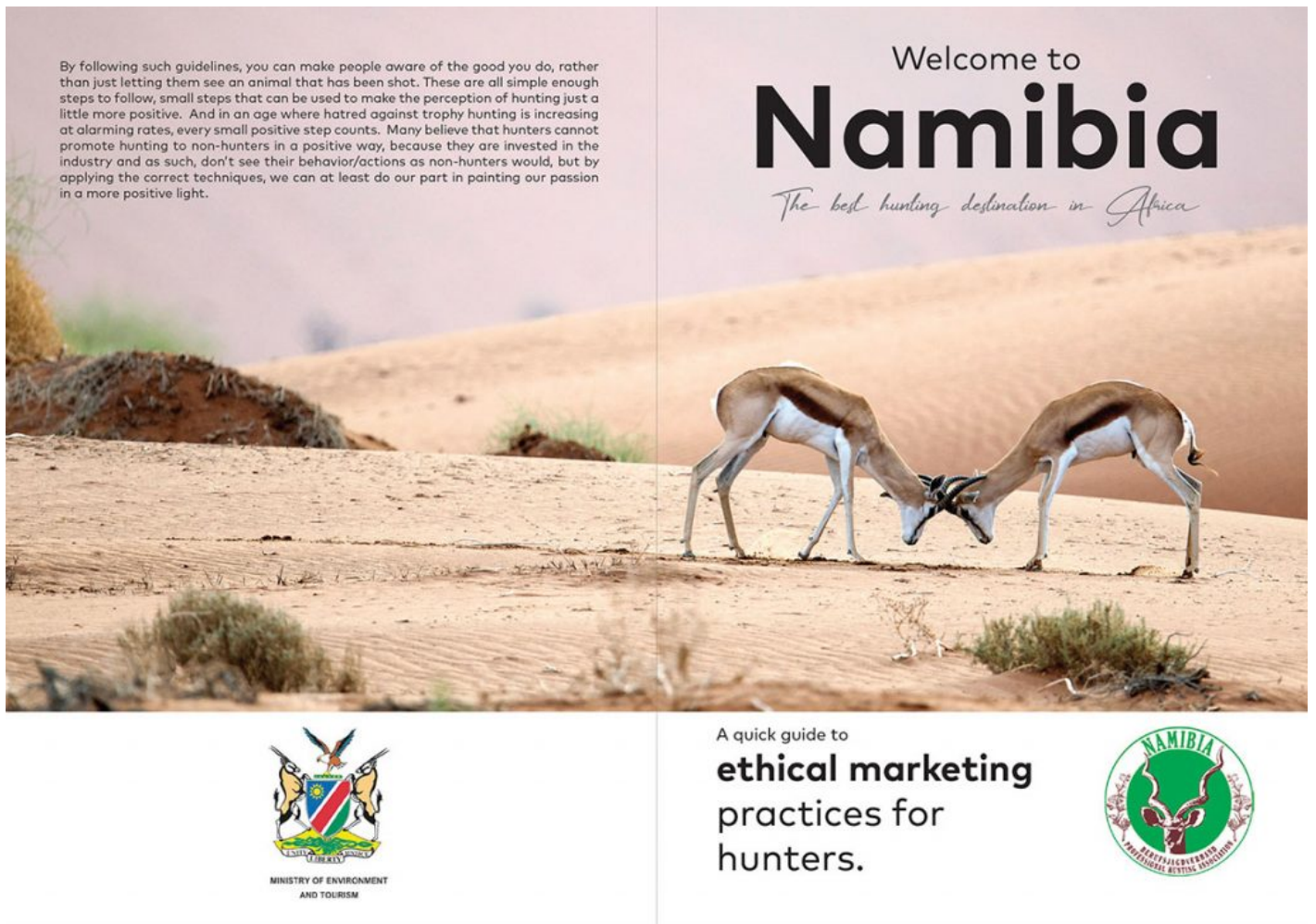


by Silvio Calabi

Hunting & Social Media: Namibia Has a Position on That-Today's hunters must take the Worldwide Web into account



By following such guidelines, you can make people aware of the good you do, rather than just letting them see an animal that has been shot. These are all simple enough steps to follow, small steps that can be used to make the perception of hunting just a little more positive. And in an age where hatred against trophy hunting is increasing at alarming rates, every small positive step counts. Many believe that hunters cannot promote hunting to non-hunters in a positive way, because they are invested in the industry and as such, don't see their behavior/actions as non-hunters would, but by applying the correct techniques, we can at least do our part in painting our passion in a more positive light.

