**Trophy Hunting – Frequently Asked Questions**

- **What is trophy hunting?**

  Trophy hunting (also known as recreational or sport hunting) generally involves the payment of a fee for a hunting experience, usually supervised, for one or more animals with specific desired characteristics (such as large body size or antlers). The “trophy” is a part of the animal such as the horns or head and is usually kept by the hunter and taken home. Meat of hunted animals is usually used for food by local communities or the hunter. It may be a distinct activity from, or overlap with, hunting for recreation or meat. Many deer hunters, for example, may desire a trophy but also hunt for food or for the experience.

- **Where does trophy hunting take place?**

  Trophy hunting takes place in most countries of Europe, the USA, Canada, Mexico, several countries in East, Central and South Asia, around half of the countries in Africa, several countries in Central and South America, and in Australia and New Zealand. A wide variety of species are hunted, and may include abundant or rare species that may or may not be threatened. Most are native to the countries in which they are hunted, and some are introduced.

- **Is trophy hunting the same as poaching?**

  Trophy hunting is often incorrectly conflated with poaching (illegal hunting), including poaching for the organised international illegal wildlife trade that is currently impacting many species including African elephants and African rhinos. However, trophy hunting typically takes place as a legal, regulated activity under programmes implemented by government wildlife agencies, protected area managers, indigenous and local community bodies, private landowners, or conservation and development organisations. Strict quotas – based on biological criteria – are set for each species that is eligible to be hunted within a defined geographic area.

  This is not to say that there are not regulatory weaknesses and illegal activities taking place, as in most industries, and these can be very serious. These include hunting in excess of quotas, in the wrong areas or of non-permitted species, and “pseudo-hunting” involving the sale of hunting trophies into black markets in consumer countries.

- **Is trophy hunting the same as “canned hunting”?**

  Canned hunting (hunting of animals in confined enclosures where they are unable to escape) represents a very small proportion of trophy hunting and raises very different issues from trophy hunting of free-ranging animals. Current IUCN policy condemns canned hunting (IUCN Recommendation 3.093, 2004) on the basis that it does not contribute to the conservation of the species in the wild.

- **Is trophy hunting driving declines of iconic African species such as elephants, lions and rhinos?**

  There is evidence that in some sites, poorly managed trophy hunting has contributed to local declines in some populations of African large mammals\(^1\). However it is not a significant threat to any of these species as a whole.\(^2\) As The IUCN Red List of Threatened Species™ indicates, the primary causes of declines in the species subject to trophy hunting (such as African Elephant, African Lion, African Buffalo, White Rhino, Black Rhino, African Wild Dog and Hartmann’s Mountain Zebra) are habitat loss and degradation, competition with livestock, poaching for meat and trade in animal products (ivory, horn, etc.), loss of prey (usually from hunting for meat), and retribution killing for

---

\(^1\) e.g. Loveridge *et al.*, 2007; Packer *et al.*, 2009, 2011

\(^2\) Lindsey, 2015
human-wildlife conflict. It is also worth noting that most of these species are not currently threatened with extinction on the IUCN Red List, as is often suggested.

Can trophy hunting benefit wildlife?

Legal, well-regulated trophy hunting programmes can, and do, play an important role in delivering benefits for wildlife conservation (see below). However, it is clear that there have been, and continue to be, cases of poorly conducted and poorly regulated hunting. While “Cecil the Lion” was perhaps the most highly publicised controversial case, there are examples of weak governance, corruption, lack of transparency, excessive quotas, illegal hunting, poor monitoring and other problems in a number of countries. This poor practice requires urgent action and reform.

How does trophy hunting benefit wildlife?

Habitat loss and degradation, driven primarily by expansion of human economic activities, is the most significant threat to terrestrial wildlife populations (Mace et al., 2005), along with other threats such as poaching for bushmeat, illegal wildlife trade, and competition with livestock. The growth of the human population and demands for food, income and land for development in many biodiversity-rich parts of the globe are exacerbating these pressures on wildlife, and making the need for viable conservation incentives more urgent.

Well-managed trophy hunting programmes can be a positive driver for conservation because they increase the value of wildlife and the habitats it depends on, providing critical benefit flows that can motivate and enable sustainable management approaches. Trophy hunting programmes can:

- **Provide incentives for landowners (government, private individuals or communities) to protect and restore wildlife habitat and populations, remove livestock, invest in monitoring and management, and carry out anti-poaching activities**. For example, policies enabling landowners to benefit from sustainable use of wildlife led to the total or partial conversion of large areas of land from livestock and cropping back to wildlife in South Africa, Zimbabwe, Namibia, Pakistan, the United States and Mexico. Without such benefits, the future of these lands and the wildlife they are home to is highly uncertain.

