

The great HUNTING DEBATE

Is commercial hunting helping conservation in South Africa – or harming it? We spoke to two experts with opposing views, and asked them to convince us.



'Our wildlife is becoming livestock.'

BEV PERVAN

IS AN AUTHOR AND COFOUNDER OF REGISTERED WILDLIFE CHARITY, CAMPAIGN AGAINST CANNED HUNTING (CACH).

When Melissa Bachman posted a picture of herself on the internet, she unleashed a storm of anger worldwide. There she sat, grinning behind the dead body of a majestic lion that she had just shot in one of South Africa's notorious canned lion hunts.

They call it 'sustainable use', but we can see that it is sustained abuse. Fuelled by wealth, the hunting fraternity relentlessly pulls the wool over our eyes with a stream of slick public relations moves designed to whitewash the evils of hunting. This is an industry that is built upon routine cruelty as a business model.

It was the hunters – not the poachers – who wiped out lions in the wild. Then the killers turned to captive breeding in order to produce a constant supply of tame, living targets. Now, lion hunts here happen in fenced camps, from where there is no escape. Even Professor Pieter Potgieter of the SA Predator Association agrees that all lion hunts in SA are canned hunts – we have it on camera.

Canned hunting is defined by us as 'any hunt where the target animal is unfairly prevented from escaping the hunter, either by physical constraints (fencing) or by mental constraints (hand-reared, habituated to humans)'. All lion hunting occurs in fenced camps of varying sizes, so in our view all local lion hunting can accurately be described as 'canned'.

Lions are not the only victims of the hunting industry. In South Africa, many animal species – including exotics like tigers – are captive-bred for hunting. To deflect public anger, hunters make extravagant claims and

argue that the captive breeders are boosting numbers of wild animals, so they must be conservationists. But to be a conservationist you must preserve. Killing is not preserving, so they are not conservationists – they are trophy collectors.

Once lions are removed from their natural environment and placed into camps to breed living targets, they lose their 'wildness'. They become alternative livestock, farmed for body parts. Some will claim that 'fair chase' makes hunting ethical. But there is little or no fair chase when animals are hunted in fenced camps, using trackers, radio communications, high-powered rifles or telescopic sights. The kill is guaranteed.

Hunters even claim that hunting raises valuable funds towards conservation, helping to ensure endangered animals' survival. But the money generated from hunting goes into the hunting industry, to purchasing more farms and animals.

A number of lions are speed-bred to be kept in cages and camps until they can be killed. This is factory farming lions as if they were battery

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hens. It's the same at 'game' reserves. Purchasing a batch of selected huntable species at a game auction so that they can be shot and then replaced by more living targets has nothing to do with conservation. Those animals are not evolving against each other as they would in nature.

What are the fundraising alternatives for conservation? Eco-tourism is a far better use of wilderness areas than hunting. If South Africa's pseudo-conservation continues as it is, I believe our wildlife is doomed.

For more on Bev Pervan and CACH, visit www.cannedlion.org.

PHOTOGRAPHS: SUPPLIED



PETER FLACK

IS A HUNTER, WRITER, TRUSTEE OF WWF SOUTHERN AFRICA, AS WELL AS A FORMER GAME RANCH OWNER.

'Hunting has been proven to conserve our wildlife.'

My thoughts on Melissa Bachman? Not much, to be blunt. I understand that Ms Bachman shot a captive-bred lion released into an enclosure not long before her arrival. This may be legal but it is no more hunting than flying to the moon. Hunting at its core is about 'fair chase' – the pursuit of a wild animal in its natural environment (a space that is of sufficient size that it can feed itself, procreate and escape its predators). Shooting an animal (bred solely to be killed) in a paddock, does not comply with this definition. Ms Bachman is not a hunter.

Why hunt? Archaeologists estimate that humans have been around in their present form for about 200 000 years. Agriculture was invented only 10 000 years ago. In other words, men have been providing for their families from wildlife for 95 percent of the time we have been on earth.

While there are many reasons why hunting is important, the bottom line is that, for people like me, hunting satisfies something deep inside us. It is embedded in our culture. To call it 'enjoyable' is to belittle hunting and reduce it to the level of a hobby or sport. It is not. It is a passion, a way of life. There is no 'enjoyment' in killing. Only a psychopath would say such a thing.

Hunting is about everything that takes place up until the trigger is squeezed. The satisfaction in outwitting a clever animal; the despondency after a muffed stalk or shot; the wonder at the beauty of an old bull in the last year of his life; the deep sadness at his death; and your every sense at its peak when you are close to dangerous game on foot...

In her book, *Wilding the Farm or Farming the Wild*, Professor Jane Carruthers of UNISA quotes a survey done in 1964 in SA, which showed there were a mere 557 000 game animals left. The blue buck and the quagga were extinct and four other species – the black wildebeest, bontebok, Cape mountain zebra and white rhinoceros – were close behind.

In 2005 the same survey showed there were now some 18,6 million game animals, and none of these four species was endangered; those that had been hunted most assiduously, black wildebeest and white rhino, had recovered best. The main reason for the recovery was the increase in hunting here when the 1977 hunting ban in Kenya and the bans in Tanzania and Uganda forced hunters south. Soon farmers here were being paid more for a kudu than a cow and, from three game ranches in the 1970s, the number grew to about 10 000 today, and private game land rose to 21 million hectares. Hence the somewhat crass truism that, when it comes to wildlife, if it pays, it stays.

I believe it is vital for our wellbeing to keep wildlife habitats and wildlife with us, and the only thing that has proven to do this in Africa has been hunting.

The money spent on daily hunting rates and trophy fees goes directly to the game rancher, but it is this money that has encouraged ranchers to change from livestock to wildlife.

For more information about Peter Flack, visit www.peterflack.co.za.

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