Welcome to
Namibia
The best hunting destination in Africa

A quick guide to
ethical marketing
practices for
hunters.

MINISTRY OF ENVIRONMENT
AND TOURISM

NAMIBIA
NATIONAL PROFESSIONAL
ANTHROPOLOGICAL
ASSOCIATION

Social media posts of happy hunters with dead animals often dismay anti-hunters and non-hunters alike, with predictable negative consequences. Namibia's Ministry of Tourism and Environment, which regulates that country's safari trade, has said it wants to ban such posts outright. NAPHA, Namibia's professional hunting body, has countered with a social-media code of conduct. All hunters everywhere should think long and hard before publicizing trophy photos.

Between the Sahara and the Cape, no African nation has a more enlightened and effective approach to conservation, wildlife management and hunting than the Republic of Namibia. Namibia has even written conservation and protection of natural resources into its Constitution: Article 95 says, "The State shall actively promote and maintain the welfare of the people by adopting international policies

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aimed at the following: maintenance of ecosystems, essential ecological processes, and biological diversity of Namibia, and utilisation of living natural resources on a sustainable basis for the benefit of all Namibians, both present and future.”

As Constitutions go, Namibia’s is among the world’s newest; it was adopted in February 1990, a month before independence, so it benefits from modern thinking. One byproduct of this is that the MET, Namibia’s Ministry of Tourism and Environment, which oversees (among many other things) the safari trade, and NAPHA, the highly regarded and conservation-minded Namibian Professional Hunters Association, have figured out not only how to work together, mostly, but also how to provide high-quality, ethical, fair-chase fee-paid hunting that is both community-sensitive and sustainable.

It likely came from ranchers in the American West, but the saying “if it pays, it stays” could have been coined in Namibia. In her 2018 address to the group’s annual general meeting, NAPHA president Danene van der Westhuyzen (the first woman to qualify as a dangerous-game PH in Namibia) pointed out that Namibia “has proven beyond any doubt its conservation efforts for all game species through responsible hunting. Despite the growth of our human population, our elephant population has increased from 7,000 to 23,500 over the last 20 years and the lion population in the northwest has increased from 20 to 150. We have the world’s largest free-roaming populations of cheetah and black rhino, and well over 70% of Namibia is under one or other form of conservation management. This makes for one of the world’s largest contiguous areas of protected land. We have more wildlife in Namibia today than at any time in the past 150 years.”

Whether it’s labeled sport hunting, trophy hunting or conservation hunting, hunting tourism has become hugely important to Namibia, one of the world’s least populated countries. Anti-hunting sentiment threatens not only Namibia’s wildlife management and conservation, but also many livelihoods in rural communities and among safari companies, professional hunters and their staffs. Thus Namibians follow the various hunting-related uproars on social media with particular interest—so much so that, in June 2018, Honourable Pohamba Shifeta, Minister of Environment and Tourism, proposed a ban on posting photos of hunting trophies on social media.

Such photos—not hunting itself—were unethical, he said. This caused a furor of its own, on both sides of the issue: Hunting operators protested that this would prevent them from marketing via the Internet; anti-hunters wondered (online, naturally) just what sort of wildlife slaughter the MET was trying to hide.

After negotiations between NAPHA and the MET, the ministry agreed not to formalize its proposed ban and instead adopt the association’s own quickly drafted “Guide to Ethical Marketing Practices for Hunters.” The MET will soon release its new Wildlife Bill, which may clarify whether hunting permits can be yanked upon violation of these guidelines; meanwhile, the association is holding its members to them.

In June this year, Namibia had its own “Cecil the lion” moment when an old elephant bull dubbed Voortrekker (“Pioneer”) was killed by a visiting hunter. The resultant outcry prompted the MET to issue an official statement defending its classification of Voortrekker as a “problem animal” to be shot.

