

# Opposition to Fair Chase

We received a response from Peter Gouws to our recent post – [Custodians of Professional Hunting and Conservation](#). See his comment and my reply below.

## FROM PETER GOUWS

I had the privilege to hunt all over Africa in its wildest form. Nobody still alive can say that about India. Yet India offered splendid hunting up until the early sixties. What happened then? Well, there was no wildlife breeding programs/game ranches like we have in Africa today. Game simply just disappeared in India and with it went one of the greatest hunting destinations of the planet. Also the Asiatic Lion disappeared. Of course the face of hunting have changed in Africa and hunting takes place on smaller areas that are fenced but at least we have plenty wild animals to pursue. How we wish to pursue them is still our choice. We can pursue them on foot or by car or a mix of the two. We can hunt them with bow and arrow or with a rifle fitted with telescopic sights. We can stay in tents or in more luxurious accommodation. It is our choice. ALL wild animals available in South Africa are bred for consumption and how we pursue them to eventually consume them is our choice. We hang horns on our walls and put skins on our floors to show off the success of our hunt and to be reminded of the pleasure to pursue them. The kings of ancient times also hunted animals that was captured and then released to be hunted by them on horseback, chariot or on foot with or without dogs and with a great array of weapons. We cannot deny that hunting is a blood-sport and the thrill lies in the killing of the beast, the pride in the trophy, the preparation of the meat, the creation of more efficient weaponry and mostly the admiration of the resistance the quarry offered by hiding, running, flying, climbing or fighting. All this comes in different ways for different people. To label some as cruel and others as fainthearted or

some as good hunters and others as bad hunters is a dangerous path to tread on. To elevate yourself to the level of a custodian of fair chase and ethical hunting is in itself a daring move. Who, if I may ask, are the people that determine the ethics of hunting and where does this fantasy of a "fair" chase come from. What is fair? Compared to what is this fairness determined? We can dwell on concrete examples of what we perceive as fair but that is entering in a never ending realm of the word "but". This brings me to captive bred lion hunting. Is this not the only way to ensure the continued existence of these magnificent warriors in a world where nobody really cares for their existence except the ones who want to do battle with them. There would be no use for racehorses if horse racing was banned since racehorses are too expensive to breed if they are not raced. Let us rather focus on the conditions of breeding and the way captive bred lion or leopard hunting is conducted. If we condemn it "per se" we are nothing else but self appointed hypocritical custodians that sometimes don't think before we criticize. I have indiscriminately hunted more than 50 lions never giving a thought for pride dynamics and implications of shooting the pride male. In our days there were many lions and we did not care. The same goes for many of us old hunters but now that I have learned the impact of indiscriminate wild lion hunting I can only say, that, as for Impala, Kudu, Roan and Sable the hunting of Lion can only be sustainable if they are bred like the others. I have absolutely nothing to do with captive lion breeding but cannot help to read in all the hunting magazines about the outcry against it from the "more ethical" group of hunters. This has led me to answer to Mr Flack's opinion on the new custodians of hunting. If ethical hunting is something you determine yourself then there are millions of different ethics out there and each person's ethics binds only him. Let me ask Mr Flack the following. Is game breeding an ethical activity if the purpose is to kill the animal for sport. Simple yes or no. I rest my case. Let us concentrate on good breeding conditions for these magnificent warrior so that we

can be assured that our grand children can do battle with them and experience that blood chilling growl when he had enough and comes fast and low through the red grass.

Just to add on the "custodian issue" This morning as I woke up I was lying thinking about it again. What a noble sounding name. The "custodians" of hunting. Who are these custodians and what qualifies a person to be elected to join this club. Is there a sort of screening process to determine if you are worthy to join. Is it about money, prestige, or simply to be different. Would Frederick Selous, Bell, Jungleman Pretorius, Bvekenya Barnard, Gordon Cummings and other great hunters have qualified? Well sirs these characters would not have qualified if ethics was the measure stick. So who the hell is going to qualify? Who would have dared to tell king Nebuchadnezzar that he was not a ethical hunter when he pursued lion and leopard with a band of beaters and chariots and eventually subdued his quarry with arrows and spears. Even the great Nimrud himself did not hunt in the realm of modern day "ethics". We will never convince the anti hunting fraternity with any argument about ethical killing. Let us rather find a way of breeding more animals and place simple breeding rules and hunting conditions in place. If we as hunters take one step back and condemn captive bred lion hunting we will never be able to justify any captive bred hunting of any animal for that matter. How? As a experienced and privileged hunter who could enjoy "free" hunting I also must guard myself not to sneer on young hunters of today posing with their trophies taken on small plots with high powered rifles, rangefinders, and shiny Landcruisers. But then I always remind myself of the word "nostalgia" and quickly change my mind and force myself to be positive about these young hunters and their quest to pursue their quarry on their terms. Whether it is with a Wesley Richards with iron sights or with a Howa with plastic stock.. who the hell am I to tell him that my way was the right and only way and his way is wrong. In the end we both killed the beast and enjoyed the chase. I once shot a magnificent eland

