

by Rolf D. Baldus

Rolf Baldus Interviews Ludo Wurfbain of Rowland Ward

Rolf Baldus (RDB) interviews Ludo Wurfbain (LW), CEO of Safari Press & Sports Afield, USA. Ludo Wurfbain established Safari Press in California in 1985. Since then he has produced more than 260 titles with over one million hunting books in print. In 2002 Sports Afield magazine was added to the group.

In 2015 agreement was reached with the owners of Rowland Ward Ltd. to manage all RW activities worldwide. Ludo comes from a family with a 150 years tradition of hunting and has hunted since he was a boy.

RDB: Rowland Ward's Records of Big Game was published in London in 1882 for the first time. In 1982 it was bought from a hunting club in Texas and shortly thereafter the premises were moved to Johannesburg in South Africa. Now it has been sold again. The new publisher is Safari Press, America's largest producer of hunting books. How will The Book, as it is often called, change now?

LW: The Book has been in existence over 130 years and the Rowland Ward name actually dates back to 1850. We are now the 4th owner and intend to both move the book forward into the 21st century by offering more services via the internet but at the same time keep to the principles of fair chase hunting, sustainable use of wild life and preservation of wild places as absolute pillars of The Book.

RDB: Jane Halse, the former publisher, always underlined that the Book should honor the game and not the hunter. It followed a European tradition of fair sports and was not to be a "vanity fair", how many European hunters see the main competitor of the Book in the US. Will the book now change from "record" in the sense of "recording" to "record" in the sense of "who got the biggest trophy?"

LW: We will keep these traditions as they are among the most valuable assets of The Book; we will continue to list pickups and specimens from museums, animals from parks that have died naturally etc. with hunted trophies in one category. The name of the hunter will remain listed as before but RW will emphasize the animal and good conservation as it always has.

RDB: So far Rowland Ward did not accept trophies from "canned shooting", no artificially bred color variants and similar aberrations. A confirmation that the trophy was collected ethically and by fair chase was also demanded? Will that continue?

LW: RW will only accept trophies legally hunted under fair chase conditions. Nothing less. As for color variants via artificial breeding; we do not see RW creating categories for such animals.

RDB: Will you require that the hunter indicates whether the trophy was collected in a fenced area?

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LW: RW will continue to ask hunters to check off if an animal was shot behind a game proof fence as it has in the past.

RDB: Will you demand in the case of CITES Annex I trophies a copy of the CITES permits to ensure that the hunt was legal?

LW: In order to register a trophy with RW the animals must have been legally hunted and certain animals require a CITES permit for a legal hunt and subsequent trophy export. As stated "RW will only accept trophies legally hunted under fair chase conditions, period. Nothing less." We have a group of companies here (Sports Afield, Safari Press) that have been involved in big-game hunting for 30 years. I have served myself on a record book committee for a decade. We have an excellent knowledge base here of game conditions, the outfitting industry and its rules and regulations. If RW believes that a hunter has shot an animal under questionable circumstances we reserve the right to ask for documentation to prove the hunt was fair chase and legal. So the short answer is yes, you will have to declare that you have shot your animal legally under fair chase conditions and if we think it is necessary we will ask the hunter for paperwork including CITES papers.

RDB: Rumor has it that Rowland Ward was bought by a British investor group based in Hong Kong. Any information on the new ownership?

LW: Yes, the company was bought by an investor group out of Hong Kong and we agreed to be the world wide agent for all products and services of Rowland Ward. All investors are hunters. One lives in Hong Kong, the others in Europe. The name Rowland Ward Ltd will continue as a separate entity with its own web site and the RW imprint will continue to be used for hunting books as well as other products and services in the future as the iconic brand that is has been for a century and a half.

RDB: When will you publish the next Edition?

LW: The next book will be published in 2018

RDB: How do you want to see The Book in five years from now?

LW: The possibility exists that we shall have a digital edition and or a one line edition. More than ever before The Book will be a standard bearer for hunting under sustainable use conditions and fair chase hunting. The Book will continue to be a leader in demonstrating that ethical, fair chase hunting is to the benefit of the game as well as the indigenous people who live with the animals and need to tolerate their presence and derive a benefit from having animals around.