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(NAPHA's President also commented on the matter.)

Voortrekker the elephant appeared on Facebook only a couple of times, and in video, not in grip-and-grin photos of the successful hunter. However, the speed with which Voortrekker media stories—most of them condemning the animal's death—flashed across the world emphasized the points in NAPHA's social-media guide, which opens with:

“Hunting is often misunderstood and therefore the un- or misinformed public can easily be swayed and influenced. Hunting images can be viewed as controversial and, as a result thereof, elicit a negative reaction from the viewer. It is for this reason that the hunting professional and his or her client must, AT ALL TIMES, be cognizant of the potential reaction that any images might cause and consider this whenever posting on social media.”

Cecil the lion was killed four years ago and has become a cultural touchpoint. Last year, photos of a woman from Texas with a giraffe trophy from South Africa went viral. The images had been on Facebook since 2017, but a group called Africlandpost discovered and tweeted them out over the caption “White american savage who is partly a neanderthal comes to Africa and shoot down a very rare black giraffe courtesy of South Africa stupidity. Her name is Tess Thompson Talley. Please share.”



One of the photos that cost Idaho Fish and Game Commissioner Blake Fischer his job. On a 2018 safari in Namibia, he boasted that he'd “shot a whole family of baboons.” In his letter of

by Silvio Calabi

resignation to Idaho Gov. C.L. Otter, Fischer admitted that he “did not display an appropriate level of sportsmanship and respect for the animals that I harvested.” Fischer photo

Spelling, grammar and accuracy notwithstanding, people did share. As they did a “Brother Nature” tweet calling for a boycott of Jimmy John’s sandwich shops after someone found an old online photo of founder Jimmy John Liautaud sitting on a dead elephant’s foreleg and flashing two thumbs up to the camera. Even a private e-mail to just a hundred or so people can have unintended consequences, as Blake Fischer, an Idaho Fish and Game Commissioner, found out last year when he sent out crudely captioned safari photos of (among other things) a family of baboons he had killed in Namibia.

One recipient—a friend?—wrote back, “I have a difficult time understanding how a person privileged to be an Idaho Fish and Game Commissioner can view such an action as sportsmanlike and an example to others. I’m sure what you did was legal, however, legal does not make it right.” Fischer’s problematic e-mail apparently did not go viral, but reportedly it sparked 1,454 emails and calls to the Idaho Governor’s office from as far away as Australia. All but 11 disapproved of Fischer.

Fischer’s boss, Gov. C.L. Otter, demanded his resignation and said, “Every member of my administration is expected to exercise good judgment. Commissioner Fischer did not.” Fischer’s letter of resignation included a mea culpa that he “did not display an appropriate level of sportsmanship and respect for the animals that I harvested.” (Some people might also question the word “harvest” used to describe the killing of baboons, generally not a species destined for the table.)

Discrimination, sensitivity and legality aside, hunters tend to see the perception of what they do as a binary issue—for or against. However, there are really three groups in play here: hunters, anti-hunters and non-hunters. The third one may be the most important—and the most susceptible to social media. Jason Roussos, now president of APHA, the African Professional Hunters Association, in an interview with *The Hunting Report* about social media posting, pointed out why it is critical for hunters to regulate their online conduct:

“Forget the anti-hunters, I don’t care about them. But we do need to be sensitive and respectful to the position non-hunters—who are the majority out there—have in regard to hunting. Most non-hunters are ill-informed about trophy hunting, and by not being careful about what we do and don’t do, we are simply giving the antis more ammo to attack us with. If we lose the support of enough non-hunters [by turning them into anti-hunters], it’s lights out for us all.”

One might think all this is nothing more—or less—than common sense. But, as Sister Meltrese used to tell us third-graders at Sacred Heart Elementary School, c. 1958, “Common sense is called common because it’s so rare.”

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Banner Photo: The lead image of NAPHA's "Quick Guide to Ethical Marketing Practices for Hunters" shows a pair of young springbok rams sparring somewhere on the fringes of the Namib Desert. NAPHA photo