



KENYA'S WILDLIFE DEBACLE:

The True Cost of Banning Hunting

Hunting is no doubt a part of conservation efforts in many countries, but it is unsurprisingly met with resistance from some environmentalists who feel that there is somewhat of a contradiction in killing some of the animals that one is trying to protect. Yet now, due to Kenya's decline in habitat and populations, the question is looming, does controlled hunting actually lead to better overall conservation?

BY DR. CHARLES KAY

As I am sure you know, some segments of the public, both here in the United States and abroad, would like to ban hunting in the belief such a move would benefit wildlife, or at least that is what they claim when soliciting funds. It sounds simple, stop hunting animals and you will have more wildlife. Is this, though, a reasonable supposition? For an answer we need to look at the wildlife situation in Kenya for that African country banned all, and I do mean all, hunting in 1977. There is no sport hunting, there is no meat hunting, and landowners, be they white or black, have no right to kill wildlife on their property. The ban is total and absolute there being no legal market in either game meat or wildlife products. Kenya

outlawed all consumptive use of wildlife at the urging of animal-rights groups in an attempt to stop poaching, or so they said.

At the same time that Kenya prohibited hunting, the Kenya Rangeland Ecological Monitoring Unit began recording the numbers and distribution of livestock and wildlife, primarily large game species, throughout Kenya. This included national parks and other protected areas, black communal lands, and private property, mostly white-owned ranches. So has banning all consumptive use of wildlife worked? Absolutely not, instead it has been a spectacular failure. Since 1977, Kenya has lost 60% to 70% of all its large wildlife even in national parks. Moreover, it is predicted that most large mammals will be extinct in the

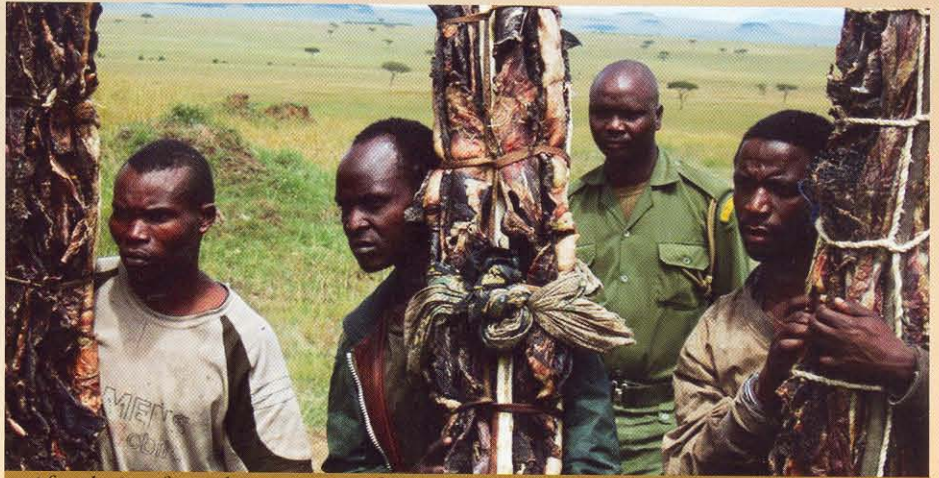
next 10 to 20 years. So there you have it, if you want to eliminate wildlife, by all means ban hunting!

The reason this happened, and is still ongoing, is that there is a cost to having wildlife. If you are a poor, black farmer, as many in Kenya are, and if your crops are destroyed by wildlife, you face not only economic ruin, but actual starvation. Similarly, if you raise livestock either on black communal lands or private ranches, there is a cost to letting wildlife consume forage that could otherwise have been used to feed livestock. In addition, there is the cost of being killed or injured by wildlife. You would be appalled at the number of local people injured or killed each year by lions, elephants, and other dangerous game. Children walking to school in rural Africa are all

too routinely attacked by wild animals. No American parent would tolerate what goes on in Africa.

That being the case, it is not surprising then that wildlife has simply disappeared, legal or not. So poaching has actually increased even in national parks. You have to remember that black indigenous landowners were forcefully removed at gunpoint, and without compensation, from every national park and game preserve in east and southern Africa to create "wilderness" pleasuring grounds for white elites. There are few black tourists in any African national park. So the local people "poach" to feed themselves and to earn a few dollars for their families. So would I and so would you, under similar circumstances.

Recently most of the remaining lions in Nairobi National Park, (Nairobi being the capitol of Kenya), were speared to death within sight of the Kenya Wildlife Service's national headquarters, while some 500 bureaucrats sat para-



After being forced at gunpoint from every national park and game preserve in east and southern Africa, the locals are now forced to poach to feed themselves and to earn a few dollars for their families.

lyzed at their desks. "Only a state monopoly could hope to attain such breathtaking heights of incompetence and ineptitude and hope to get away with it." All of which can be traced to the fact that white colonial governments planted the flag and claimed all land and wildlife for king and country, thereby depriving local people of their birthright. What is even more surprising is that black governments have

done little to correct this injustice. Instead, policies like banning all consumptive use of wildlife have made the situation worse.

There is more to this than I can relate here and if you would like additional details, Google Mike Norton-Griffiths and you should be able to find the website on which he has posted a number of his research articles. Dr.





Unlike the problems facing Kenya's wildlife, hunters in the US have always been working for a better solution. Seen here is Wyoming guide, Jim Freeburn (second from right) and his crew. They are all smiles as they show what can come from proper wildlife management and from working hand in hand with private landowners.

