

THE ETHICS OF HUNTING IN PRIVATE NATURE RESERVES ADJACENT TO THE KNP

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1. INTRODUCTION

- The Kruger National Park is used internationally as an example of one of the most important national parks in the world. It is obviously important for conservation purposes but it is also extremely important for purposes of scientific research. It goes without saying that the animals in such a splendid national institution belong to the people of South Africa. It goes without saying that hunting those animals for sport would be so morally offensive that no right thinking person would even propose a debate on hunting the animals of the Kruger National Park.
- A number of years ago the Kruger National Park entered into an agreement with farmers adjacent to the Kruger Park to drop the fences. This had the effect of expanding the area of the Kruger National Park and allowing the animals some free movement.
- The ultimate beneficiaries of the dropping of the fences, should be the animals of the Kruger National Park. In exchange, the owners of the areas adjacent to the Kruger obtained the singular benefit of hosting Kruger animals on their private properties for their own private viewing enjoyment.
- Unfortunately, the benefit to the animals that was generated by the dropping of the fences, is now a moral and ethical controversy, because the owners of the properties to which the animals migrate, have found a way to justify killing the animals for their own pleasure and profit.
- The rules of law under which they operate are founded on the concept of land ownership bringing with it ownership of wild animals on the surface of the land, just as it brought ownership of the minerals below the surface. But, modern thinking has developed. It has, for example, been recognised that minerals are a national resource that ought not to belong to the surface owner to exploit but should vest in the state. The old law that the owner of the surface of land can do with wild animals found upon it whatever he or she wishes, including killing them for his or her own pleasure and sport, must be reconsidered.

- This presentation is not about statistics, the number of animals or ecological concerns. It focuses solely on the morality and ethics of private reserves, adjacent to the Kruger National Park, where South Africa's precious heritage is killed.
- We are also not concerned with what hunters themselves believe would be right and wrong in given circumstances. Hunters have adopted for their own use the term "ethical" and they distinguish between ethical hunters and unethical hunters, damning to the second category those who participate in canned hunting.
- Our approach is completely different. We do not care what hunters themselves think may be good and bad hunting practices. We take issue, on a moral and ethical basis, with hunting as a phenomenon.
- The ultimate aim of this presentation is to make the moral argument against hunting in general and against hunting in the areas where the fences have been dropped adjacent to the Kruger National Park in particular. Whilst hunting is per definition in our book immoral, the hunting by private individuals of animals who form part of the national treasure, is particularly immoral.
- An industry that is based on immoral and unethical practices, can never form the basis of any job creation. Hunting is such an industry.

2. A DEFINITION OF ETHICS AND MORALITY

- Morality, it is generally accepted, has to do with the distinction between good and bad. Morality operates on the individual level and every individual, being a moral being, is compelled to make moral decisions throughout his or her life. Morality as a concept makes it possible to express a view about the conduct of another person and labelling such conduct moral or immoral.
- Morality has to do with the individual choices that people make, with what is good and bad, and not with what is legal and illegal.
- Ethics is society's conception of what is generally right and wrong, elevating the particular norm into a general norm. Ethics concerns the general consensus of society on what is right and wrong in a specific context. Ethics concerns the sum view of society in general and not the views of a sub-class of society.
- Just as society does not take note of the ethics of for example, those who participate in state capture (apparently they opened each meeting to discuss bribes with a

prayer), society also will not and should not take note of the ethics made up by such sub-sets, such as hunters.

- The making of a set of rules by people who are in agreement, and who make the rules for themselves – in this case trophy hunters - has nothing to do with ethics. The concept of 'ethical conduct' has been usurped by the hunters who distinguish between ethical and unethical hunting, whilst all they really do, is to describe what is acceptable and unacceptable to THEM, as hunters.
- It is immaterial whether some hunters call themselves ethical hunters and condemn practices of other hunters. We must establish whether hunting, as a sport, for the purpose of gathering trophies to hang on walls, is ethical or not, and then especially in the areas adjacent to the Kruger National Park where the fences have been dropped.

3. TROPHY HUNTING / SPORT HUNTING AND MORALITY

- The moral case for sport hunting explains that it is not that immoral to hunt for sport because sentient animals are being slaughtered for food on a daily basis around the globe and it can hardly be said that this industrial scale slaughtering is immoral.
- It is true that millions of animals are killed in factories around the globe every day. Ban Animal Trading, despises and opposes the factory farming of animals. But, that is not what is presently at issue.
- As far as society is concerned, there is a major difference between factory farming and sport hunting on the moral plane. Society, and not Ban Animal Trading, justifies factory farming as a necessary evil. Most right-thinking people do not enjoy and relish in the practices of factory farming, but are repulsed by these practices.
- Hunting for sport is never necessary. The sport hunter enjoys the act of killing. Society places the trophy hunter in a different category than the mother who buys chicken drumsticks at the supermarket to feed her family. Society judges the person who kills for his or her own pleasure, for personal profit, harshly and judges such individuals as perverse.
- Sport hunting is always morally reprehensible and "justifying animal killings for the sake of "entertainment" is untenable," and bonding with nature through lethal means, is an indefensible form of 'recreation' and 'leisure'.

