

HUNTING

A GREAT DEBATE

Each in his own way, columnists **John Hanks** and **Ian Michler** have been making valuable contributions to *Africa Geographic* for many years. It is a reflection of the complexity of conservation in Africa that these two men, who both strive for the protection of the continent's biodiversity and wildernesses, hold fundamentally different viewpoints on the role of hunting in this endeavour. Moved to respond to two of Ian's recent columns, John sent us his thoughts on the subject - and they and Ian's response make for enlightening reading.



John Hanks

Ian Michler's diaries for March ('Seeing the light') and August ('Dispelling misconceptions') were very critical of the trophy hunting industry, calling for a 'more reasoned look at hunting in Africa and the growing opposition to it'. Michler argues that trophy hunting is a poorer form of land use than photographic tourism, is detrimental to wildlife populations and makes no significant contribution to national GDPs and employment. These criticisms come at a time when Africa's biodiversity is facing an unprecedented threat from widespread land transformation that is often linked to increasing poverty and unemployment, declining food security and inadequate budgets for virtually every conservation agency in Africa.

I am convinced that the simplistic and often emotional arguments against the hunting industry (which like any activity is far from perfect) are not helping to develop a coherent approach to the long-term future of natural areas. We do not need further polarisation of the consumptive use versus the strictly protectionist polemic, where both sides are often guilty of the crass stereotyping of opponents.

Few would dispute that the philosophical underpinnings of the protectionist paradigm assign an intrinsic value to individual animals, accepting them as fellow sentient beings and strongly opposing the killing of wild animals for any reason. However, this should not be an excuse for avoiding rational and informed debate. I shall attempt to engage not as a trophy hunter (which I have never been and never will be), but as an environmentalist who is aware of the real threats to biodiversity and, equally importantly, to the livelihoods of thousands of people in Africa's rural communities.

Michler argues that in Botswana 'it has been demonstrated conclusively that the economic merits of photographic ecotourism far outweigh those of hunting'. Clearly, where there are high wildlife densities and scenically attractive landscapes, there is greater potential for photographic tourism than for trophy hunting. However, in those areas where large mammals are few and

scattered and the scenery is mundane, photographic safaris will not be viable. Here the better land-use option for biodiversity conservation can often be trophy hunting rather than domestic livestock and shifting agriculture. More significantly for resident communities, they have an incentive to protect the large mammals that would otherwise be seen as a threat to their livelihoods.

Jon Barnes, one of Africa's most respected resource economists, presented a detailed analysis of the economic returns of these competing forms of land use in Botswana (Barnes, J.I. (2001). 'Economic returns and the allocation of resources in the wildlife sector of Botswana.' *South African Journal of Wildlife Research* 31(3&4): 141-153) and concluded that photographic tourism has greater benefits than consumptive use over about one-third of the wildlife estate. He then states: 'Consumptive wildlife uses are relatively unimportant in terms of economic contribution, but they are the only use values possible in the less well-endowed two-thirds of the wildlife estate. This portion of wildlife land faces an economic threat of conversion to livestock grazing land, and consumptive uses are vitally important to help ensure its future retention under wildlife. Thus a ban on consumptive use, as recommended by some, would seriously jeopardise wildlife conservation, already under threat from livestock expansion, in large parts of Botswana.' ▶

Wilderness Safaris, one of the country's leading photo-tourism operators, has a position statement on trophy hunting that confirms this conclusion. It states: 'The reality is that ecotourism on its own cannot ensure the conservation of Africa as a whole. There are areas that cannot support high-end, mid-range or even low-end photographic ecotourism. It is in these areas especially that hunting (conducted ethically, responsibly and sustainably) has a role to play. This has been true even in stable developed tourism industries like South Africa's, and is certainly true in less mainstream destinations like the Central African Republic or Burkina Faso.'

