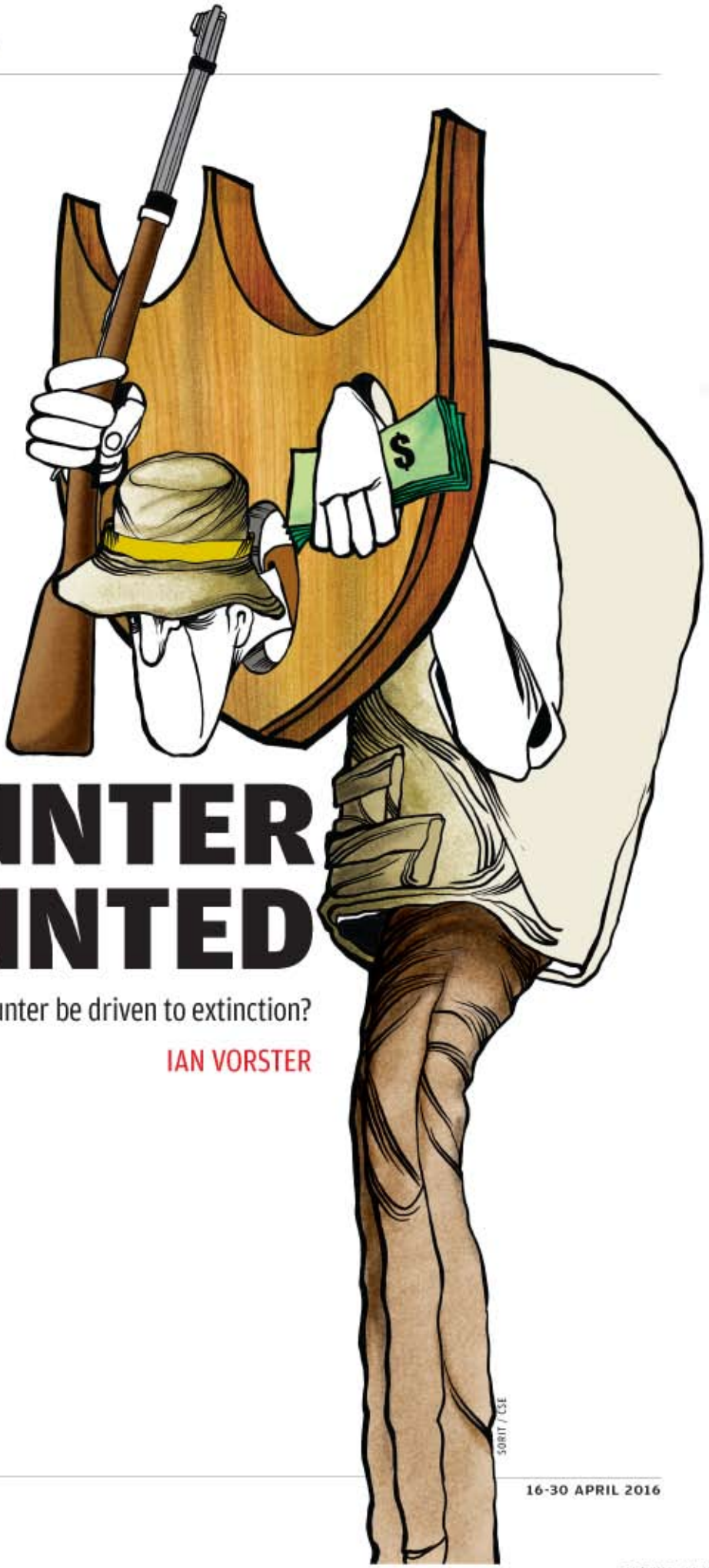

HUNTER HUNTED

Should the trophy hunter be driven to extinction?