- Trophy hunters use religion as another major defence of their killing of animals for profit and pleasure. They believe that hunting is simply performing God's will. God would not have made it possible for human beings to develop all the methods for hunting and killing animals, if God was not in favour of hunting.
- What a perverse argument. People might have needed to hunt in pre-industrial times for purposes of survival, but those days are gone. To justify hunting on the basis of an inborn impulse is as unjustifiable as using child brides.
- Morality evolves. Society today cannot and should not decide what is morally right and wrong on the basis of ancient practices.

4. THE ARGUMENT AGAINST TROPHY HUNTING / SPORT HUNTING

- Killing animals is certainly not a sport.
- Sport hunting comes down to a human being armed with some device that gives him or her the ability to kill an animal. These devices, or weapons, transform a somewhat pathetic human, when compared to majestic animals, into a killer. There is no equality of arms in trophy hunting – the arms carried by the human far outweigh the defence mechanisms of animals.
- Society understands the concept of 'sport' as a celebration of the human form. Sport concerns the testing of the human body against different yardsticks, such as, for e.g. running a race over a distance, where one athlete competes against another athlete.
- Sport can also be the competing of humans against each other to see who has the best skills in a particular field of endeavour. Sport is always played on a level playing field and with equality of arms.
- It is this aspect that is completely missing when animals are killed for pleasure and profit.
- Hunting is immoral because it places the human being in a position of power over an unequal and powerless animal.
- It is based on a Stone Age concept of power, and that power always triumphs. If you have power over something or someone else your will is the law and you are right. If you own something, you can do with it – because animals are seen as goods and commodities – as you wish.

- This concept of ownership is fast becoming outdated because of the massive distortions that it creates in society. The days of slavery, apartheid and witch hunts are over. Society has evolved beyond that kind of thinking. Owners cannot destroy their possessions as they see fit. Ownership carries responsibilities and these include the obligation to protect, not destroy, these so-called possession.
- The killing of animals for sport infringes upon their rights as sentient beings. They feel pain. They become tense and anxious. They experience separation from members of their group. The list goes on.
- Human beings are, in the final analysis, simply animals with no more claims to sensory awareness, fear and anxiety than any other animal. The only difference is that the human animal can make decisions about other animals.
- It is in this context that the question applies whether killing animals for pleasure and profit is morally good or bad, and it should be elevated into a system of ethics that must become law.

5. THE SPECIAL CASE OF PRIVATE RESERVES ADJACENT TO THE KRUGER NATIONAL PARK

- It has been said above that the dropping of the fences is a truly remarkable act, that has added vast areas to the habitat in which the Kruger animals can move around more freely.
- We have also said that killing these animals is not only counter-productive but is morally reprehensible, simply because these animals are a national treasure and no-one should have the right to kill a national treasure for his or her own bloodlust and profit.
- The argument goes further than this.
- We are, in South Africa, at present at a crossroads in our thinking about private ownership.
- In the past, those who had the physical might and power to subject others to their will, took what they wanted from the land, as they saw fit and with no compunction as to the wishes of those who previously lived on or adjacent to the land.

- South African national resources landed in the hands of a limited representative sample of our society, who upheld the colonialist ethos that sport hunting is the sacred and exclusive right of the wealthy and the elite, and that the animals of the plains and forests belong to them, to do with as they please.
- Affording a few privileged, mostly white, men and women to hunt animals that form part of the national heritage, for the joy of killing and to display status and power, is particularly pernicious.
- These wrongs must be righted. And this line must be pulled through to the animals that are now on private reserves adjacent to the Kruger National Park.
- These private reserve owners might perhaps, in terms of ancient common law rules, have the right to kill whatever wild animal is on their land. But this does not translate into moral conduct in the 21st century.
- The commendable act, displayed by the authorities – in this case SANParks – which has the mandate to protect the biodiversity of the Kruger National Park, to drop the fences was facilitated by the generosity of the owners of the surrounding private reserves to ‘host’ the Kruger animals.
- All of these commendable acts are negated when the private reserve owner is no longer the altruistic host, but the killer or facilitator of killings of animals who are a South African heritage.
- The moral argument does not depend on statistics. It does not matter how many members of which species are shot and killed on the private reserves around the Kruger National Park. The killing of one animal for profit and pleasure – such as Skye, who was killed illegally in the Umbabat last year - is enough to raise the moral indignation of all right thinking members of society, and trophy hunters are well aware of this.
- It is fundamentally wrong to kill animals – who form part of our national heritage and who, as a matter of fact and law, belong to all of us – for pleasure and profit, and to satisfy some primitive form of bloodlust.
- Hunting, or killing for pleasure and profit, always happens under the guise of conservation and of habitat protection.
- Hunters believe that conservation and habitat protection is only possible when wild animals are killed for pleasure and profit, and that they are the best environmentalists, the selfless heroes of conservation.