'There are many cases in Africa where trophy hunting has added significant value to conservation and where photographic or non-consumptive tourism could not have been nearly as effective. We share the views of respected academics who have applied dispassionate analysis to Africa's hunting industry and conclude that *trophy hunting is of major importance to conservation in Africa by creating economic incentives over vast areas – including areas which may be unsuitable for alternative wildlife-based land uses such as photographic ecotourism* [my italics].'

Michler cites the recent desk-top study on the value of trophy hunting by the Australian group Economists at Large. The report was commissioned by a consortium that includes the International Fund for Animal Welfare (IFAW), the Humane Society of America and the Born Free Foundation. These NGOs are opposed to hunting, so one may reasonably ask whether it is a truly objective report. In contrast, the peer-reviewed literature has many contributions from (non-hunting) conservation scientists who provide substantiated evidence of the ecological and socio-economic benefits of the consumptive use of wildlife compared to livestock farming in semi-arid areas. These are too numerous to quote here, but are studiously avoided by those who do not wish to read them.

In South Africa, notes Michler, hunting takes place on 13.1 per cent of the land yet contributes only 0.04 per cent to the GDP. This is incorrect and misleading. What he fails to mention is that 50 years ago South Africa had no hunting industry at all; there were no wildlife populations

to support one. Trophy hunting now takes place over a large area of the country where cattle ranching has given way to the farming of wildlife species that previously occupied the land. That it can do so is a tribute to the public conservation agencies and landowners who built up wildlife populations on private land from an estimated 575 000 in 1966 to at least 18.6 million by 2007 (Carruthers, J. (2008). 'Wilding the farm or farming the wild? The evolution of scientific game ranching in South Africa from the 1960s to the present.' *Transactions of the Royal Society of South Africa* 63(2): 160–181).

Few can dispute that there are areas of Africa where photographic tourism is not viable, but safari hunting is a sustainable alternative that benefits local communities and gives them strong incentives to retain wildlife on their lands

Game farms in South Africa have increased from fewer than 5 000 in 2002 to more than 12 000 in 2013 and generate revenue from a combination of ecotourism, the sale of live animals and several forms of hunting, with meat production as a by-product. Hunting makes by far the largest contribution, earning R7.7-billion in 2011: R3.1-billion from 250 000 South African biltong-producing hunters; R2.1-billion from 15 000 foreign trophy hunters; and the balance from add-on services, accommodation and food.

Government-owned national parks and reserves cannot effectively conserve all the wildlife in South Africa and have to rely on game farmers for assistance. For example, a quarter of the country's 20 900 rhinos – more than the entire rhino population in the rest of Africa – are on private land. The hunting industry has been responsible for species like rhino, sable and roan being bred by game farmers and returned to where they once occurred in healthy numbers – and has helped to generate the income needed for sustained breeding programmes. Furthermore, a move away from agriculture brings with it an increase in the diversity of other animals and plants, and this must surely be welcomed?

Brian Child, who has published extensively on this subject, has noted that beef

commodity prices have been stagnating globally for nearly four decades (albeit with a significant upturn in the past two years). And while beef production elsewhere has steadily shifted away from dry lands since the 1960s thanks to grain feeding, nitrogen supplementation and feedlots, in Africa this is not the case and the continent's farmers are unlikely to be competitive with large-scale meat production in Argentina, Brazil and the US. For ecological and economic reasons, the game-ranching economy is a legitimate option that should be supported by all who are serious about the long-term future of Africa's biodiversity. With a more favourable policy environment, it could even be applied on a much broader scale than at present, especially if it can be adapted to Africa's circumstances through approaches like community-based natural resource management (www.pastoralismjournal.com/content/2/1/18).

