

THE ETIOLOGY OF HUNTING

The definition of the term 'to hunt' includes: pursuing, tracking, following by any and various means, lying in wait for, chasing with dogs (or with cheetahs; or birds of prey; or small predatory animals - like ferrets) and using a firearm, or a bow-and-arrow, or a cross-bow, snare, or any other kind of trap, to capture or to kill a wild animal. And 'hunting' has a like-meaning.

Trophy hunting, sport hunting and meat hunting are all derived from this same root. And poaching, in its various forms, is nothing more than illegal hunting.

It has been brought to my attention, however, that the general public, world-wide, is greatly confused by all this terminology; and that many people living in the big cities of the world - because they have lost touch with nature; because they are uninformed about the hunting ethos; because they are constantly being misinformed (lied to) by the animal rights brigade; and/or because they simply greatly disapprove of hunting - tend to lump all these hunting categories under one derogatory label - 'poaching'. This consequence, however, reflects the very unsound personal preference opinions of those fanatics whose purpose in life, at any cost, is to abolish the practice of hunting.

This is NOT the way to obtain clarity out of confusion. So, let us define each one of these hunting terms and point out their differences.

1. **Trophy Hunting** is the hunting of an animal for the purpose of obtaining whatever the desired trophy that animal provides. Classically, trophies include record sized - or near record sized - horns; tusks; large body-size; attractive coloured skins; and a host of other prized body parts for which the animal has been killed. A recordable trophy is categorised as anything bigger or better than a particularly defined minimum-size; and such trophies are recorded in official trophy record books by the organisations that host such recordings.
2. Trophy hunters pay a premium price for the privilege of hunting animals with particularly large trophies. Trophy hunters, therefore, produce a much greater income (per animal killed) for the land-owner (or government), than animals which carry trophies that are smaller than the prescribed minimum size. Normally, but not always, the animals with the best trophies are the biggest and the oldest animals in the populations that succoured them.
3. There are said to be, on average, 6 800 true trophy hunters who visit the best of South African hunting destinations every year; and they are prepared to pay premium prices for the premium product - the best of the best trophies available.
4. Critics of the trophy hunting industry (The animal rightist anti-hunters) insist that the animals with the biggest trophies are the biggest and the best breeding males in their respective populations (*sounds logical, doesn't it???*); and that, because of this fact (*it is NOT a 'fact' at all*), trophy hunting MUST damage (*again this sounds logical!*) the quality of the gene pools from which these super-large animals come. This, however, is not always borne out in reality - because many top-of-the-range males are still being collected every year from wild populations all over the world! Sustainable trophy hunting, therefore, does NOT adversely affect gene pools; and this observation applies when trophy hunting is properly regulated. The truth of this

fact - and this *is* a fact - is that most extra-large-sized and older males are no longer breeding; and that they have long ago passed on their genes to the next generation.

5. The most active breeding males in any animal population are those which appear in the middle age-groupings of mature males. Those which are younger rarely get an opportunity to breed because the older and bigger animals don't allow them anywhere near the females when they come into oestrus. And those which are older, either don't have the energy or the inclination to fight for their right to breed or they are simply too old to be interested in mating under conditions of extreme duress.
6. **Legal Sport Hunters & Legal Meat Hunters.** There is a new kind of 'so-called' trophy hunter in the mix nowadays. These are hunters who are not interested in taking home with them super-sized horns or tusks (obtained at very great expense). They are happy to pay a reasonable fee, however, and quite content to hunt average horn-sized animals (i.e. representative 'trophies'). These are the hunters that fall into the category of 'legal sport hunters' and 'legal meat-hunters' (or 'biltong hunters' if you like). Many of them are quite prepared to shoot female animals if the landowner puts them on license for 'management' reasons - because obtaining meat-to-eat is the main reason for their hunting pursuits. These hunters, mostly local South Africans, are by far in the majority with 200 000 regular subscribers who hunt throughout the hunting season every year. These are the people who undoubtedly contribute the most to the game ranchers' bank accounts. They, therefore, represent the game rancher's bread and butter.
7. There is an *additional* 100 000 sport hunters and meat hunters in South Africa, who are occasional hunting participants. Although smaller in number - and taking to the field only irregularly during the hunting season - they, nevertheless, contribute significantly to the economics of game ranching in this country.
8. Contrary to many animal rightists' propaganda utterances, no meat or other game product ever goes to waste when hunters - including trophy hunters - kill game animals under licence. Indeed, every bit of meat derived from the trophy hunters' kills, is also recovered and sold by the game rancher - because, although trophy hunters are able to recover their treasured trophies after a successful hunt, the meat from such kills is still owned by the game rancher.
9. Twenty percent of all red meat consumed in South Africa is venison
10. **The Poachers.** Poachers are '**illegal hunters**'. They kill game animals of all kinds without a license - using all kinds of hunting techniques to achieve their objectives. At the most primitive end of the scale they use wire and steel cable snares; and hunting dogs; sometimes nets; to catch and to kill the smaller game animals. These poachers are only concerned with filling their own cooking pots with food. Rifles come into the equation when poachers hunt bigger game animals for meat - which they sell, commercially, to mining compounds; to farm labourers; and to urban township people. And finally, we have the much publicised commercial big game

poachers. These illegal hunters kill elephants and rhinos and they sell their horns and/or their tusks - for very high profits - into the Far Eastern ivory and rhino horn markets.