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SORIT / CSE

A BLACK RHINO in Namibia, a majestic elephant outside Gonarezhou National Park in Zimbabwe, and Cecil the lion: it seems like 2015 was the year of the trophy hunter. As western society digested this shopping list of threatened and endangered species, members of the scientific community, conservation practitioners, hunting associations and ecotourism operators continued their acrimonious and long-standing debate around one question: should the trophy hunter be driven into extinction?

Now would be the time to answer that question—in December 2015, the US Fish and Wildlife Service announced that lions are now protected under the Endangered Species Act of 1973, something that prevents the import of trophies to the US, the nation that leads the market.

Wildlife filmmaker and photographer Dereck Joubert runs camps in Botswana's Okavango Delta. When asked what he considers to be the solution to the problems faced by a nation like Zimbabwe, with its recent abysmal conservation history, Joubert, who is also the founder and chairman of the National Geographic Big Cats Initiative, said, "Follow the Botswana model—increase high-value low-volume tourism; phase out high-volume tourism by clustering it into limited areas; ban all big cat hunting, and let the species grow back; convert hunting areas into ecotourism concessions; encourage donor funding of parks and projects in parks."

The view that trophy hunting is detrimental to species is also supported by a paper written by Andrew Loveridge (the researcher who collared Cecil) in which mortality among lions between 1999 and 2004 in Hwange National Park, Zimbabwe's largest gaming reserve, was examined. The study, published in *Biological Conservation* in 2007, was designed to measure the impact of sport hunting beyond the park on the lion population within the park. While hunting is not allowed inside the park, it is permitted in the safari areas that surround it. The researchers tagged 62 animals (male and female) and found that sport hunters in the safari areas surrounding the park killed 72 per cent of tagged adult males. That is unsustainable.

There is also the view that money earned from trophy hunting can finance conservation efforts. Johnny Rodrigues, director of the Zimbabwe Conservation Task Force, which carries out much of the nature conservation responsibilities in the country, says trophy hunting of lions might contribute to conservation efforts if certain parameters are kept in place, such as legal limits, buffers around national parks, no illegal baiting and more. "But the problem is that before issuing hunting permits, you need to know the wildlife population, and the government doesn't have that information." It seems intuitive that if you are going to shoot an animal for its cape, you want to know if that kill will hasten extinction of the species.

Paying to kill

Hunters have always said that they pay for conservation. In support of this, the Safari Club International has a link to a *New York Times* Op-Ed posted on their website. Written by Tanzania's most senior wildlife conservation official, Alexander N Songorwa, the article says, "Hunters pay $9,800 in government fees for the opportunity [to hunt]. An average of about 200 lions are shot a year, generating about $19.6 million in revenue. All told, trophy hunting generated roughly $75 million for Tanzania's economy from 2008 to 2011." This income supports conservation in 26 game reserves, claims Sogorwa.

Markus Borner, former director of the Frankfurt Zoological Garden, Germany, who oversaw conservation programmes in Tanzania, comments, "It is not trophy hunting that is threatening the survival of lions in Africa. It is mainly the loss of habitat due to fast growing populations that is reducing wildlife." Borner then drives home an essential element of the hunting argument, "Whatever one thinks about the moral of trophy hunting, the industry is essential if the large reserves are to survive, not just in Africa but also in Alaska."

Adri Kitshoff, CEO of Professional Hunters' Association of South Africa, says that the country has an estimated 20.5 million animals that can be hunted, with the off-take through trophy hunting in 2013 being just 0.002 per cent of that wildlife. Although this generalises the differentiation of species, Kitshoff emphasises, "It just goes to show how sustainable trophy hunting is in South Africa, and how well our natural resources are being managed. It creates incentives for our people to look after our animals by negating competition with wildlife for land..."

Communal benefits

Professional hunting associations are also quick to mention communal programmes that benefit from trophy fees. There are three primary examples—CAMPFIRE in Zimbabwe, ADMADE in Zambia, and

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the Communal Conservation Program in Namibia.

