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## Trophy Hunting

Sub-Saharan Africa.

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### Introduction

This chapter seeks to critically analyse Trophy Hunting as a form of dark tourism. Trophy hunting involves the killing of animals to keep and display body parts as trophies. Hunting is legal in many countries around the world, but big game hunting is at its biggest in sub-Saharan Africa, which accounts for seven of the top ten countries that export trophy items (Born Free, 2019). Tourists, predominantly from the US and Europe, pay substantial fees to shoot indigenous wildlife. Often portrayed somewhat romantically as a battle of wits between man (and participants are predominantly, although by no means exclusively, men) and beast, hunting is seen as an exciting and dangerous wilderness adventure. In reality, while hunting can involve tracking animals on foot and sleeping in tents, hunters are well-equipped, well-protected and well-looked after. Costing hundreds to thousands of dollars per day, hunting safaris are a high-end luxury form of tourism. 'Canned' hunting, where animals are bred in captivity and released into enclosed areas to be shot, takes hunting even further away from any pretence of a fair chase or a reversion to some natural state of predator versus prey.

Trophy hunting is undoubtedly highly controversial in an age of species decline and endangerment (WWF, 2020), and of increased scientific and legal recognition of animal sentience. Debate is polarised: supporters of trophy hunting point to ecological and economic benefits that hunting tourism brings (Di Minin et al., 2016); opponents argue that conservation benefits are over-stated, that hunting exacerbates economic and social divisions in local communities, and, more fundamentally, that trophy hunting involves inflicting inexcusable levels of suffering on animals.

### The dark ethical transgressions of trophy hunting

The most obvious 'dark' element of trophy hunting is that it involves the killing of animals for no justification other than human pleasure. While other forms of hunting – for food, or to protect livestock, crops or livelihoods – also involve killing animals, these are often seen as less unacceptable

because the benefits associated with them are linked to tangible human needs. Trophy hunting serves no obvious purpose of necessity – hunters do not kill animals out of either a need to survive or to thrive economically. Motivation to hunt is purely embedded in the personal satisfactions of excitement and egotism. The trophies acquired are to signal prowess and personality to others – to seek admiration and approval from fellow hunters, and to advertise wealth and status to other social peers (Thompson, 1975; Courchamp et al, 2006; Bell, 2009; Bryant, 2004; Gunn, 2001).

The premature, violent and unjustifiable deaths associated with hunting raise many ethical questions. From an animal rights or species justice perspective, animals have the right not to suffer; death from hunting is often preceded by stress and injury, by hours or days of pain and suffering. For animals raised in captivity for canned hunting, suffering may be a feature of their entire lives. Ethical concerns around trophy hunting are passionately expressed both in literature and public discourse. All hunting forms can appear ethically dubious, requiring moral tolerance (von Essen and Nurse, 2017). Environmental ethics writers see trophy hunting as ‘plastic hunting’, where hunters receive unfair advantages and show a lack of respect for the animal when posing with the carcass (Loftin, 1988; Taylor 1996). Hunting tolerance generally decreases when endangered or young animals are killed (Curcione, 1992), attracting public attention and backlash (Blevins and Edwards, 2009).

There are a plethora of ethical issues relating to how hunting takes place, from trapping and baiting, hunting with dogs, shooting from vehicles and more (Lindsey *et al.*, 2006). However, the most unethical element is arguably canned hunting, where animals are raised in captivity and kept in abhorrent conditions and small enclosures so they cannot escape, guaranteeing a kill for the hunter (Di Minin et al, 2016). 80-90% of lions hunted in South Africa are canned (Di Minin et al, 2016), highlighting serious ethical problems within the industry. Hunting for sport is fundamentally rejected by animal welfarists for reasons beyond the immediate concern of harms to the animals hunted. One issue here is the devaluation of wildlife, degrading the worth of animals by putting a price on their lives according to how much a hunter is willing to pay to kill them, rather than appreciating their value as living beings (Sheikh, 2019).

In line with this argument, many believe that humans should engage respectfully with animals. They scorn the international conservation community and anyone who accepts trophy hunting for aiding and abetting a highly immoral practice. At heart, being “inescapably tethered to a system that involves killing and debasing individual nonhuman animals, as the only way to save their populations or species” is undoubtedly tragic (Batavia et al, 2018:4).

