

by Ivan Carter

The Hunter's Image

Yes, a lion got killed. Yes, he had a name and was a favorite at a well-known photographic installation in Hwange National Park. He was killed in a place with no lion permit and the world went nuts: Millions of words of rhetoric were generated, some true, some false, most opinions and feelings. The result of all of this is that today we look at a very different hunting landscape to what we were looking at just 12 months ago.

This event and the subsequent events have been the "Twin Towers" of the hunting world - our 9/11 - the anti-hunters have suddenly gained enormous momentum and have shown the hunting world just how powerful they are. If you do not believe this then you just need to look around you ...

Several airlines now do not carry trophies in their cargo. At the time of writing this article, lion trophies are no longer allowed to be imported into the USA, Australia and France. Several hunting conventions were literally shut down as a result of letters being written. As I type this, the European Union (EU) - yes, the whole EU - is discussing the possibility of closing imports of any kind of African trophy into Europe.

The anti-hunters truly used their extreme show of force to illustrate just how influential they have become and, sadly, the thing that truly suffers is our wildlife. This will be the very end of huge parts of Africa and its wildlife ...

When I look at a map of Africa in my mind, I basically see two things - areas with wildlife and areas without wildlife - and I ask myself what the difference is: The areas with wildlife have people who are protecting it and creating value in those areas; some from photographic tourism and some from hunting tourism.

People who are against trophy hunting will often return from a trip to Kenya where they visit the Maasai Mara and a few other places and say, "The wildlife is thriving. We saw millions of animals." Indeed that is true, very true - but we are not comparing apples to apples. Let's look at the northern frontier district of Kenya, which in former times was a hunting area thriving with an abundance of species, both in variety and in numbers. A visit there today will show you a broken ecosystem with large numbers of people, livestock and dust ...

As a matter of fact, we do need to acknowledge that there are areas of the planet, huge areas and species where non-consumptive (photographic and viewing) tourism is absolutely the best solution - Maasai Mara, Serengeti, Ngorongoro Crater, Kruger National Park, Okavango Delta, Bwindi Impenetrable Forest - the list goes on and on ... These are areas that for one reason or another have a very viable business model that does not require hunting to sustain it. However, that is not true everywhere. Let's look at a vast amount of western Tanzania where enormous hunting blocks, collectively covering millions of acres, are supported 100% by hunters' dollars. Yes indeed, without hunters to pay for the protection of those areas and the anti-poaching and infrastructural maintenance, these areas and their wildlife will cease to exist.

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An old man walked up to me at a trade show recently and asked, "Who closed lion imports to the USA?" I looked at him and said, "You did, Sir." He was shocked, stuttered, coughed and said, "WHAT?" I repeated myself, "You did, Sir. I did. We all did." "We did so by not educating people on the importance of hunters as a financial tool for Africa, an integral part of the conservation model. I am not talking here about the actual trigger puller; that's a whole different conversation. I am talking about the good that the business of hunting does when managed properly and correctly within viable quotas and with a good percentage of the income generated going into communities, anti-poaching, etc. Sir, we have kept that a secret, preferring instead to show kill shots and dead game and reporting only inches and sizes." After a few moments, he looked me up and down and said, "You know, you are right. I have not thought of it that way." He then walked off into the crowd.

Let's imagine for a moment you are a non-hunter - not an anti-hunter, just a non-hunter, someone who does not hunt but is not against hunting. You are living in Sydney, Australia, you and your wife work and you have a moderate income. You are Mr Average, a First World citizen and all you know is that wild African lions number in the region of 32 000 continent-wide. You also know that vast areas of Africa are seeing declining numbers of wildlife. Then you see a picture of a guy sitting with a dead lion, the caption of which reads: "A great success in western Tanzania yesterday. Congratulations to Joe Schmoie for his magnificent lion taken with a .375 H&H after a hard hunt." Nothing more, nothing less - no education, no other facts. (At this point facts would be ignored anyway because of the overwhelming emotional response associated with the dead lion.) The conclusion as a non-hunter you immediately jump to is that this guy is part of the problem, not part of the solution. The picture angers you so you jump on-line and you google lion trophy hunting, only to find hundreds of similar images. You read all the articles on the first Google page and your mind goes into overdrive. You have seen the solution, you understand why lions are in trouble and you are now well on your way from being a non-hunter to an active anti-hunter.

