

Hunting Statistics 2016

“Human subtlety ... will never devise an invention more beautiful, more simple, or more direct than does Nature, because in her inventions nothing is lacking, and nothing is superfluous” – Leonardo da Vinci (1452 – 1519)



I have come in for a lot of criticism over the years, predominantly from vested interests, for linking the drastic decline in overseas hunters visiting South Africa – from 16 394 in 2008 to 6 539 in 2016 (a drop of 60% in nine years) – to the canned killing epidemic and the intensive breeding, domestication and/or genetic manipulation of wildlife to produce animals with exaggerated horn lengths and unnatural colour variations, which have coincided with this period and done so much damage to hunting and, ipso facto, conservation in this country.

Admittedly, a lot of the criticism can be written off as of

the, "Well, they would say that, wouldn't they?" kind of thing, ala the comments of Mandy Rice Davies when the English politicians involved with the call girl, Christine Keeler, denied any such involvement and I took the nasty remarks by certain canned killers and intensive breeders with the bucket of salt they deserved, although one did resort to violence and shoulder charged me into a wire enclosure at OR Tambo Airport cutting my hand. I was invited to press charges against the buffoon by airport staff but declined as, when you fight with pigs, the pigs enjoy it and all you do is end up dirty.

Other comments were more difficult to understand, including statements by Mr. Stephen Palos, CEO of the Confederation of Hunting Associations of South Africa, an amateur hunting body representing nearly 30 such organisations. Mr. Palos made the following statements back in 2015 and has continued to advocate them in his current position as CEO of this important hunting body. For example:

"I cannot join that man's hypocrisy by simply condemning the breeding of lion to be hunted ..."

Although there is little or no hunting involved in the killing of most of these animals, the vast majority of which are domesticated beasts.

"What I know in my gut, and this experience proves, is that there ALREADY IS INDEED a demand for the hunting of colour variants, which will grow further as prices asked for them drop to meet prices more hunters will pay. Obviously as more of a certain variant are created, their value will drop taking them towards the point that hunting becomes an option. Once quantity/price factors make hunting viable, demand will start to stabilise the falling price. This is already the case with the likes of black or white springbuck. I do not think any investor in these animals thinks otherwise right now, and given the proven business acumen & sheer wealth of many of these investors, I think it's an insult to say that they are falling fowl (sic) of a deliberate Ponzi scheme or even worse, creating one."

And yet this is precisely what has happened. Because there has been little or no hunting demand for these unnatural animals – in fact the reverse as most hunters abhor this cynical practice – the prices for them have dropped like the proverbial stone. So much so that I have been reliably informed of one intensive breeder with a herd of some hundred ‘golden wildebeest’ who offered them free of charge to a well known professional hunter with a request that any profit the PH made from them be shared with the breeder. In another case I am aware of, black impala, previously sold for million of rands per animal, are now being offered for R5 000.00 (\$420.00) each. If this is not the same as happened when the tulip bubble burst in the Netherlands, then I do not know what is.

“Breeding or managing animals to enhance trophy size is now commonplace. Selective stud animals, feed hoped to contain essential elements for horn growth and now even devices placed over juvenile animal’s horns to protect them from wear! For the answer to this I must call on the Serenity Prayer which says:

God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, The courage to change the things I can, And the wisdom to know the difference.

There is no doubt that this practice will not be changed. It is here to stay. There are simply too many ranchers, too many ranches and too many animals for this to be police-able. To argue it would generate only heat, not light. But there may be consequences, and actions to take. The biggest tragedy of this practice is that it renders hundreds of years of history irrelevant as the record books stand to be inundated with new fantastic animals bred exactly for the purpose of making the book.”

No, the biggest tragedy is that more and more of the thousands of overseas hunters who, in 2016, paid on average R215 000

each for daily rates and trophy fees alone, will decided to hunt elsewhere and predominantly in our Namibian neighbour. If you take the average loss of overseas hunters over this period since 2008 at 7 000 per annum, a very conservative figure, then the losses to this country over the nine years since 2008 amounts to R13,5 billion in 2016 rands and, if you add to this monies also spent on airfares, accommodation, car hire, taxidermy, gratuities, gifts, tourist travel both before and after the hunt and so on, you can probably double this figure. Simply put, the country cannot afford to lose this massive amount of foreign exchange in order to satisfy the whims of a few selfish and cynical businessmen who do not give a damn about hunting or conservation but only their bank balances.

Talking about criticism of these practices, he said, "To my mind these attacks by hunters on hunters or other sections of the wildlife industry do far more harm by lambasting each other in our own hunting media, exposing huge discord and disconnect between ourselves, than what harm stems from any of the actual specific practices themselves".

How disingenuous can you be? How out of touch with the reality of the damage done and being done to hunting and conservation must you be to equate criticism with the catastrophic results of canned killing and intensive breeding! How many overseas hunters must this country be reduced to before the damage done by these practices is seen as more serious than the mere criticism of it?



While I agree that washing dirty linen in public should not be a first choice, there is no alternative when hunting and the conservation on which it depends is being destroyed, along with the livelihoods and jobs of those in game ranching and the secondary businesses which depend on it in the predominantly rural areas where these occur. Especially if there is no benefit to conservation, wildlife and wildlife habitats from these disgusting practices. Especially if those that have benefit from these ugly businesses are so few and benefit no-one and nothing other than themselves.

I have just received the South African hunting statistics for the 2016 calendar year provided by the Department of Environmental Affairs (DEA). As any businessman worth his salt will tell you, it is better to have information that is 90% correct soon, than information which is 100% correct too late. Not that I am saying the information provided by government in this connection is 100% correct. I have no way of knowing but I can certainly say that information provided nearly a year after 2016 has ended is history and not useful information.

