subsistence farmer and is seen as only a nuisance and a threat.

The international animal rights and animal welfare movements, spearheaded by the International Fund for Animal Welfare ("IFAW"), are reacting vociferously against any move to reintroduce hunting in any form back into Kenya. They have embarked on a very efficient publicity campaign in newspapers, radio, and television, and are cleverly playing the race card by arguing that the only beneficiaries of hunting would be rich, white landowners who had anyway stolen their land (and the wildlife on it) from Africans. They are also masters of misleading politicians and government officials up to the highest levels. An unholy alliance developed between local animal welfare and land reform groups and it has been reported that they resolved that were hunting to be reintroduced into Kenya then they would arm bands of local militias to shoot to death the hunters in the field. The IFAW has a very major influence on the country's wildlife policies. Consequently, Kenya's wildlife populations continue to fade away.

Fact is that Africa cannot continue with the current level of mismanagement of its wildlife resources. Many things will have to change, most notably attitudes, effective law enforcement, and wise land-use policies. Fundamental to the future of Africa's wildlife, however, is sustainable tourist or conservation hunting and sustainable village subsistence hunting. Much can be learned from the South African wildlife management model.

The South African wildlife management model.

Whereas property rights are either non-existent or very weak in most of Africa, the situation in South Africa is different – at least so far. Not only do we have private property ownership in South Africa, but individual landowners are also the owners of the wildlife on their property. This is the result of a far sighted decision by the government in the 1960's to privatise wildlife ownership. Many landowners have refrained from, or turned away from, stock and/or crop farming and are currently operating private game reserves or game ranches on their land. Some of these properties are quite large and run into the tens of thousands of acres. The wildlife have become a very valuable commodity and is expertly managed and protected. Consequently, most of South Africa's wildlife is to be found on private land. This is particularly true of some rare species such as sable, roan and tsessebe. It is estimated that there are currently more than 9000 private game ranches in the country and this industry is growing by roughly 300 000 hectares per annum. Privately owned wildlife ranches also by far exceed the extent of public owned parks and reserves. The value of land containing wildlife has also risen markedly. Privately owned game ranches today cover an area of more than 20 million hectares as opposed to national and provincial parks that jointly cover 7.5 million hectares. In addition, the number of game animals on private property is almost double that of the game in the country's national parks. Taking into account that there is an estimated 60% more game in South Africa today than in the mid-1900s, the success of private game ranching speaks for itself. South Africa has indeed become a world leader in extensive wildlife ranching on fenced properties.

But these private conservation efforts will not be successful without the income from hunting safaris. Enter the *international trophy hunter*. He provides the critical funds to keep the conservation efforts going. Without his support the land will simply have to be turned into more profitable crop or stock farming. The international trophy hunter thus has reason to be proud of his contribution towards conservation in Africa. Visiting hunters from overseas are usually referred to as *sport hunters*, *international hunters*, or *trophy hunters*. A more appropriate term might be *conservation hunters* due to their contribution to private conservation efforts.

Those landowners that have attempted non-consumptive eco-tourism have found that it is extremely difficult to turn this into a profitable operation on privately owned land – especially if the property is not large enough to support viable populations of the 'big six'. Non-consumptive eco-tourism is quite a capital intensive business and an adequate return on investment is seldom realisable. It also leaves a much bigger footprint – in terms of infrastructure, vehicles, roads, waste disposal, etc. - on the environment than is the case with hunting which requires less infrastructure and fewer visitors.

Non-consumptive eco-tourism can however work on public land if the concession costs are not prohibitive. It should be noted that the fees payable by visitors to the game lodges on public land in most African countries is largely a function of the concession fees charged by the government and is invariably on the stiff side.

The South African wildlife management model has been hugely successful and has ensured the survival of game species such as the black wildebeest, bontebok, Cape mountain zebra, etc. It has also ensured that wildlife is still an important feature of the present day South African landscape. Nature and man is clearly benefitting in a material way from this unique management model – the most successful model so far on the African continent. Without private ownership and sustainable offtake in the form of hunting, this model would however not have succeeded.

Why I hunt

Man has been created as an omnivore and has hunted since time immemorial. He hunted in order to defend himself and to feed himself. It is also noteworthy that, like all other predators, the eyes of man are located in the front of the head. That makes him by nature a hunter; it is part of his ancient biological and cultural heritage.