So hunters, where have we been? We are hiding behind T-shirts that say: "I hunt, it's legal, get over it". We say things like: "I don't care. The more hate I get, the more pics I am going to post" and "Here's one for the anti-hunters" as we pose with a leopard over our shoulders and blood running out of its mouth. Can we honestly say that this is going to win the battle for us?

I am not in any way saying hide it. I am not in any way saying stop it. What I am saying, is let's get serious about what it's going to take to ensure that the good we do as a group and as a body is truly understood. We are not asking non-hunters to run to the gun shop, buy a gun and start killing animals. What we are asking is for people to truly listen, to understand the good that we do and how we do it.

Hunters who say they do not care about antis are, simply put, very naive. I have a message for hunters: IT'S TIME TO CARE! It's time to take a long, hard look at how we educate, at what we have been doing and how we have been doing it, and start to change the model.

Einstein said that doing the same thing over and over again and expecting a different result is the definition of insanity. Likewise there have been folks who have said to me that I am a hypocrite, as I have as much or more content on-line of kill shots than anyone - and yes, they are right. But I am also knowledgeable enough about current affairs to know that that needs to change. We cannot change the

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past - we own it. What we can change is the future because we own that too. We are not allowing them to win by changing our strategy. We are not allowing them to shape our future. On the contrary, if we do not change our strategy they will and already are shaping our future - and with it the future of the millions of acres and thousands of wildlife species that thrive on hunters' dollars.

The other argument I often hear is that it is just 5% of the radicals who are going to write letters and make a fuss and "we don't need to worry about that". Well, here are the facts: If we look at a universe of hundreds of millions of non-hunters, even just 100 million non-hunters, then 5% or 5 million people motivated to shut it Down. Any organization that is service-oriented and relies on the general public for their income (a hotel chain, an airline or even a whole community) who receives 5 million letters will look hard and is very likely to make some policy change!

This brings me to a very real question we all often ask ourselves: Why do you hunt?

You do not, I can assure you, embark on an African hunt to feed a local village.

You do not go on a hunt to finance a local anti-poaching group.

You do not hunt to drill water for a man-made watering hole or village water supply.

You do not hunt to build a school or a clinic.

You do not hunt to finance researchers.

This list can indeed go on and on but it is not a list of reasons why you hunt - it is a list of the benefits of hunting and the effect of hunters' dollars flowing into an outfitter, a community, a region and a government.

So I say again: Why do we hunt ?

Is it because we love an excuse to be outdoors on the trail of something?

Is it because we are driven by some primal need to chase?

Is it for the relationships developed around a campfire and the pursuit?

Is it for the adrenaline and excitement of the final moments of a stalk?

Is it for the excuse to spend time with loved ones in a carefree, natural environment?

Is it a way for you to feed your family in an exceptionally healthy way?

Is it for the adventure of it all?

I would guess it is probably one or two or even all of the above reasons. And yet what we post on social media does not usually reflect any of that - all it reflects is the dead game, which actually is when it is all over.

In the very wise words of Shane Mahoney: "There has never been a time in history when the societies around the world have had more empathy for wildlife." I truly believe he is absolutely correct - we are bombarded through social media, print, television and billboards about wildlife needing help. I agree - a lot of this is marketing campaigns by wildlife welfare organizations who have thriving business models based on emotional response; it is all over Discovery Channel and Nat Geo, who by the way reach an estimated 400+ million households in more than 10 languages! This is all leading to a great awareness by Mr Average, who also has a Facebook account and an opinion.

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So let's get back to the 9/11 analogy, namely that Cecil the lion was our "Twin Towers". What do we do? Do we all sit and say that sucks, but I'm just going to keep on doing what I do. Or do we mount an army, a powerful, effective and highly intelligent army - let's call it the conservation resistance army!

I say YES - we mount an army. We equip and teach that army and we send them out to battle, and here is how I see it:

The front-line infantrymen: In any fighting force the foot soldiers are the most numerous. Everyone who hunts is a foot soldier - their keyboard is their weapon, their ammunition is the constant stream of good information they can spray into the enemy like bullets. It is thought at a wild guess that there are possibly as many as 250 million people around the world who actively hunt. Can you imagine if each one of those people once a week posted something valuable - a great wildlife image, a great fact about the benefit of hunting, a project supported by hunters, etc. That is 13 billion great facts a year shot into cyberspace!

