

by Gerhard Damm

Hollowing Out Sustainable Use From The Inside

After the self-professed anti-hunting Born Free Foundation (BFF) gained membership to IUCN, it now enters into partnership agreements to subvert multinational agreements which have sustainable use as part of their rationale.

The Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals CMS and Born Free Foundation BFF signed a partnership agreement in May 2018. According to information on the CMS website, CMS and BFF cooperated already in the past outside formal partnership agreements.

Born Free opposes all forms of trophy hunting. BFF emphasizes the organization's ethical opposition to trophy hunting, but claims to work closely with policymakers, enforcement agencies, wildlife managers and other stakeholders to ensure that rules, regulations and guidelines relating directly or indirectly to trophy and sport hunting are strictly applied and enforced. BFF's claims that this is part of **its wider mission to reduce and ultimately eliminate human-induced, negative impacts on animal welfare and wildlife conservation.**

Importantly, BFF unashamedly campaigns to change public attitudes towards trophy hunting and **implement sustainable, non-lethal forms of delivering real wildlife-derived benefits to local communities.** BFF's track record shows that BFF does not always adhere to facts and truth, and - as far as the author could ascertain, has very little to show with regards to the well-being of local rural communities and wildlife!

BFF reports about the signing of the MoU with CMS saying that *"CMS Executive Secretary Bradnee Chambers highlighted the significant role Born Free has played in supporting the work of the Convention on terrestrial African mammals, culminating in the recent listings of lions, leopards, giraffes and chimpanzees on its appendices, and the creation of the joint CMS/CITES African Carnivores Initiative. Born Free is also contributing to the Convention's ground-breaking work on the importance of animal culture and the role individual animals play in their societies, which aligns closely with Born Free's Compassionate Conservation principles."*

CMS partners include the secretariats of biodiversity-related Multilateral Environmental Agreements (MEAs), other inter-governmental bodies, non-governmental organizations and the private sector, that work with CMS. Interestingly, one of the CMS ambassadors, Ian Redmond, is also "a conservation consultant and advisor for organizations such as the Born Free Foundation and the International Fund for Animal Welfare".

CMS has already signed partnership agreements with inter alia the Bern Convention; CIC - International Council for Game and Wildlife Conservation; CPW - Collaborative Partnership on Sustainable Wildlife Management; but also with HSI -Australia (part of the global arm of The Humane

by Gerhard Damm

Society of the United States) as well as IFAW - International Fund for Animal Welfare. CMS also partners with IUCN, CBD, CITES and IWC (see box on this and next page for details).

As the only global convention specializing in the conservation of migratory species, their habitats and migration routes, the CMS treaty under the aegis of the United Nations Environment Program (UNEP) affords a global platform **for the conservation and sustainable use of migratory animals and their habitats.**

The CMS Secretariat develops and promotes agreements, supports and supervises research and conservation projects and co-operates with governments other international organizations and partner organizations (NGOs, media and the corporate sector). Potential partners are selected by a variety of criteria, inter alia, *by their ability to advance CMS goals and the consistency of the organization's objectives and activities with those of CMS* (including those activities beyond the immediate area of the proposed relationship). The collaboration of CMS and its formal partners extends to either the development of conservation policy or specific projects and fieldwork.

Many conservation efforts are based on the sustainable use of natural resources; in fact MEAs like CITES, CBD and CMS share sustainable use as interlinking concept. Sustainable natural resource use includes regulated responsible hunting, whether it is for subsistence, recreation, or for trophies. Regulated hunting programs normally do not present a threat to the survival of species; such programs can reduce poaching, lead to species population growth and recovery, provide valuable income to local communities for conservation and development projects, and provide incentives for communities to engage in wildlife conservation for the long-term.

CMS is partnering with organizations or groups supporting regulated forms of sustainable use and apparently also with some who are diametrically opposed to any such use, especially extractive use like hunting. Therefore, one wonders about the wording of the CMS press release *"The Partnership Agreement helps fulfil the Secretariat's mandate to liaise with international organizations concerned with migratory species and will facilitate communication and cooperation towards achieving the two organizations' shared goals."*

Although information on the nature and scope of cooperative arrangements should be available on the CMS website and to the public at large, we could not find any further reference or text to the new partnership agreement with BFF. The author was, however, able to obtain a copy.

Interestingly, the agreement acknowledges that *"BFF and CMS pursue common goals"* and *"the relevance of cooperation"*; but even more interestingly, **both parties confirm in the agreement that they will share internal information, documents, work plans, coordinate activities and work programs, to the extent that CMS will encourage other MEAs (e.g. CITES and CBD) to share information with BFF.** The icing on the cake is the linking of the CMS and BFF websites and the objective to develop collaborative activities.

This partnership was signed by CMS Executive Secretary Bradney Chambers and BFF CEO Howard Jones on 30th January 2018 but apparently made public only during the 3rd meeting of the Sessional

by Gerhard Damm

Committee of the CMS Scientific Council in May 2018.

BFF says unashamedly that *“Born Free is opposed to the killing of any animal for sport or pleasure, and strongly refutes claims by trophy hunting proponents that their activities support conservation or local communities”*; BFF campaigns for *“a petition calling for countries to end trophy hunting and to stop the import of trophies from threatened or CITES-listed species”* and BFF solicits donations to *“protect threatened species worldwide from the cruel practice of trophy hunting”*

CMS for its part declare that *“as an environmental treaty under the aegis of the United Nations Environment Program, **CMS provides a global platform for the conservation and sustainable use of migratory animals and their habitats**”*.

Whether you call the concept ‘sustainable use’, ‘incentive-driven conservation’, ‘conservation through exploitation’ or, where commerce is involved ‘market-led conservation’, is irrelevant. Important is the fact that these concepts – so integral in the policies of CBD, CITES and indeed also CMS – are apparently not part of BFF’s vocabulary or philosophy.

In an interview published by the Express (UK) on July 18, 2018, BFF Chairman Will Travis, described in the article as *‘one of the world’s leading conservationists’*, submitted this reactionary and populist comment: *“Trophy hunting is highly controversial and is widely condemned as being inhumane and elitist, failing to deliver either the community or conservation dividend that its proponents claim. Botswana has bravely broken with the ‘use it or lose it’ mantra of neighboring countries and has now aligned itself with a more progressive and compassionate conservation agenda that resonates with the great majority of people worldwide. ... Botswana has an opportunity to show independent, resolute, international leadership and to continue on an enlightened conservation course that rejects the blood-lust of those who revel in the killing of wild animals and who deprive the rest of the world of their majesty and wonder.”*

Rather than spreading the mantle of *“one of the world’s leading conservationists”* over Mr. Travis, the author of the Express article and Mr. Travis should have consulted with the several hundred experts of the IUCN Sustainable Use and Livelihoods Specialist Group to get their facts right! With regards to Botswana, Mr. Travis should listen to the voices of thousands of rural community members, and to Botswana’s president!

This is not the only time BFF has come out decrying sustainable use – one wonders why CMS engaged in a formal partnership agreement with this organization and who are the drivers behind this agreement. Did Chambers consult with the Parties to CMS on purpose and content of the agreement?

CMS Executive Secretary Bradnee Chambers has to answer a lot of questions!

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