bull with a German client after chasing it at high speed with a open Landcruiser until about 20 meter then slammed brakes to give him a shot!! How ethical was that? Yet we talked for days about that chase and those 44 inch horns!! Was it more ethical because it was in south east Angola in the wide open jungle and the Landcruiser was a old FJ series and the rifle a Rigby 350? Come on you "custodians" who want to separate yourselves from us mere mortals. Take an oath not ever to break your own ethics and then see how long it last in the bush when the chase is on and the Adrenalin flows. If the leopard comes to the bait 1 minute after sunset but it is still light. Do you leave it or do you take it? What does your ethics tell you? Or do you take it in Zim where it is allowed but not in Zam where it is not allowed. Is it your ethics that decide your actions or the laws that decide your ethics? Free lion hunting is fading fast with all the CITES rules. Captive animal ( lion included ) breeding and hunting is the only way foreword. Let's just leave this custodian crap and be hunters.

## **MY RESPONSE**

Dear Mr. Gouws,

Thank you for your lengthy email. You have obviously given this matter considerable thought and taken substantial time and effort to reduce your thoughts to writing. As such, I feel you deserve a considered reply. Unfortunately, in order to do so, I am going to disagree with you fundamentally in a number of areas. In this regard, let me begin by saying that I found a lot of what you wrote both confusing and confused but I will do my best to address at least the major points raised. To the extent I do not deal with every point you make, however, this should not be construed as meaning I agree with that point. In fact, there is little if anything which you have written with which I agree.

Let me make the following points:

1. While I have applied to join the Custodians of Professional Hunting and Conservation – South Africa (CPHC), as yet I am not a member and play no role, directly or indirectly, in the organisation. Like me, anyone can apply to join provided they complete the application form and agree to abide by the rules and regulations of the body as amended from time to time. I have forwarded your email to them and they may decide to reply to you directly.
2. Fair chase hunting rules of one kind or another have been in existence for many years and those adopted by the Fair Chase Guild (before it was expelled from SA Hunters because they said everyone in SA Hunters was a fair chase hunter and therefore there was no need for something like the Guild), were essentially those drafted by the late Robin Halse and Chappy Sparks many years ago and which formed the basis of the rules governing the Rowland Ward Guild of Field Sportsmen. If I were to guess, I would say they were drafted over 30 years ago and, in my humble opinion, have stood the test of time.
3. Hunting ethics, like morality, change over time and what might have been acceptable hunting ethics in the time of Nebuchadnezzar is highly unlikely to be acceptable today. Consider the ancient code of an-eye-for-an-eye “justice” from the time of Hammurabi and how it has been replaced by legislation, regulation, police, prosecution and prisons.
4. No-one, however, let alone the drafters of these fair chase rules insists that anybody has to abide by them but merely that, if you want to belong to CPHC, then you must.
5. Let me now deal with some specific points you raise, namely:
  1. You state that **“ALL wild animals available in South Africa are bred for consumption ...”** Clearly that is nonsense. There is a substantial body of

game ranchers who set aside land for wildlife habitat and wildlife for no reason other than that they are passionate about both. For example, a number of animals introduced to my own game ranch, such as caracal, African wildcat and Cape mountain zebra, to name but three, were allowed to breed and never hunted. In fact, it was game ranchers like these who began the quiet conservation revolution in the 1960s which swept across the country, caused the huge resurgence in game numbers from about 557 000 to over 18,5 million forty years later and built this country's proud conservation reputation, which has been so sullied by the canned and put-and-take killings and intensive breeding, domestication and manipulation of wildlife to produce animals with exaggerated horn lengths and unnatural colour variations.