The generals: These are the large hunting organizations like DSC and SCI, the professional hunting groups like PHASA, ZPHGA, TPHA, APHA and NAPHA. These are the folks who need to have very well-planned social media content, with facts and figures and great information. They need to constantly maintain the supply of weapons and bullets, every new fact and piece of information that comes up gets funneled to the front line by these folks to make sure that their infantrymen have the right, accurate and true ammunition.

The machine gunners: These are the people in the public eye, the folks who film, host, edit, write and distribute any hunting media - a machine gun that can spew thousands of bullets into the opposition's fighting force. The television shows across the globe need to be these gunners; they need to have exceptional, palatable, factual and elegant hunting facts and information, so that when a non-hunter stumbles across a channel or a show or a YouTube clip they are fascinated and educated rather than horrified and turned off.

A big part of the battle is the damage that has already been done and what YouTube continues to do. There are some pathetic YouTube clips that to this day get thousands of views and are widely distributed as "this is what hunters represent". These will always be out there; we understand it is the Internet and once content gets out there it is there to stay. That said, each and every single one of us can do a good job of looking back and cleaning up our past; cleaning up some of the less elegant stuff that is out there by simply taking it Down. If we all step up and do that the effect will be profound - no less entertaining will be to aggressively work as a community to replace this with great moments that we pursue every day in the field ...

The military police: Not all hunters are good for an area. As a matter of fact, not all hunting is good for wildlife and wild areas in many areas across Africa. Because of greed and other variables, hunting has been part of the demise, not part of the solution. The military police need to be the governing bodies and associations within these countries who can police and protect the integrity of those who are doing it right - a little goes a long way when you are dealing with emotion and a little bad goes a long way in

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destroying the benefit of a lot of good.

So, in closing, I would ask this to each and every one of you:

Do you love to hunt?

Do you want your kids to enjoy the freedom to hunt as we enjoy today?

Do you love wildlife?

Do you want to see it thriving into the next generation?

If your answer to any of these questions is yes, then surely you are prepared to do what it takes to ensure that it will be there forever? In today's world where everyone has a voice we need to exercise ours - in a way the world has never seen before. Can you imagine the impact, even just within our own communities, if every single one of us a few times a week shared something meaningful, generated some exceptional photography or footage and started spreading the facts!

In conclusion, let me say this: Before you upload a video or a photo, before you comment on a post, ask yourself, "Is the post I am about to make going to be educational and informative or is it going to raise emotion and hatred?"

As many of you know, in the last 18 months I have taken on a project that is focused on telling the world about human/wildlife conflict. To that end I have stopped making television shows and DVDs about hunting and have been focused on capturing the essence of these issues, most of which revolve around unsustainable human population growth. I have travelled to many places in a lot of different countries and what I have found in many cases is truly a tragedy. But I have to say I shudder in fear for our wildlife as I imagine the millions of acres across Africa that today are protected in some way, shape or form by money derived from hunting - if that wheel stops turning, the wildlife is doomed ..

I hope you will read this and realize what a serious situation we find ourselves in; how urgently we need to change what we do and how we do it when in the public eye.

I live in the Bahamas - my children have indeed left their little footprints in the African dust. They are fortunate to get a balanced view of how the world works. They have been part of the process and know where their meat comes from. They thrive on being outdoors. When they grow up, they may never choose to hunt - but I owe it to them to make sure that they have that choice.

Ivan Carter, born and raised in Zimbabwe, began a professional hunting career in 1988. With his passion for elephants and other big game spends over 180 days in the field each year in pursuit of dangerous game. He is currently filming for the second season of his new series, "Carter's WAR, Wild Animal Response", presented by NOSLER on the Outdoor Channel, a series based around human/wildlife conflict in Africa. Ivan is a great advocate for sustainable conservation practices, and truly believes in hunting as a conservation tool. Like Ivan on Facebook at www.facebook.com/ivancartersafrica and [ivan.carter](https://www.instagram.com/ivan.carter) on Instagram and follow him on his adventures in the field

This article was first published in Source: African Outfitter, www.africanoutfitter.com. African Indaba

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