It is hardly surprising that according to Michler hunting generates a very small percentage of the GDP in South Africa, whose export-based economy is the largest and most developed on the continent. The country is rich in natural resources and a leading producer of valuable minerals, and at the end of 2012 its GDP stood at US\$384.31-billion. Hunting on private land alone is worth more than US\$1-billion, contributing significantly to the economy. Michler's figure of hunting contributing 0.04 per cent to the GDP is far too low – it is at least 0.26 per cent, and as this comes from mainly marginal land, it is not inconsequential. More than 70 000 jobs have been created on newly established game farms in recent years and by 2020 the industry will have generated an additional 220 000. For Michler to claim that the hunting industry creates employment for only 0.0001 per cent of Africa's available workforce is misleading in the extreme.

In previous issues of *Africa Geographic* I have described how wildlife populations are increasing steadily in Namibia, particularly on conservancies where the communities have ownership of the wild animals. The significant financial returns they gain from safari hunting are a key factor in improving how they protect and manage their wildlife. There are now 79 community conservancies covering 19.4 per cent of Namibia's area, and trophy hunting and



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non-consumptive tourism are a vital component of their income.

Livestock numbers on private land declined from 1.8 million to 0.91 million between the early 1970s and 2001, whereas huntable wildlife populations doubled from 0.565 million to 1.161 million. 'On private land in Namibia hunting has driven a lot of the investment in wildlife,' says Jon Barnes. 'Indeed hunting, initially as a supplementary enterprise alongside livestock, is the source of income for reinvestment in wildlife, which then makes it possible first to expand hunting and then to invest in viable non-consumptive tourism on private land.'

In his August diary, Michler refers to another 'misconception peddled by the hunting industry', namely that the decline in Kenya's wildlife (70 per cent in large-mammal populations since the 1970s) is a direct result of the moratorium placed on hunting there in 1977. What he fails to mention is that IFAW and other animal rights protagonists have been instrumental in convincing Kenya to maintain the 1977 ban.

A well-researched and balanced account of the impact of banning hunting is Glen Martin's *Game Changer: Animal rights and the fate of Africa's wildlife* (University of California Press, 2012), which assesses the Kenyan situation in contrast to developments in Tanzania, Namibia and South Africa. In these countries, hunting by

citizens and foreign tourists is an integral part of wildlife management and the sustainable use of wild animals is expanding – as are their populations in Namibia and South Africa. There is now evidence to suggest that the collapse of wildlife in Kenya has been due largely to the explosion of bushmeat poaching in former hunting concessions.

Few can dispute that there are vast areas of Africa where photographic tourism is not viable, but safari hunting is a realistic and sustainable alternative that benefits local communities and gives them strong incentives to retain wildlife on their lands. Surely it makes economic and ecological sense to not exclude this option but to manage it better so that greater profits accrue to the communities and biodiversity is conserved?

If trophy hunting were to be stopped in Africa, in those parts of the continent

In northern Botswana, scenic beauty and an abundance of wildlife make the region perfect for photographic tourism. In parts of Africa without this fortunate combination, trophy hunting could be an alternative to unsustainable agricultural land use.

where photographic tourism is not viable we can expect to see wildlife areas being used for subsistence agriculture, with increased human-wildlife conflict and declining large-mammal populations. Some people may rather see this than know that hunters are paying for the pleasure of killing animals there – unfortunately an objective assessment of conservation benefits is rarely the primary concern of animal rights groups that care more about the welfare of individuals than about the long-term survival of species. Others believe that well-managed trophy hunting is a small price to pay for retaining biodiversity. ▶

JOHN HANKS

A zoologist by training, John Hanks took his first degree, in Natural Sciences, at Magdalene College, Cambridge, and followed it with a PhD on the reproductive physiology, growth and population dynamics of elephants in the Luangwa Valley, Zambia. He has more than 45 years of experience in a wide variety of conservation management and research projects.

Hanks has worked in Angola, Botswana, Ethiopia, Kenya, Mozambique, South Africa, Zambia and Zimbabwe in posts that have ranged from chief professional officer at the then Natal Parks Board to the director of the Africa Program for WWF International, chief executive of WWF-South Africa and executive director of the Peace Parks Foundation. He has published more than 150 scientific papers.