### **The dichotomies of trophy hunting: A tool of conservation or economics?**

From a broader ecological or conservation perspective, hunting wild populations may clearly have some impact on population levels – a particularly important consideration for endangered species. Intervening with the lives of wild animals can also have serious ramifications for wider ecosystems and biodiversity (White, 2011). However, trophy hunting is often defended as having a role to play in ecology and conservation efforts (Di Minin et al., 2016). Supposedly, it is sustainable through low off-takes and high fees, where a few animals are sacrificed to trophy hunters at high prices in order to reinvest the money into the conservation of species and habitats with minimal risks for species decline and ecological degradation (Bond et al., 2004; Leader-Williams et al., 2005). However, there are many questions – and a need for more research – over hunting’s legitimacy as a conservation tool (Lindsey et al., 2006).

The Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES) and national laws regulate trophy hunting to ensure that the numbers of hunted animals are not excessive or unsustainable.

Host countries are responsible for issuing quotas which designate the number of animals legally permitted to be trophy hunted (Sheikh, 2019). It is argued that, where quotas are carefully adhered to, “revenues from tightly regulated trophy hunting can provide important incentives for careful management, protection and reintroductions” of especially endangered species (Lindsey et al., 2006:461). Trophy hunting revenues have been seen to aid the reintroduction of some endangered species (Flack, 2003) and have stimulated the development of some wildlife conservancies (Weaver and Skyer, 2003). Revenues have been used to employ rangers to combat illegal poaching (Lewis and Alpert, 1997; Di Minin et al, 2015). However, many critically challenge trophy hunting’s conservational value and express concern over quotas. Governments have been found to mismanage wildlife numbers (Caro et al, 1998; Taylor, 2001) and set unscientific quotas based upon guesswork, sometimes without specifications or age restrictions on the animals hunted (Packer et al, 2011). Further, some African states ineffectively monitor and enforce quotas, so weak governance allows trophy hunting regulations to be easily bypassed (Leader-Williams et al, 2009). The wealth of hunters can bribe outfitters to facilitate illegal hunts (Eliason, 2012) and there are many documented instances of high hunting rates causing species decline (Adams, 2004; Packer et al, 2009). Ultimately, there is no guarantee that quotas are accurate, being abided by, or that trophy hunting is not endangering species, particularly when there is increasing pressure for large quotas (Lindsey et al, 2006) and animals being sold too cheaply to provide any benefit (Wilkie and Carpenter, 1999; Dickinson, 2021). The conservation objective of trophy hunting is clearly limited when it is hard to police.

It is argued that trophy hunting is a profitable use of land as many game ranches have been established over the years (Krug, 2001) and that trophy hunting land uses are twice as financially beneficial to conservation than protecting animals in national parks and can generate income where other land uses are not viable (Lindsey et al. 2006). Others stress that trophy hunting is imperative, and land would be converted for uses detrimental to biodiversity without it (Di Minin et al., 2013). The idea appears counterintuitive, capturing and raising animals in ranches to protect them by killing them, and many point out the ecological implications of this. Fenced game ranches in Africa are often small and overpopulated (Patterson and Khosa, 2005), and ranchers are known to hybridise species to create exotic trophies, disrupting genetics for the purpose of saleability (Hamman et al., 2003). Natural functions such as roaming and migration are obstructed (Estes et al, 2011; Woodroffe et al, 2014) and predatory animals are often persecuted to save large herbivores for trophy hunters (Ripple et al, 2016). The adverse effects of trophy hunting are well-documented, underpinned by trophy hunting’s unnatural and artificial impact on nature. From inbreeding (Milner et al, 2007) to disrupting social species (Packer et al, 2009), trophy hunting damages wildlife (Ripple et al., 2016). Evolutionary consequences from trophy hunting are hard to reverse (Coltman et al., 2003), and trophy hunting is an intrusive practice affecting mammals globally (Milner-Gulland et al., 2003). Further, local communities can find trophy hunting destructive (Sachedina, 2008). So, whilst supporters emphasise the importance of hunting revenue for conservation, their attention is misguided by failing to address many key issues regarding species welfare which seriously trouble the sustainability of trophy hunting (Coltman et al, 2003).

