

by Gerhard Damm

# Spothunting In Africa Is Not The Enemy Of Biodiversity

“Passionate debate about sport hunting was unleashed in Europe and in the United States in the wake of the Cecil the Lion debacle in Zimbabwe during August 2015.” Since the beginning of this year, there is fresh debate between environmental associations and hunting organizations. A written statement by European Deputies was made, calling for a ban on importation into the European Union of all hunting trophies. This project attracted 20% of the requisite signatures.

Anti-hunting organizations will doubtless severely criticize this lack of new legislation but it is welcomed in the interests of African biodiversity. Tourism alone, save in truly exceptional cases, cannot fund sound biodiversity. True conservation of African biodiversity requires that non- agricultural use of land be financed. Selective, regulated sport hunting can be a valuable contributing source of revenue.

Conservation would be weakened if local communities were deprived of the spin-offs arising from sport hunting. That is not to say that sport hunting in Africa does not suffer from recurring problems. Revenue generated by this activity can be insufficient to finance conservation efforts after operating costs and taxes are deducted.

Where national institutions are too lax, an excessive number of animals are hunted, hunting practices are cause for concern from the ethical point of view and, above all, local communities are wronged , as revealed in a study conducted in North Cameroun.

Whatever one may think of the activity itself, sport hunting often remains the most important source of revenue, indeed, the only such source, for development and conservation in many regions of Africa. A number of IUCN experts, furthermore, support sport hunting from the conservation point of view.

Ecotourism certainly generates revenue without killing animals but this requires minimum density of animals and good access to the animals. This limits such activity in many countries in central Africa where the forest is often too dense for tourists to see the animals. Tourism also needs hotel and road infrastructure, security and political stability which are often lacking in Africa.

Given these contexts, sport hunting represents essential revenue to encourage the local population to accept the presence of wild animals and to protect them in large areas of their territories.

Prohibiting sport hunting would, in many cases, cut off the last source which nourishes conservation of biodiversity in Africa. In Namibia, for example, sport hunting generated 1,5 million Euros in 2014, including employment. That country has had a national conservation of fauna program in place since 1996 and the revenue just cited is almost one third of the revenue arising out of fauna and flora management by the country's local communities.

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In Botswana, there is an increasing outcry against the prohibition on sport hunting proclaimed in 2013 by the government. The escalating number of wild animals are attacking livestock and community revenue is under serious strain.

Be that as it may, and as emphasized in a scientific article published in Namibia, sport hunting and ecotourism are two complimentary activities that must be managed together. Sport hunting generates revenue after three years while ecotourism needs an average of six years to generate revenue. If sport hunting were to be banned, eight out of fifty communities in Namibia in the national program would not be able to cover their operating costs linked to conservation, as against 37 out of 50 communities who cover their operating costs through sport hunting.

Wildlife conservation in Africa cannot survive financially without sport hunting. One is not speaking of less sport hunting but of better management of this activity.