11. **Hunting - General Comment.** There is absolutely no reason at all why any reasonably intelligent person should confuse any of these hunting categories. There is no reason for any person to equate ALL hunting with TROPHY hunting - unless they have an ulterior (animal rights propaganda) reason for doing so. And there is no reason to assign a greater degree of importance to trophy hunting over any other kind of hunting; especially wildlife management hunting. And although 'culling' and 'population reduction management' maybe be executed with a rifle, these two 'management activities' cannot, in any way, be equated to 'hunting' for sport, for meat or for trophies.
12. And, although in this report, a great deal of emphasis has been placed on trophy hunting as the most important contributor to the economics of wildlife ranching (or to the national economics of elephant hunting in government-controlled areas) in South Africa, the huge differences that exist between the relatively small numbers of trophy hunters (6 800 - or thereabouts) - compared to the sheer mass of sport and meat hunters - 200 000 or 300 000 - suggest otherwise. So, I am inclined to believe that, all in all in South Africa, the sport hunters, and the biltong hunters are by far the biggest contributors to the great financial success of this country's wildlife industry.
13. This does not mean the trophy hunter is NOT immensely important to South Africa!
14. Although I have done a lot of big game hunting, I have never been a trophy hunter myself; and I have never kept trophies. But I loved to hunt. My most cherished hunting memories, however, were when I was hunting alone, or just with my Bushman tracker; and when I took my son out, aged 18 (many years ago), on his first elephant hunt. People who are not hunters will never understand those very poignant moments that still linger deep inside every hunter's heart.

The HUNTING ETHOS

The Hunting Ethos is the distinguishing character, sentiment and belief that hunters adopt, collectively, as their moral code; and it varies between different societies. It is different to 'ethics' - which is a very personal relationship that tempers the conduct of a hunter when his soul is pricked by his conscience. Ethics are what a hunter practices when he is hunting alone - out of sight from his peers. Ethics - good or bad - in fact, define the hunter.

People in the big cities of the Western World - who for several generations have been continuously and progressively losing the ability to commune with nature (because they are never exposed to it) - cannot be expected to understand the hunting ethos. And this is causing angst amongst both those members of society that accept and understand the hunting ethos, and those that don't.

In fact, there is nothing wrong with hunting. Indeed, there is a great deal that is right with it. When a farmer sends an ox to the abattoir, it is killed humanely with the help of a stun-gun, before the carcass is dissected and packaged for human consumption. The game rancher does not have that luxury. When he wants to harvest a completely free wild animal on his ranch it has to be hunted, because there is no other way for him to kill the animal and to make it available for dissection. So, 'hunting' is a vital 'tool of management'.

IS HUNTING AND KILLING CRUEL?

Killing is part of living. For one organism to live by eating another organism - which is one of the most basic laws of nature - requires that the one organism must kill the other. And the act of killing, itself, is NOT 'cruel'. Why? Because for an activity to be judged 'cruel' there has to be an *intention* on the part of the perpetrator to create pain and suffering on the victim. And I know of no hunter on earth whose purpose - when hunting a wild animal - is to create pain and suffering. *Ipsa facto*, hunting is NOT a cruel activity.

PERSONAL PREFERENCE OPINIONS

Everyone is entitled to his or her personal preference opinions (about anything), but nobody is entitled to demand that those opinions should dictate what other people be required to do. Hunting is a very personal and important pursuit in the field of wildlife management; and it should be left to those who practice hunting, and their peers, to decide whether what they are doing is right or wrong. And we know that the anti-hunters only have a negative viewpoint - which should be totally ignored by everybody. Hunters, however, also know there are many people who genuinely, and simply, do not understand the hunting ethos; and who inherently dislike the idea of anyone wanting to kill a beautiful wild animal. No matter how sincere the feelings of such people are, however, their opinions will never change the hunters' life-styles or their passions. Not one little bit.

Finally, I have to make comment on all the anti-hunting sentiments that are currently being bandied about by so many people who have absolutely no idea what they are talking about. Responsible society, government and wildlife management practitioners, understand what wildlife management is all about. THEY are the people - alone - who should be involved in any and all hunting debates. They know that wildlife management is a science of which hunting is an important part. They also know that no facet of wildlife management (a.k.a. 'conservation') can be determined by way of public referendums; which is exactly what the anti-hunting animal rightists are demanding should happen.

Ron Thomson