- What hunters have done successfully, is to turn conservation, which aims to protect and save animals, into big business.
- “Conservation has become an investment opportunity and is no longer an end in itself.”
- Hunters are not natural predators, and killing the strongest, largest and often rarest members of any animal community for trophies does not contribute to conservation.
- In fact, it puts entire animal families at risk and threatens the overall population of the species, as has been witnessed in the case of Skye, mentioned above - the ‘wrong’ lion who was hunted in the Umbabat last year.
- On the topic of Skye, who is believed to have been lured out of the protected Kruger National Park onto a privately owned nature reserve– how did this specific killing contribute to conservation?

5. SUMMARY

- The dropping of the fences is perhaps one of the most far-sighted acts of the management of the ecology. It adds vast areas to the habitat of the animals of the Kruger National Park and allows them some free movement.
- However, the real problem lies in the fact that these areas are privately owned and the animals are exploited for the exclusive benefit of a wealthy and elitist section of our population.
- They treat the animals as their own and kill them as if they are private property and not the precious heritage of all South Africans.
- Wild animals do not know boundaries created by humans.
- Those who have the means to kill animals, and call it conservation, use the fact that animals cannot distinguish invisible human boundaries to their benefit and privatise South Africa’s national heritage for personal profit and pleasure.
- The wealthy human occupants of most of the private nature reserves fail to understand that the fences were dropped for ecological reasons.
- The private nature reserves, by signing the agreement with the Kruger National Park to create ecological unity, have agreed to give Kruger National Park animals, South Africa’s natural heritage, a right to move freely from the Kruger Park through the private reserves.

- The animals are still Kruger animals, even when they cross the imaginary boundaries created by the private reserves.
- It is illegal to hunt animals in the Kruger National Park.
- Yet a few centimetres in the wrong direction of free movement makes it legal to kill them.
- The fences were not dropped to provide windfalls for private reserve owners to exploit wild animals for profit and pleasure.
- The killing of the animals in the private areas adds another layer to the murky and moral problems of sport hunting and must be deprecated.
- The long-term damage caused by trophy hunting activities outweighs any possible perceived short-term gain and the negative evolutionary effects of trophy hunting on wild populations will deplete populations and will thus threaten the tourism industry.
- Moreover, trophy hunting is incompatible with South Africa's current attempts to enhance its international image as a destination for ecotourism.
- Ecotourism and trophy hunting are mutually exclusive.
- Eco-tourists do not want to go to places where wildlife is killed.
- Trophy hunting will give South Africa a bad name as an ecotourism destination and is thus likely to reduce earnings from ecotourism.
- Brand South Africa has already suffered irreparable damage because of the captive breeding of big cats for their bones.
- We choose to believe that the subsistence hunting of animals for food and clothing thousands of years ago did not turn men into savages with no moral compass.
- How times have changed.
- Traditions have become twisted, and hunting is now mostly the unregulated killing of South Africa's precious heritage, practised in this country by an exclusive racial group that have the financial means to kill for profit and pleasure.
- Trophies, the heads, tusks, horns and other body parts of magnificent wild animals are what we will leave behind for the next generation.

- I conclude with the words of Matthew Scully, author of “Dominion”: “The care of animals brings with it often complicated problems of economics, ecology and science. But above all, it confronts us with a question of conscience. Many of us seem to have lost all sense of restraint towards animals, and understanding of natural boundaries, a respect for them as beings with needs and wants and a place and purpose of their own. We assume that our interests always come first, and if it’s PROFITABLE OR EXPEDIENT that is all we need to know. We assume that we are everything and they are nothing.
- Animals are more than ever a test of our character, of mankind’s capacity for empathy and for decent, honourable conduct and faithful stewardship. We are called to treat them with kindness, not because they have rights of power, or some claim to equality, but in a sense because they don’t: because they all stand unequal and powerless before us.”

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