



“SERVING THE HUNTER WHO TRAVELS”

“Hunting provides the principal incentive and revenue for conservation. Hence it is a force for conservation.”

Special To The Hunting Report World Conservation Force Bulletin

by John J. Jackson, III

Comment On “Draft Norms & Standards for the Regulations of the Hunting Industry in South Africa

By Ron Thompson

(This month's guest columnist is Ron Thompson, a wildlife authority on Conservation Force's Board of Advisors. What follows is part of his comments on the new norms and standards proposed in the Republic of South Africa. The comments were addressed to The Minister of Environmental Affairs & Tourism. – John J. Jackson, III.)

GENERAL: What I have to say concerns conflicts of wildlife management principles with certain provisions of the bill. I would request that you do not consider these matters to be frivolous, even though much of what I have to say is not ‘the norm’ for government bodies, like DEAT, the world over. What I have to say is, nevertheless, valid, and I would like to think that you will accommodate my observations in amendments to the draft bill and that, by so doing, you will take South Africa into the lead with regards applying common sense realities to its wildlife management legislation.

1.) The endangered species concept and its wildlife management implications: Whereas I accept that there IS such a thing as an “endangered spe-

cies”, the concept – in terms of the draft bill – is not applied in the real meaning of the word. In fact, I wonder if ANY of the mammal species listed in the draft bill as being “endangered



species” can be correctly so classified. This matter is tied up with another concerning the management of species and/or their populations. It is NOT possible to manage a species “as a species” – which is implied when you attach the label ‘endangered’ to a species. Species arrange themselves in dif-

ferent populations, all of which suffer from, or enjoy, a variety of environmental “pressures” that render some populations “SAFE” and others “UNSAFE”. SAFE populations are those that are thriving and constantly growing in number; UNSAFE populations are those which are declining – and the reason for the decline cannot be reversed (so they face ultimate extinction). One might, therefore, call an UNSAFE population an “endangered” one – except that “UNSAFE” is a better description because it can be juxtaposed against its opposite - “SAFE”.

No “species” can be considered truly “endangered” until each and every one of its populations can be categorized as being “unsafe”. The two mammals that you list as being “critically endangered” – the riverine rabbit and the rough-haired golden mole – “might” be correctly classified as being “critically endangered” but I believe that even these two will have some populations that are “SAFE”. And I doubt if ALL the populations of

the mammals listed on your ordinary “endangered species” list are “UNSAFE”. THAT means probably none of them are truly “endangered”.

This is NOT a pedantic observation because it has important management implications. Given the fact that no two populations of a species have exactly the same environmental pressures exerted against them – one HAS to apply a management practice to each of a species’ different populations that takes into the account the specific environmental pressures that are being applied to that population. For example, a population of blue wildebeest that is being heavily poached by a local rural human population, needs to be managed according to the principle of ‘preservation management’ – which requires a “protection from all harm” strategy (including curtailment of the

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poaching). A different population of blue wildebeest may be excessive – there may be too many animals for its habitat to sustainably support. This population requires population reduction management – which is one form of ‘conservation management’. In this case, the numbers of animals need to be reduced in number (by capture-and-translocation; culling and/or hunting – all of which are ‘conservation management’ practices) to a level that the habitat CAN sustainably support. Under these circumstances, IF you were to apply the label ‘endangered’ to the blue wildebeest as a species you imply that ALL its populations should be managed according to the principle of “preservation management”. And if you did THIS you would be forcing managers to MIS-manage those popu-

lations of blue wildebeest that SHOULD be managed according to the principles of “conservation management”.

SAFE populations of ANY species SHOULD be managed according to conservation management principles – which includes population reduction; culling; hunting; and/or capture-and-translocation. UNSAFE populations of ANY species should be managed according to the principles of preservation management (protection from all harm). Management, therefore, is population-centered and NOT species-centered. And the concept of “endangered species” implies species-centered management.

In the 1930s the white rhino in South Africa had been reduced to less than 20 individuals. It was THEN a TRULY “endangered species”. In other words, ALL its populations were THEN declining and facing extinction – indeed most of its populations had by then been rendered extinct. The species was THEN subjected to “preservation management strategies” - and the white rhino as a species recovered. NOW the white rhino is out of danger - MOST of its populations are SAFE – so now we can apply conservation management to most of its populations. They can be culled, hunted and captured for transfer elsewhere – without fear that any losses so incurred will adversely affect the species.

The problem with calling A SPECIES “endangered” is that it forces the MIS-MANAGEMENT of its SAFE populations. We have a chance in this pending legislation to put this whole issue into proper perspective – and so to lead the world in this direction. At the moment NO COUNTRY IN THE WORLD has had this kind of wildlife management perspicacity – which has caused confusion in every corner of the globe.