It must be conceded that since those early days when man developed a conscience, and learned to use tools and fire, he has however altered his environment to such an extent that it is no longer necessary to hunt in order to keep body and soul together. Although twenty first century man developed a post-modern set of values and although the practice of hunting is increasingly questioned in the Western civilisation by animal rights activists in particular, hunting is still popular and widely practiced by people from all walks of life. Four types of consumptive utilisation of wildlife are recognised:

- (i) Trophy hunting, mainly by international sport hunters
- (ii) Hunting for meat by 'biltong' or meat hunters
- (iii) Commercial harvesting of antelopes by game farmers (although this not really hunting)
- (iv) Uncontrolled hunting for the bush meat trade, which is usually simply poaching.

Poaching, however, should not be regarded as hunting. Hunting is a legal, controlled and sensible activity, whilst poaching is illegal, uncontrolled, destructive and indefensible.

Whilst primitive man's survival depended on his hunting skills, the 21st century hunter is hunting for the pleasure of it, to collect trophies and/or meat (usually to add a healthy variety to the meat he is buying from his butcher), and to enjoy the totality of the hunting experience.

In an article "*Hunting for the truth: why rationalizing the ritual must fail*", published in African Indaba, Volume 2, Issue 6, the biologist/hunter/philosopher Shane Mahoney explained hunting as follows:

"Hunting is not simple. It is the generator of our human condition, the crucible of intellect, and the fire of creativity. It is our mirror of the world, the image maker of wild creation; it has defined how we see, literally and figuratively. It is the only absolute rediscovery mechanism available to human beings; the mind-body fusion of all meditative, spiritual experience is derived from its pasturage. Those who return there know full well the sense of universal intimacy it gives over. Explaining this odyssey is our greatest challenge; but succeeding will be our greatest achievement. The world remains perpetually absorbed by this search, yet hunters know the way. Hunting is a deliberate journey to the union of birth and death; it cannot but create a deeper perspective and appreciation for the glorious importance of both.

Like it or not we have to search deep within us, journey to the place where the mind is floating free. We have to voice what is silent; capture what is shadow. The hunt is a universe of emotion that overwhelms, scatters all notions of other preoccupations, and delivers the persona complete. Hunting is a love affair; turbulent, gnawing, and all possessing. It is composed of lives, but it has a life of its own; a life held precious by the participant who, in part, creates it. It is an affair of the heart; and like all such affairs it drags the mind along, a great force subjugated by the senses engaged to their fullest; but alive just the same, and capturing memories and creating fantasies that are nearly one and the same. Hunting is an emersion; a drowning on connectedness that squanders pride and privilege; the true hunter is the humble man, the enthralled child, and the knowing prince. All is ready, nothing is restive; all is rhythm, nothing is friction.

Hunting is knowing why the senses were made! It displaces both the practical and the excess. It represents evenness, oneness and the knowledge of self. Hunting is a cataclysm of inward progress. We hunt for spiritual reasons; we hunt to find inner peace; we hunt to understand the world. Hunting is our first great myth! The true hunter is both the alert and the meditative man. Thought and action combined in purpose; a hymn for the unity of world and self. Hunting is a search for all."

Peter Shroedter described the rationale for hunting as follows in an article, "Joy of the hunt: Why can't postmodern society acknowledge its inner wild man?", African Indaba, Volume 6, Number 2:

"The act of hunting in the pure sense of the word is a communion with nature and an acknowledgement of our species' past and its enduring dependency on the environment for survival. The fact human beings are genetically programmed to hunt should be enough reason to acknowledge that hunting is part of being human. It is the act of hunting that connects us to the essence of our existence and our dependency on our environment."

The real threats to African wildlife

It has been shown over and over again that in the modern day controlled sport hunting (either for trophies or meat) poses no threat to Africa's wildlife populations. It is an effective counter to poaching as the outfitters patrol their concessions on a regular basis and poaching subsequently decreases substantially. In Southern Africa, wildlife is flourishing on privately owned 'hunting ranches' and it is believed that there is now more game on private land than at any time during the last 150 years. So, hunting is having a positive impact on wildlife.

The main threats to Africa's wildlife today are habitat loss (mostly as a result of human settlement, over-grazing by domestic livestock, urban development and deforestation); weakened gene pools as a result of animals being confined to relatively small conservation areas; and poaching of which there are three types. Most of Africa is extremely poor and a single family can include several wives, many children, grandparents, etc. There are very limited job opportunities for these rural people and poaching plays an important role in keeping body and soul together. This subsistence poaching is however not the worst kind. The second type of poaching is the organized poaching for rhino horn and ivory. This industry is largely controlled by unscrupulous operators from the Far East and corrupt officials in the African governments, especially those in the wildlife departments and the military. But it seems that the CITES convention, and anti-poaching efforts in countries like Botswana, Namibia and Tanzania, is having an effect and poaching of rhino and elephant has been reduced. At the time writing rhino poaching has however escalated dramatically and the Vietnamese seem to have become major players in rhino poaching.

