

by Kai Uwe Denker, President Namibia Professional Hunters Association (NAPHA)

The Future of Hunting and Manipulative Breeding

An extract from Kai-Uwe Denker's speech on occasion of the Annual General Meeting of Professional Hunters' Association of South Africa (PHASA) in November 2015 (Source NAPHA).

The Scientific Data Committee of NAPHA came to the conclusion in 2004 that the artificial breeding of color variants of wild animals should not be allowed.

In 2012, NAPHA members voted in favor of a clear stance of the Association against the selective artificial breeding of wild animals for the hunting industry.

The selective artificial breeding for outsized horn growth and color variants because of its huge financial lure poses a severe risk to the positive image the Namibian Hunting Industry still enjoys. There are more than enough statements by scientists and conservation institutions, like for example the Antelope Specialist Group of the IUCN, stating "that the artificial breeding of wild animals for novel coat colors or outsized horn growth does not serve to support the conservation of the species". The similarities with captive lion breeding are obvious.

We trophy hunters try to defend our doing by claiming that killing is not what motivates us, but rather the enjoyment of an original doing and of participating in nature and that the trophies we take home first and foremost serve to remind us of treasured moments we experienced out in nature. The selective breeding of wild animals for outsized horn growth reduces our argument to the point of absurdity and pulls from underneath our feet the very valid justification for our doing, reducing it to mere trophy collecting for ego-boosting motives.

The issue was discussed at the [November 2015] AWCF Conference and a representative of the Breeders' Association there stated in defense of artificial breeding that there are no more wild places left in South Africa. I cannot speak for South Africa, but I was assured by people in the know that there still is wild and original country in South Africa. To experience unspoiled African wilderness after all is what foreign trophy hunters want and this kind of statement certainly does not help to rectify misconceptions which might exist.

For Namibia, however, I strongly reject this argument. There are vast tracts of unspoiled wild country in Namibia, not only, but mainly in the Communal Conservancies, which were so important in the defense of hunting during the Cecil hype. The breeding of color variants like for example black-, moonshadow-, blacktailed-, or whatever impala, dilutes the unique status and the value of natural subspecies like our black faced impala, or for that matter Kafue lechwe and others and thus undermines the protection of unique subspecies. The line-breeding of springbok for outsized trophies, often using specimens captured under dubious circumstances in our communal areas, reduces the

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unique status and the value of our Damaraland springbok, thereby robbing our Communal Conservancies of the advantage of a unique natural asset.

The representative of the Breeders' Association also justified artificial breeding as at least being better than cattle breeding. After all cattle originate from line breeding with the wild ancestors of cattle, which subsequently were exterminated. Where are we heading to?

Line breeding will be seen as domestication of wild animals. The inevitable habituation of wild animals during the process, which are bred and released to be shot, will create the hotbed for the next Blood Lion/Cecil type of uproar and ultimately will be the final nail in the coffin lid of trophy hunting. This practice will place a huge question mark over the true motives of trophy hunters.

The lure of short-term financial gain, of a "quick buck", is very strong in this issue and in my opinion the true motive. We feel that Government needs to come in here to regulate the matter based on scientific consideration of its conservation value only and in the best long-term interest of hunting. It is not the lucrative side of an industry that is at stake - it is hunting as such that is at stake. We hunters should be fully aware of this. This is why I place so much emphasis on the matter. We just cannot afford another uproar.

During the Country Reports at the AWCF Conference hunting's value for conservation was repeatedly portrayed as opposed to that of eco-tourism. I think it is high time to rightly and strongly claim that hunting is part and the purest and original form of eco-tourism. [There] are no factual arguments against this. But we can no longer afford practices, which easily can be exposed by anti-hunting fanatics as not contributing to the protection of natural habitats and the wildlife therein. All that is needed is a little shift in mind-set and people who see the bigger picture beyond their personal interests.