Norton-Griffiths is an economist who was born in the U.S., educated in Britain, and who has lived in Kenya for many years. In 2007, Dr. Norton-Griffiths published a paper in *World Economics* [Vol. 8(2): 41-64] titled, "How Many Wildebeest Do You Need?" that chronicles this sad story. "All [the animals rights organizations] care about is that hunting and other consumptive utilization of wildlife is not reintroduced to Kenya, and whether this leads to further losses of wildlife and to the perpetuation of rural poverty is completely irrelevant to them, because their underlying purpose is not to help Kenya but [to enrich themselves through fundraising]."

At the same time that wildlife numbers have fallen precipitously in Kenya following the prohibition on hunting, wildlife populations in Namibia have doubled. While in South Africa, wildlife habitat has doubled and then doubled again. Why the difference? Because both Namibia and South

Africa passed legislation giving landowners rights to wildlife. That is to say, the landowners own the wildlife, at the least the large game species. In South Africa, with which I am most familiar, the ranchers have to high-fence their properties before the government will relinquish ownership of game species, and there are other regulations, as well. But there are no closed seasons, no state licenses, no bag limits, and no prohibited methods. Shooting under the midnight sun is legal; i.e., spotlighting. There are also sanctioned markets in both game meat and live animals. The end of wildlife you say? Nothing could be further from the truth.

As the post-apartheid government has withdrawn subsidies from white cattlemen, the landowners have turned to game ranching and both wildlife populations and sport hunting have experienced phenomenal growth. Now that the government has changed the incentives from wildlife

being a cost, to wildlife being an asset, a million acres a year are being converted to wildlife—unlike here in the States, where all you hear about is the loss of wildlife habitat. Private landowners, not the national government, have saved the black wildebeest, blesbok, bontebok, and other species including white and black rhinos, because sport hunting now pays the bills. Aldo Leopold predicted as much back in the 1930's when he wrote an essay on "Game Economics" in which he noted that the surest way to save habitat and enhance wildlife was to allow landowners to profit from protecting habitat and enhancing game populations.

At the present time, plains game hunting in Namibia and South Africa is the most cost efficient big game hunting in the world. Moreover, the trophy quality and hunting experience are outstanding. On my second trip to South Africa, I hunted for three weeks and shot 14 animals, six of which

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made Rowland Ward, the international equivalent of Boone and Crockett. The cost? About the same as one high-end, trophy mule deer or elk hunt on a private ranch or Indian Reservation here in the West.

While this has been a blessing for white ranchers, various African governments have also passed laws giving black communal landowners rights to wildlife. In Namibia these are called conservancies and it has been shown that when local people receive a direct financial benefit from wildlife, illegal activity is reduced or even eliminated.

It is really quite simple, if sport hunting pays the bills, both wildlife, and more importantly habitat, are not only conserved but enhanced.

In Kenya, animal rights groups claim that wildlife viewing by foreign tourists is more beneficial than sport hunting. In that, though, they are badly mistaken. According to Dr. Norton-Griffiths as "extraordinary as it may seem, not a single tourist company in Kenya invests in wildlife or habitat management even though their very economic future depends upon the resource." This is because most of the large

tourist operations are owned by multinational companies, whose only concern is short-term profit. In addition, studies have shown that virtually none of the foreign tourist dollars make it down to the local people, who actually live with wildlife. Instead, black elites divert the money to themselves.

It has been estimated that half the gate receipts from national parks "disappear" before reaching the Kenya treasury. Similarly, there is no accountability of the large financial grants that animal-rights groups make to the government each year, rendering them little more than annual bribes. This is why the black elites that run the country have resisted calls to reinstitute hunt-



ing. If hunting was again made legal, animal-rights groups would stop giving funds to the central government and thus, there would be less opportunity for rent-seeking behavior by officials; i.e., graft and corruption.

As documented by various scientific studies, wildlife viewing is also more environmentally destructive than sport hunting. This is because the profit margin per person is less, so you have to run a much greater number of tourists through the system to achieve the economic activity generated by a single sport hunter. In addition, tourists expect paved roads and modern five-star accom-



Instead of wildlife numbers plummeting, areas of Africa outside of Kenya are seeing incredible herd numbers and excellent hunting. Yet, another example of the important role hunting plays in the dynamics of wildlife management.

modations. Water is scarce in arid Africa and tourists require a lot more of it than sport hunters. Furthermore, tourists generate larger quantities of human waste and garbage, both per person and in total, than sport hunters. Sport hunters, on the other

hand, are content to stay in tents and drive dirt tracks. No one is arguing that wildlife viewing should not be part of the mix, but to call wildlife viewing "non-consumptive," is simply false. Tourists also have a much larger carbon footprint than safari hunters.



Hunting also has a huge impact in terms of social and economic aspects of certain areas. If not for hunting, many locals would have no source of income and more than likely they would become subject to a poverty stricken state.

Hopefully you will never have to confront animal-rights activists while you are out hunting, but if you do, or if you favor that sort of thing, now at least you are armed with the truth about the wildlife debacle in Kenya. Banning hunting is a surefire way to eliminate wildlife. Although to non-hunters this may seem counterintuitive, it is nevertheless true. The reality is that outlawing the consumptive use of wildlife in Kenya has been an unmitigated ecological and human disaster. While in other African countries that have modified their game laws to encourage sport hunting, wildlife populations have increased, as have the private and communal lands devoted to wildlife. As hard as it may be for some people to accept, the free-market system has been more effective at conserving wildlife in Africa than heavy-handed, state-run monopolies.