The third type of poaching is the organized commercial poaching for the bush meat trade. This form of poaching is indiscriminate and everything is killed – females, males, young and old. And no species are spared. Poachers kill everything they can find where after they dry or smoke the meat for sale to a huge market all over Africa. The bush meat trade is having such a devastating effect on Africa's wildlife that it warrants more in depth discussion hereunder.

Man and wildlife used to co-exist in sub-Sahara Africa for thousands of years and wildlife have always been regarded as a free and readily available source of protein. Hunting has always been for subsistence purposes and African hunters took just enough for their own subsistence. The offtake by subsistence hunters did not have much of an impact on the masses of wildlife which were abundant everywhere. With the colonization of Africa in the 19th century by the European powers, everything started to change. The white man brought with him modern medicine, new technology and new legal and administrative systems. Within a hundred years most of Africa was transformed from rural tribal societies living in a very traditional way to modern countries with cities and towns, roads and railways, airports, hospitals, schools, etc., etc. One of the major consequences of the African transformation was a human population explosion that put the natural environment under severe pressure. People started to leave the traditional villages to settle in towns and cities in an attempt to find a better life. But to this day traditional hunting is regarded as an absolute right throughout East, Central and West Africa.

In the modern Africa man not only hunts for subsistence purposes: hunting has become a full time commercial occupation for many in the absence of other job or career opportunities. In many villages most of the able men hunt regularly – some more than others. Modern Africa is putting immense pressure on humans to earn cash to pay for food, school fees, rent, clothes, medicines, transport, etc. The hunting pressure increased not only as a result of the rapid growth in human populations, but also as a result of access to modern firearms and ammunition, as well as access to areas that have hitherto been difficult to exploit. The development of new roads built by logging and mining companies into once inaccessible forests has contributed in no small way to the decline of wildlife – particularly the forest duikers and primates. Not only are the logging companies overexploiting pristine forest, they provide hunters/poachers easy access to pristine wilderness areas. It is now also easier to transport the meat back to the towns and cities.

Today, uncontrolled commercial hunting is taking place at an unprecedented scale, particularly in West and Central Africa and parts of East Africa. The offtake is not nearly sustainable and it would be very naïve to expect the wildlife populations to withstand this serious onslaught and over utilization. All wild animals are harvested for the bush meat trade: bovines, primates, birds, rodents, reptiles – everything is killed and

consumed. Throughout much of Africa, but particularly West and Central Africa and up into the Horn of Africa, the bush meat trade is having a devastating effect on wildlife. Although many scientific papers have been published over the years, nothing is changing: Africa is devouring its wildlife heritage and in the not too distant future there may be nothing left.

The current uncontrolled over exploitation wildlife in the form of bush meat is in sharp contrast to the South African wildlife management model and cannot continue at the current level. It is only a matter of time before Central and West Africa, at least, will be without any wildlife. To make matters worse, the forests are also disappearing fast as timber is shipped to first world countries. Africa is heading towards a calamity, a disaster of grotesque proportions. Hunting and game ranching, however, could make a substantial difference.

Most countries have the necessary legislation in place to control the bush meat trade. The real problem, however, is law enforcement. Most governments do not have the capability or the will to enforce the legislation. And the hunters, middle men and butchers know that. De facto it is a 'free for all'. It is thus not surprising that many national parks throughout Africa are subjected to ongoing poaching. Huge quantities of meat are flowing out the National Parks and other conservation areas into the urban cooking pots.

Whether Africa will be able to manage the consumption of game meat down to sustainable levels remains to be seen. The challenge for Africa is to transform the current destructive poaching culture into a culture of sustainable utilization. Human populations are still growing and the need for sensible land use practices and rational harvesting of wildlife is critically important for the survival of rural people as well as wildlife. Unfortunately, the sustainable utilization of wildlife and natural resources is not always high enough on the political agendas.

IN SUMMARY

Africa's wildlife is in serious trouble; populations of almost all species are declining across most of the continent. The continent is plagued by poaching, loss of habitat, accelerating human settlement, mismanagement and a lack of resources to implement wise and beneficial wildlife policies.

South Africa, however, has developed an exceptionally successful national wildlife management model that relies on private ownership and the principle of conservation through sustainable utilization by way of hunting. Hunting contributes significantly to the well-being of man and nature and has a vital role to play in the future of man and wildlife in Africa.

The anti-hunting fraternity, on the other hand, is driven by weird and senseless ideologies that pose a major threat to Africa's wildlife and the survival of man on planet earth. These organizations are however influential and masters at misleading decision makers and playing the media. They have developed into a serious cancer in an already sick world and it is in man's best interests to permanently rid him of these weird ideologies.

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