The director of Zimbabwe's CAMPFIRE programme, Charles Jonga, says, "Our information shows that communities are receiving 55 per cent of income directly from safari operators. We are unable to determine at this stage what the implications of this are on wildlife monitoring and protection..." Some of this obfuscation may be due to corruption, which has also been blamed on a history of violence and colonialism.

Regarding the CAMPFIRE figures, Vernon Booth, a wildlife conservation ecologist in Zimbabwe, says, "You will see that it is not that easy to arrive at an amount that each individual in a community would potentially receive. The number of people, in the case of CAMPFIRE, is often just too many to make this meaningful. So, one has to define what is meant by a 'community'. Are there several thousand people in a village, as in Tanzania and Mozambique, or just a few families, as in Namibia or Botswana?"

So for the trophy-hunter's fees to support conservation, the issue appears to be how to define what is meant by "community" and then to develop incentives at the community level to encourage the conservation of wildlife. Has this been done?

The director of southern Africa's World Wide Fund for Nature, Chris Weaver, says yes. He points to Namibia's highly respected community conservation programme. "The market-based approach to conservation has dramatically altered the mindset of communities from animosity to that of embracing wildlife as a livelihood asset." Weaver provides guidance to conservation partner organisations for whom the term "community" normally means just a "few families".

Shifting ownership and responsibility over wildlife resources to communities will cultivate a sense of proprietorship, provided it offers more than the alternative form of land use

So, what's the answer?

Allow the trophy hunter to go extinct? Perhaps the best person to answer that question is an African village resident. In an article published in *The New York Times* on September 12, 2015, Jimmy Baitsholedi Ntema says, "Before, when there was hunting, we wanted to protect those animals because we knew we earned something out of them. Now we don't benefit at all from the animals. The elephants and buffaloes leave after destroying our plowing fields during the day. Then, at night, the lions come into our *kraals* [cattle enclosures]."

Shifting ownership and responsibility over wildlife resources to communities, many of the specialists say, will cultivate a sense of proprietorship, provided it offers more than the alternative forms of land use. Michael H Knight, the chair of IUCN's African Rhino Specialist Group and the director of science for South African National Parks, offers a concrete solution to the mess of corrupted countries, corporate concerns, and complicated caveats. "There is a need for certification of hunting concessions to promote a better hunting ethic. I would also push for the best possible value through some sort of ticket system for lions, leopards, elephants, buffalo and rhino," he says.

That would be similar to the Forest Stewardship Council brand seen on many wood products in the US, where certification ensures that products come from responsibly managed landscapes. Knight adds, "By this I mean that the hunting associations will only patronise those concessions, and the professional hunters and outfitters that sign up to the certification system."

Rosie Cooney, the Chair of the IUCN's Sustainable Use and Livelihoods Specialist Group, summarises, "We need to move towards such a certification system, and we need the big, developing-world based hunting organisations to show leadership on this. Otherwise poor practices, corruption, and unsustainability that plague some parts of the hunting world, will completely tarnish the really excellent examples of good practice. Currently, in most areas where this high value tourist hunting is active, there are no other land uses that make wildlife, and wild areas as valuable to people as hunting. If the hunting goes, it will hasten the vicious cycle of persecution of wildlife, agricultural encroachment, and de-gazetting of protected areas."

But not everyone is of the same view. Regarding the role of revenue raised from trophy hunting, lion researcher Craig Packer comments, "It's a myth that sport hunting raises enough money to conserve lion habitats. A trophy lion costs about a million dollars to protect through its life. Twenty hunters should each pay $50,000 for a lottery tag to shoot one six-year old male—if this isn't done, all the land set aside for sport hunting will lose its lions in the next 20 years, so hunting will disappear anyway." And the trophy hunter would follow.

It seems incongruous to have to roll this boulder of trophy hunting up the hill of western sentiment, when in effect the same Sisyphean task has to be accomplished for all of biodiversity using ecosystem services, or with carbon trade-off plans for climate change. As unpalatable as it might be, the strategy needs consideration. ■

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