2.) Paragraph 5 (k)(iii) refers. Factors to be taken into account when considering applications for provincial hunting authorizations. Objections to an application by interested person: I believe it is high time that South Africa introduces a qualifying criterion that can be used to legiti-



JOHN J. JACKSON, III
Conservation Force



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Editor/Writer

John J. Jackson, III

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Don Causey

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Conservation Force
One Lakeway Center, Suite 1045
Metairie, LA 70002
Tel. 504-837-1233. Fax 504-837-1145.
www.ConservationForce.org

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mately consider or to reject the opinions of those people/organizations that object to ANY facet of its wildlife management laws and policies.

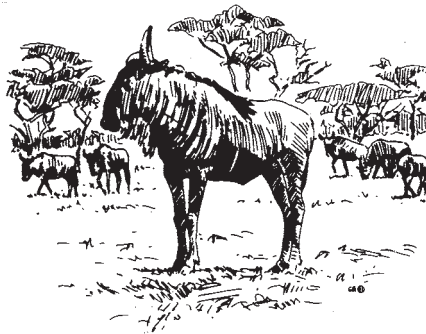
In recent years we have allowed to take root in our society an element of the green movement – the ideology of animal rights-ism - that is inimical to everything that we have stated that we believed in the World Conservation Strategy, and which we transposed into our National Conservation Strategy. And we allow these strange and dangerous people to raise funds in our society, and to spend those funds to negate our every effort to achieve the objectives of our National Conservation Strategy. I say this with confidence. When you take the trouble to dig into this ideology you will find that you can easily identify an animal rightist by reason of the fact that he opposes everything contained, particularly, in the third of the three principles outlined above: **“To ensure the sustainable utilization of species and ecosystems”**. A growing number of people in South African society are beginning to understand this. I believe, therefore, that whereas – with respect to **paragraph 5 (k)(iii) (Factors to be taken into account when considering applications for provincial hunting authorizations. Objections to an application by interested person.)** – I do not imply that we should NOT listen to objections to our policies, I believe we should introduce a criterion that ensures such objections are responsible, constructive and meaningful. I am sure, Sir, that had you done this with regards public participation in the Kruger elephant culling debate, you would have found your job a lot easier to handle.

I believe that DEAT needs to introduce a criterion that requires ANYBODY who wishes to participate in South Africa’s wildlife management debates, to first endorse their support for both the provisions of the IUCN’s World Conservation Strategy and those of South Africa’s National Conservation Strategy. If you introduced this criterion – which I believe would be accepted by society as a legitimate way of regulating contributions from

the public floor – you would effectively sift the wheat from the chaff. You would also be focusing public attention on a facet of our society that needs to be identified as a danger to our wildlife management affairs – AND to man’s future survival on planet earth.

Although the World Conservation Strategy was revised and renamed in 1991, its principles remained unchanged. It was, however, the 1980 version that was used as the model for our National Conservation Strategy.

3.) Paragraph. 11. (1) & (2). Regarding: Hunting on private land adjacent to a protected area where there is no intervening game fence: I believe, Sir, that you have missed the boat in this provision – and I believe you have introduced this provision in cognizance of stated public concerns that the pri-



vate game reserves west of Kruger National Park have been “hunting national assets”. I say this because I have noted that ignorant people have stated, via the press, that the owners of these private game reserves have been hunting Kruger National Park animals that have “strayed” across the boundary from the national park. When you examine this argument in the face of wild animal behavior patterns, it holds no water.

ALL wild animals establish “home ranges” as they mature into adulthood – which provide them with their living needs (air, water, food and shelter). SOME wild animals also establish “territories” – which vary greatly in character depending on the species concerned. Territories function in the breeding behavior patterns of those animal species that establish them.

Home ranges and territories become established only after a great deal of personal experience by the animals that “own” them. These animals – when they become adult – show great fidelity to their home ranges and to their territories and, having gone to a lot of trouble to obtain them, do NOT vacate them on a whim. Indeed, if they regularly wander out of them, one day, when they come back, they will find them occupied by a stranger. So they stick to these pieces of real estate like butter sticks to a slice of bread.