There is certainly a lack of consensus surrounding the legitimacy, acceptability and effectiveness of trophy hunting as a conservational tool (Lindsey et al., 2006). Proponents highlight the cruciality of trophy hunting as conservation efforts are already underfunded and would suffer dramatically without the revenues (Di Minin et al., 2016). Countries may ban trophy hunting on their own turf, or may ban trophy imports to curtail hunting elsewhere (Sheikh, 2019). Trophies are not required for conservation, and neither are the thrills and remorselessness intertwined with trophy hunting, which may lead us to question the sincerity of ‘conservation’ as a justification for hunting (Batavia et al., 2018).

Past literature has emphasised that trophy hunting is economically superior to alternative options, such as ecotourism (Leader-Williams and Hutton, 2005; Lindsey et al, 2006). Even where tourism thrives, trophy hunting revenues are still argued as vital (Baldus, 2005). Since trophy hunters pay more than conventional tourists, more income is generated from fewer people (Chardonnet, 1995), thus reducing carbon footprint and environmental impacts (Gössling, 2000; Di Minin et al, 2016). From an animal-welfare perspective, emissions are not relevant to the trophy hunting debate (Ripple et al., 2016), but they may be from a broader ecological perspective. On the other hand, eco-tourism may have greater benefits than hunting, with the potential of generating income over a sustained period greater than a one-time kill by a trophy hunter (Myers, 1981). There is also evidence that nature-based tourism is more significant in national development than trophy hunting, which accounts for just 1.8% of total tourism revenues. Since the majority of African tourism is nature-based, the value of animals is obvious, and the majority would rather see wildlife alive than dead (Campbell, 2013).

Trophy hunting is also lauded by supporters for the benefits it provides to local communities, including employment opportunities, income and food, although most trophy animals are not typically edible (Fischer, 2015). The industry is reported to be lucrative, generating hundreds of millions of US dollars per year in Africa (Lindsey et al., 2006), which is vital to some countries. However, even proponents are not blind to the fact that trophy hunting is fraught with corruption and mismanagement (Lewis and Jackson, 2005; Lindsey et al., 2006). Revenues are distributed unfairly, contrary to agreements, to the point where local communities do not receive adequate funds (Child, 2005). Research suggests that less than a quarter of total revenues have been reinvested into wildlife management (Di Minin et al, 2016), and local communities have seen as little as 3-5% of shares of revenue (Lindsey et al, 2006). This is a key driver behind negative attitudes towards trophy hunting (Mayaka, 2002), contributing to distrust between local communities and governments (Nshala, 1999). Unrest stems from the difficulty in recognising how trophy hunting fees are utilised, by whom, and who they truly benefit. If local communities are not benefitting, it is extremely hard to identify the positives of trophy hunting. The crux of the matter is that trophy hunting is justified by the money that it generates, yet the genuine benefits are few and far between.

## **Conclusion**

Arguments about the ecological and economic benefits of trophy hunting may be irrelevant to those who see this primarily as an animal rights or animal welfare issue, but it is clear that the ecological and economic benefits that are claimed may not be as strongly supported by the evidence as they are by hunting supporters. Even if such benefits could be better harnessed, and if hunting could be practiced to both sustainable and humanitarian standards, there are other problems associated with the 'sport'. The financial value placed on many hunting trophies, particularly those coming from more endangered species, helps drive the illegal wildlife trade. Legal hunting can fuel and become illegal poaching (von Essen and Nurse, 2017) and support serious and organised crime.

Hunting, arguably, sustains and perpetuates more fundamental social divisions. Hunting can be understood as a primarily male practice which demonstrates patriarchal domination over nature (Gunn, 2001) and exhibits hegemonic masculinity (Sollund, 2020). Not only have trophies long symbolised power, success and status (Krier and Swart, 2016), they have also been associated with male supremacy (Mullin, 1999). The boasts of trophy hunters and their arguably disrespectful trophy collections demonstrate a 'victory' over nature, adding a new dimension to their 'manhood' on top of their power ascribed by wealth and a sense of camaraderie with other men (Kheel, 2008). Ultimately, killing animals larger than mankind "may represent one of the last bastions of men to exercise 'traditional, hegemonic masculinity'" (Sollund, 2020: 12). Trophy hunting in Africa is also a colonial hangover (Born Free, 2019), perpetuating and reinforcing global power imbalances and ethnic and racial divisions, and feeding into the 'culture wars' of North America and Western Europe.

It is perhaps not surprising that public support for trophy hunting is limited, and that more and more countries are more tightly restricting trophy hunting – or banning it completely.

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