The most important facts indicated by the belated statistics are the following:

1. The continued deterioration in numbers of overseas hunters visiting South African. In 2016 these numbers fell from 7 633 to 6539, a further drop of 1 094 hunters or 14%, from those in 2015.
2. Although revenue increased by 11%, I think this can largely be ascribed to the drop in the rand against the US dollar brought about by the disastrous machinations of Zuma and his government.
3. In round figures, revenue derived from daily rates and trophy fees paid by these hunters amounted to R1,4 billion in 2016 versus R1,27 billion in 2015. The real reason behind the increase is the spend per hunter, which increased by a whopping 29%, from roughly R166 000 to R215 000 per hunting trip. Personally, I find this

increase hard to credit but that is what the statistics show.

4. On the other hand, these hunters shot slightly fewer animals – 27 241 as opposed to 27 298 the year before and, looking at the breakdown of the top ten animals by number, there were no surprises with impala, warthog and kudu leading the list.
5. Limpopo Province earned the most, namely, R600 million – up from R480 million a year previously – or 25%.
6. North West Province, the kings of canned lion killing, earned R90 million from the 291 lions shot there at an average price of US\$21 200. Having said that, there has been a dramatic reduction in the number of canned lions killed from 622 in 2015 to 355 in 2016 – a fall of 43% – although the drop in revenue has not been as severe as these figures might imply and overall earnings from this disgusting activity fell a mere R12 million from R122 million to R110 million in round numbers. If you know anyone who claims to have shot a free range lion from this region, in all likelihood he/she has participated knowingly in a canned killing and, if they have, they should be held to account for their anti-hunting conduct by the hunting bodies to which they belong.
7. Interestingly, at the same time as canned lion killings dropped, so too did the number of American hunters visiting South Africa in 2016. Numbers fell by 15% to a still significant 3079 in number, although it is the lowest number in ten years. Even so, North American hunters made up 61% of the total of overseas hunters with European hunters a distant second at 32%.

What with both Dallas Safari Club and SCI both coming out this year with statements condemning the canned lion and captive bred lion killing sickness, you can only hope that this activity will go the same way as the intensive breeding of unnatural colour variants – wither on the vine and disappear.

There is much anecdotal evidence to support the negative effects of canned killing and intensive breeding and the concomitant loss of overseas hunters. A game rancher wrote to me recently about the large drop in the prices offered for the purchase of live game this year. An outfitter called me this morning to tell me of a successful game ranching friend in the Dundee area who specializes in kudu hunts and who is battling to sell them because he has been undercut by recently discounted hunts for these game animals in Limpopo Province. I spoke to a second major outfitter who told me of a client who warned him that, if he shot an animal with a tag in its ear, he would never hunt with him again. And of another client who was going to bring a friend on a hunt but the friend declined because he did not want to go "on an old man's hunt" because he assumed South African hunts were essentially for domesticated animals in a small paddocks, which guaranteed the end result. A highly experienced, well regarded South African outfitter and PH, who has recently returned from the annual hunting conventions in the USA, said it had become all but impossible to sell South African hunts.

Probably the biggest negative flowing from these developments, apart from the job losses in rural areas, is the fate of the new black game ranchers who will now find it difficult, if not impossible, to make a go of things in the current climate. To compound this problem is the demise of the independent professional hunter who, in the past, could have been relied upon to partner black game ranchers to help them market their operations both locally and abroad and the absence of whom further exacerbates an already dire situation.

I was also called recently by a well known and popular taxidermist to compliment me on predicting the current hunting trends, the effects of which he can see first hand in his business. He asked whether there was anything that could be done to reverse the current situation as he was aware of a number of game ranches reverting to domestic livestock, as

evidenced by the large amounts of game meat on the market – shot to make way for the re-introduction of cattle.

This, of course, raises a further issue. How much cheap and healthy protein is being lost? Using the average loss of 7 000 overseas hunters per year since 2008, and assuming each hunter shot a conservative five animals per trip providing 30 kgs of meat per animal, this equates to a loss of 1 050 000 kgs of meat per annum. What will need to be done to replace it, especially from those game ranches in the arid or semi-arid regions which cannot be used to raise domestic livestock? How much land will need to be set aside to make up for the loss of this kind of healthy protein?

Let me say at the outset that it gives me no pleasure whatsoever to have predicted – along with a number of others – the consequences of canned lion killing and intensive breeding for South Africa. The answer to the taxidermist's question, however, is that of course the dreadful current trend can be reversed. It will take the same things that gave rise to the hugely successful, quiet South African conservation revolution in the first place, which began some 60 years ago. In other words, a partnership between government, the private sector and amateur and professional hunting bodies. There is also the highly successful Namibian example to follow where government, hunting bodies (both amateur and professional) and game ranchers have combined both to protect hunting from canned killing practices and intensive breeding, on the one hand, and to actively promote hunting, locally and internationally, on the other hand.

But much more needs to be done and, although the Namibian model provides guidance, South Africa needs to embark on its own well thought out, three year, program, coupled with a public relations strategy, to re-introduce the romance of African safaris into South Africa, coupled with the rating of game ranches and professional hunters according to the standard of fair chase hunting offered by them. I believe we

also need to move away from luxury, bushveld, glass and chrome mini-palaces filled with contemporary art and return to good, old fashioned, South African hospitality in our farm/ranch houses, to tented camps, bucket showers, dinner in the boma and coffee around the camp fire. We need to go back to our roots, to the things that made South Africa the hunting destination of choice on the African continent, that provided opportunities for all for over 60 years and which funded the wonderfully successful conservation revolution which swept the country.

In these days of political renewal and hope in South Africa, is it too much to hope that hunting and conservation will also have their Augean stables washed clean even if the President has also indulged in intensive breeding?