2. You write, **"We cannot deny that hunting is a bloodsport and the thrill lies in the killing of the beast ..."** Well, you may not be able to deny this but I and many others can and do, including the great Spanish professor of philosophy, Ortega y Gasset, who coined the famous phrase, "Hunters do not hunt to kill but kill to have hunted." But then I must admit I have never chased an eland in a vehicle in order to kill it like you have. In addition, in my humble opinion, whatever that is – shooting, culling, killing – it has absolutely nothing to do with hunting.
3. You ask, **"Who, if I may ask are the people that determine the ethics of hunting and where does this fantasy of a fair chase come from."** Well, I believe that ethics, like beauty, is in the eye of the beholder and, when it comes to hunting, it is how you behave on a hunt when you are on your own and no-one can see what you do or do not do is what determines your ethics. You clearly have your

own ways of behaving when hunting and, fortunately or unfortunately, they are completely different to mine. So, the answer is that each of us determines his own hunting ethics, just like we establish our own morality in life; what we believe is acceptable behaviour and what is not.

In the case of CPHC, a number of likeminded people have banded together to form an association and I am at a loss to understand why this has ruffled your feathers so badly. You do not have to join. In fact, I would hazard a guess that, given what you have written to me, you would not be welcome.

Considering that the number of overseas hunters visiting South Africa has dropped from 16 394 in 2008 to 6 534 in 2016, while the number of overseas hunters visiting Namibia during the same period has climbed from 6 300 to over 23 000, it is safe to assume that hunters have stayed away because they do not like the way hunting has been conducted by a number of people in this country and do not want to be tainted by or inveigled into this type of conduct, by the canned killings, put-and-take killings and the intensive breeding, domestication and manipulation of wildlife to produce exaggerated horn lengths and unnatural colour variants.

So, if I am correct, then if hunting in South Africa were to follow your proposals, I would anticipate that this trend of overseas hunters avoiding South Africa would continue. The result will be the closure of more game ranches, the reversion to crops and domestic livestock, the loss of thousands of jobs because game ranches employ more people per hectare than these alternative forms of land use, to name but a few of the disastrous consequences of your advice.

4. You ask the question, **“Is game breeding an ethical**

**activity if the purpose is to kill the animal for sport”** and demand a simple yes or no answer. I will not be dictated to you by how I answer this question because the correct answer is, “It depends”. If the animal is subsequently hunted by fair chase rules, then the answer is, no, it is not unethical but the converse also applies.

5. You ask the question, **“Who are these custodians and what qualifies a person to be elected to join this club.”** Well, I have answered this question in Paragraph 1 above. I do however detect the same concerns raised by you as were voiced by a number of supposedly fair chase hunters in SA Hunters. Their concern was that, if they joined the Fair Chase Guild their hunting companions might “out” them given their past unethical hunting conduct. On the other hand, if they did not join, people would say that they failed to do so because they were unethical hunters. In other words, damned if they did and damned if they didn’t and that was the underlying reason why some of these people banded together to have the Fair Chase Guild expelled from SA Hunters.
6. I agree with you that hunting ethics will not convince the anti-hunting or animal rights brigade to approve of hunting but that is not the object of the exercise. I believe the formation of CPHC is, firstly, to provide a home for a number of likeminded hunters and, secondly, amongst other reasons, to persuade other hunters who may not hunt according to these rules that there is much satisfaction to be gained in hunting this way. In so doing, one of the side effects may be to persuade those undecided about hunting that, if it is practiced in this manner, it is something they may enjoy or at least allow others to freely enjoy.
7. You state that, **“Come on you “custodians” who want to separate yourselves from us mere mortals. Take an oath**

**not ever to break your own ethics and then see how long it last in the bush when the chase is on and the Adrenalin flows.”** Firstly, those of us who agree to abide by fair chase hunting rules do not want to separate ourselves from anyone. CPHC is not an elitist organisation. I say again, anyone can join. Secondly, it is precisely in a situation such as you sketch that it will be important to stick by the fair chase rules. After all, principles are unimportant unless they cost you something. Lastly, while one of the fair chase rules demands obedience to the laws of a country, such laws are not the determining factor of what constitutes fair chase. These ethical rules are there whether the law provides for a particular course of conduct or not.

8. Lastly, you say, **“Captive animal (lion included) breeding and hunting is the only way forward. Let’s just leave this custodian crap and be hunters.”** It is clear Mr. Gouws that you and I can at best agree to differ. In my humble opinion, your route contains within it the seeds of its own destruction. Fewer overseas hunters, fewer game ranches, less wildlife habitat, less wildlife, fewer outfitters, fewer professional hunters and what is left of South Africa’s reputation as a conservation orientated country destroyed. We are already far down this path and, if left to people like you who appear to be living in the dim and distant past, the end will be certain and that much quicker.

I have said this many times – my passion is wildlife habitat and wildlife. I support whatever conserves them and oppose whatever does not. You, Mr. Gouws, do not!