

# Hunting Facts versus Animal Rights Fiction

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I carefully read Mr. Michler's Opinionista piece entitled, "[Like the fossil fuel industry, trophy hunting is unsustainable](#)". Like almost all his writings on this important topic, it is all but devoid of relevant facts and, more importantly, a practical, tried and tested, successful alternative to fair chase hunting as a key conservation tool.

It is full of his usual half-truths, emotion, snide innuendo and plain nastiness. These tired views of his have been debunked by Dr. John Hanks, a previous CEO of WWF-Southern Africa and the Peace Parks Foundation as well as Dr. John Ledger, a previous CEO of the Endangered Wildlife Trust but it does not prevent him repeating them ad nauseam.



Let me nail my colours to the mast. I am passionate about wildlife and wildlife habitats. I support whatever conserves them and oppose whatever does not. I have spent the better part of my 70 year old life and not insignificant amounts of my own money, trying to do just that. While I used to be a hunter and, for 20 years, was a commercial game ranch owner, I no longer hunt for a variety of reasons, which need not detain us now.

Allow me to provide a few empirically determined, scientifically established facts, which give the lie to Mr. Michler's piece:

1. In 1964 a game survey was conducted in South Africa, as referred to in the book, *Wilding the Farm or Farming the Wild* by Professor Jane Carruthers. The survey found that a mere 557 000 head of game was left in the country. When the survey was repeated in 2005, this number had grown to 18,7 million. How? Why? The answer is hunting as I will explain.
2. By the 1960s, the blue buck and quagga were already extinct and four other species were following hot on their heels, namely, black wildebeest, bontebok, Cape mountain zebra and white rhinoceros. None of these species amounted to more than 50 in number. Today, all have recovered and those that have been hunted most assiduously have recovered best. How have these species recovered and why? The answer again is hunting.
3. In the 1960s there were three game ranches in South Africa. Today, there are over 9 000 providing some 21 million hectares of wildlife habitat for wildlife – whether these are huntable species or not, including birds, insects, rodents, reptiles and small predators – amounting to more than three times all the land covered by national parks and provincial reserves put together and it has not cost the government a single cent to establish, manage or maintain. How did this happen and

why? Again, the answer is hunting.

4. When hunting was banned in Kenya in 1977 and temporarily closed in Uganda and Tanzania a little later, the demand moved south and, suddenly, the game which farmers had previously eradicated because it competed with their domestic livestock for food and water and was thought to spread disease, became more valuable than their sheep, goats and cattle given the money paid by hunters to hunt them. These selfsame farmers began to set aside land for wildlife because it generated a better income than their traditional farming and so began the quiet South African conservation revolution, which spread across the country to the benefit of all – people, wildlife habitat, wildlife and food security.



5. Conversely, in Kenya the reverse took place. In a report published in late 2016 by seven Kenyan scientists, they stated that since hunting was abolished there in 1977: “Here, we report extreme declines in wildlife and contemporaneous increase in livestock numbers in Kenya rangelands between 1977 and 2016. Our analysis uses systematic aerial monitoring survey data collected in

rangelands that collectively cover 88% of Kenya's land surface. Our results show that wildlife numbers declined on average by 68% between 1977 and 2016. The magnitude of decline varied among species but was most extreme (72±88%) and now severely threatens the population viability and persistence of warthog, lesser kudu, Thomson's gazelle, eland, oryx, topi, hartebeest, impala, Grevy's zebra and waterbuck in Kenya's rangelands. The declines were widespread and occurred in most of the 21 rangeland counties. Likewise to wildlife, cattle numbers decreased (25.2%) but numbers of sheep and goats (76.3%), camels (13.1%) and donkeys (6.7%) evidently increased in the same period. As a result, livestock biomass was 8.1 times greater than that of wildlife in 2011±2013 compared to 3.5 times in 1977±1980.

6. According to these scientists, the solution was; "We suggest ... restoring rangeland health, most notably through strengthening and investing in community and private wildlife conservancies (in other words, game ranches and hunting)\* in the rangelands. \*The writer's parentheses
7. The latest statistics published by the Department of the Environment late last year showed that 6 539 overseas hunters visited the country in 2016 and spent R1,27 billion on daily rates and trophy fees or an average of R215 000 per hunter. This amounts to over R140 000 per game ranch and does not include additional amounts spent on things such as air fares, car hire, hotels, gratuities, taxidermy, gifts and sightseeing before and after the hunts, which would probably double the total spend.
8. Free State University calculates that there are some 300 000 domestic hunters, most of whom are meat hunters. They spend, on average, R34 000 each per annum on hunting and hunting related items or another R10,02 billion.

9. According to Wildlife Ranching of South Africa, game ranches provide over 100 000 jobs, which are more plentiful, better paid and more skilled than the domestic livestock jobs they, for the most part, replaced.
10. It is hunters who have, directly and indirectly, funded these conservation and economic gains from which our country has and is benefitting.
11. It is a conservation model that has manifestly worked and is still working. It is tried and tested and the benefits are there for all to see, including the main beneficiaries, the wildlife habitat and wildlife we all care so much about.
12. Despite all the hundreds of millions of dollars raised each year by Mr. Michler and his fellow travellers, the HUSUSes, Petas, IFAWS and the hundreds of other anti-hunting/animal rights organisations who do little or nothing other than divert funds from genuine conservation organisations, why is it that they have not bought one hectare of wildlife habitat, not one animal about to be hunted in Africa, to practice what they preach, to show how this utopia, this fossil free environment will work in practice? Is it because there is no money left after their overseas seagull trips – you know the ones where they swoop in, crap on the heads of the workers and swoop out again immediately afterwards – their worldwide PR and advertising campaigns to raise yet more money, their extended conferences in glamorous destinations and their self-congratulatory, strident, emotional propaganda efforts for their untried and untested programs?
13. In fact, Mr. Michler by his own admission states that he and his fellow travellers have no idea what to do. He writes, “It’s time to search for more effective and sustainable alternatives.” He has been beating this same drum for years and years and years. How much longer does he need to search before he realises the answer is right

before him? And while he is fossicking around raising ever more money for his search while effectively doing nothing more than grand standing and spreading his politically correct propaganda, what are the hands-on conservationists amongst us meant to do? Ban hunting, the foundation on which the only proven, long term conservation successes on this continent have been built? Wait for him to come up with some untried and untested experiment? Really?

14. Admittedly, wildlife habitats and wildlife are under huge threat in Africa as a whole because of, as the Kenyan scientists themselves have identified, population increases, habitat destruction, commercial bushmeat poaching – which the Michlers of this world deliberately and inaccurately conflate with and refer to as hunting – poor government policies, planning and management, as well as climate change. It is only in countries like South Africa and Namibia with their well-developed hunting communities that wildlife and wildlife habitats are flourishing.

1. Two final points to bear in mind; the interior of South Africa consists of the third largest plateau region outside Asia. It is mainly semi-arid and largely unsuited to crops or domestic livestock. It is also neither suited nor attractive to photographic safaris and yet it is where most of South Africa's game ranches and, ipso facto, hunting is conducted.

2. The fastest growing segment of hunters in North America, which has some 13,4 million hunters growing at 3,4% per annum, are young women and urban men in their late twenties and early thirties like Mark Zuckerberg, the Facebook CEO, who want to take responsibility for the protein their families eat.

16. In conclusion, Africa needs more legal, fair chase hunting of wildlife in its natural environments on a

sustainable basis, not less, if the conservation of wildlife habitat and wildlife is to have any chance of success. The proven, long term South African and Namibian conservation successes show beyond a shadow of doubt that this is the case.