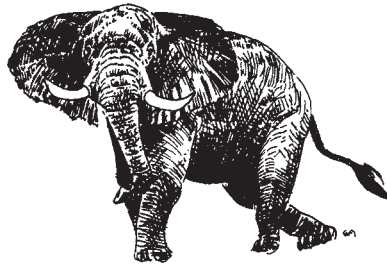
When habitats become “saturated” – that is when all the home ranges and all the territories have been taken up by the adult components of an animal population – a problem is created for all those young animals which cut the apron strings with their mothers every year. Their problem is they cannot find a home range of their own to occupy within their parental habitats. And because their parental populations become congested, they leave their natal habitats and wander in search of a new place to live elsewhere. They become vagrants. Occasionally, old adults move out, too – especially dominant males that have been deposed of their territories by a younger and stronger male. ALL these vagrants, however, are genuinely **surplus** to the populations that created them. So when they move out – onto private game reserve land adjacent to the national park (even if they are there hunted and killed) – their emigration from the park does NOT deplete the national park of any “national asset”. Indeed, if these animals did NOT move out, the national park habitats would be damaged and this would adversely affect the national park in many ways. So their movement onto private game reserve land adjacent to the park should be understood, explained to the public, and welcomed. And if they are shot on this private land as a hunting take-off so much the better. That, too should be understood, explained to the public, and welcomed. These private game reserves, in fact, are relieving the national park of a great deal of excessive animal pressure – so they are a management asset to the park.

I must also add that, in the last few years, I have been visiting the Olifants West Game Reserve (Balule) where I have seen a massive build up of elephant numbers. I have also seen a great deal of irreparable damage caused by these elephants – most of which are (as expected) young elephants in their teens and twenties. And despite bringing the habitat damage to the authorities’ attention there has been NO response to the owners stated concerns. This is a scandalous state of affairs that needs to be addressed with some degree of expedition. And it can be added to the argument I made (above) about the hunting of so-called national assets on the private game reserves. There is a void here, therefore, in terms of the REAL wildlife management needs of these private game reserves. I believe, therefore, you are concerning yourself far too much with public criticism of the hunting that is taking place on these lands and not enough on the wildlife management needs that are indicated. It would appear that NO cognizance is being taken, AT ALL, of the **wildlife management priorities** that SHOULD be addressed on these private game reserves – FIRST for the SOIL, SECOND for the PLANTS (the habitats – which are being destroyed by too many elephants); and LASTLY, for the ANIMALS. Paragraph 11 reflects this state of affairs admirably. I, therefore, believe it needs your **specific** attention because what is going on is NOT something that South African wildlife needs.

In sub-paragraph (2)© you talk of “*sharing between the parties (National Parks & Private Game Ranch Owners) of benefits arising from such hunting*” – What about the liabilities? Should not the national park bear the cost of maintaining the habitats in a good condition when the “national assets” that come from the park push down all the trees – and when government does not allow the land owners the right to manage their game ranches to achieve objectives that THEY wish to achieve.

I believe in this whole regard far too much attention has been given to the fact that vagrant game animals – that are surplus to the national park

populations anyway – are moving onto the private game reserves adjacent to the park. I believe you need to give proper attention to what is actually happening, and why, with regard to these game animal movements, and that you should allow the private game ranchers to manage their own wildlife affairs without interference from “big brother.” These game ranches have dif-



ferent management objectives to those of the national park and you need to acknowledge this and you need to help them achieve their OWN objectives. You should NOT try to make these private game ranches mini-Kruger National Parks.

4.) Paragraph 12. Damage-Causing Animals: I believe DEAT’s whole attitude towards this aspect of wildlife management in South Africa is wrong. The provisions of this section of the

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bill are cumbersome and will not work efficiently. I have worked all my life with so-called “damage-causing-animals” and I have experienced what it is like to get a response out of a local government department when they are asked for help. Either the government department has nobody available, or it has no transport, or the responsible person has something else to do – first. When an animal is causing damage on private land – UNLESS it is a TRULY valuable animal that SHOULD be captured and removed, I believe the land owner (IF he has the required experience) should be empowered to dispose of the offending animal himself. We need to get away from the old ‘verkramp’t bureaucratic attitude towards private land owners and allow them to exercise proper management actions on their own land where and when they can. They should be required to call upon QUALIFIED government officials ONLY when they cannot cope with what is required themselves.

Here, again, there is talk made of animals that have “escaped” from an adjacent national park. Why don’t we try to reason that MOST animals that leave a national park have removed themselves from saturated habitats with the national parks and that they want to find somewhere else to live that is less congested. AND that they are normally surplus to the national park animal populations.

5.) Paragraph 14.(2.) Poison’s & Traps and (2)© Spotlights. These are all tools of management that, from time to time, are beneficial to getting a job done that cannot be adequately done by any other means. And when you prohibit their use – especially when farmers want to kill a stock-killing animal – they (the farmers) will use ANY and EVERY means at their disposal that will rid them of the pest that is bothering them. It is MUCH better NOT to prohibit the use of ANY of these tools-of-management, but rather to regulate their use. You can control something that is permissible under regulation. You CANNOT control something that is being done illegally.

- Ron Thomson.