- **Generate revenue for wildlife management and conservation, including anti-poaching activities, for government, private and communal landholders**. Government agencies in most regions depend at least in part on revenues from hunting to manage wildlife and protected areas. For example, state wildlife agencies in the United States are funded primarily by both trophy hunting and broader recreational hunting. Private landowners in South Africa and Zimbabwe and communal landowners in Namibia use trophy hunting revenues to pay for guards, rangers, equipment and infrastructure to manage and protect wildlife. Revenues from trophy hunting operations in Mongolia, Tajikistan and Pakistan are also used to pay local guards and to improve habitat for game animals. Trophy hunting operators and the patrols they directly organize, finance and deploy can reduce poaching.

---

3 Schipper et al., 2008; Ripple et al., 2015
4 e.g. Loveridge et al., 2007; Packer et al., 2009, 2011; Nelson, Lindsey & Balme, 2013; Page 2015
5 e.g. Johnson, 1997; Woodford et al., 2004; Valdez et al., 2006; Lee, 2008; Child, 2009; Frisina & Tareen, 2009; Lindsey et al., 2009a; Lindsey et al., 2009b; Heffelfinger et al., 2013; Mahoney, 2013; Mallon, 2013; Wilder et al., 2014; Balfour et al., 2015; Hurley et al., 2015; NACSO, 2015; Michel and Rosen, 2016; Naidoo et al., 2016
6 Heffelfinger et al., 2013; Mahoney, 2013
7 Child, 2009; Lindsey et al., 2009a; Lindsey et al., 2009b; Balfour et al., 2015; NACSO, 2015
8 Page, 2015; Johnson, 1997; Woodford et al., 2004; Frisina & Tareen, 2009; Mallon, 2013; Michel & Rosen, 2016
9 Lindsey et al., 2007
• Provide incentives to reduce retaliatory killing and local poaching among communities living with wildlife that imposes serious costs on local people, such as loss of crops and livestock or human injury and death. This is particularly important in Africa where elephants and other species destroy crops and large cats kill humans and livestock. Regulated trophy hunting of lions, for example, which focusses on males over a minimum age, can mean that female lions and cubs are not targeted by local people in retaliation for damage and actually result in fewer lion deaths overall.¹⁰

➢ Can trophy hunting benefit local people?

Local communities benefit from trophy hunting in a variety of ways including: direct payments from a hunting company for use of their land (the hunting concession) and its associated quota; other hunter investments, which typically support improved community services like water infrastructure, schools and health clinics; gaining jobs as guides, game guards, wildlife managers and other hunting-related employment; and gaining access to meat (see references above for examples). These are typically poor rural communities with very few alternative sources of income and sometimes no other legal source of meat.

➢ Are there alternatives, like photographic tourism?

Trophy hunting is not the only means to make wildlife valuable to people and to return local benefits. Photographic tourism can be a very valuable option in many places and has generated enormous benefits for conservation. However, it is viable over only a very limited percentage of the wildlife area currently managed for trophy hunting: it requires political stability, proximity to good transport links, minimal disease risks, high density wildlife populations to guarantee viewing, scenic landscapes, high capital investment, infrastructure (hotels, food and water supply, waste management), and local skills and capacity. Where tourism is feasible in areas currently used for hunting, it is typically already being employed alongside hunting.¹¹ Like trophy hunting, if not carefully implemented tourism can have serious environmental impacts and can return a very low level of benefit to local communities, with most value captured offshore or by in-country elites.¹²

➢ Is IUCN “for” or “against” trophy hunting?

IUCN is neither “for” nor “against” trophy hunting. Like all conservation approaches, the conservation impact of trophy hunting varies according to numerous factors, including whether other viable alternatives are available. It is clear that there have been, and continue to be, cases of poorly conducted and poorly regulated trophy hunting that require urgent action and reform. Nonetheless, legal, well-regulated trophy hunting programmes have been demonstrated to play an important role in delivering benefits for both wildlife conservation and for communities living with wildlife.¹³

➢ Why would an organisation concerned with conservation advocate a practice that involves killing animals?

¹¹ e.g. Naidoo et al., 2016
¹² Sandbrook & Adams, 2012
¹³ e.g. Johnson, 1997; Woodford et al., 2004; Valdez et al., 2006; Lee, 2008; Child, 2009; Frisina & Tareen, 2009; Lindsey et al., 2009a; Lindsey et al., 2009b; Heffelfinger et al., 2013; Mahoney, 2013; Mallon, 2013; Alidodov et al., 2014; Wilder et al., 2014; Balfour et al. 2015; Hurley et al., 2015; NACSO, 2015; Michel & Rosen, 2016; Naidoo et al., 2016
The objective of conservation is to ensure that species, subspecies and populations as a whole are viable and able to fulfil their ecological roles in the ecosystems throughout their native range. Conservation often entails active management of wildlife populations, and the killing of individual animals may be justified in the interest of conservation if it would improve the likelihood that the population or species as a whole will persist, or recover, in the long term. For example, old males past reproductive age may need to be removed in order to allow younger males to breed, and large populations may need to be reduced in order to prevent lasting ecological damage to their habitat. Sometimes this population management happens as part of a trophy hunting programme, other times as part of a non-commercial cull. No trophy hunting does not mean no killing.

Many people may object to the killing of individual animals on ethical grounds, and are opposed to any such action regardless of its conservation benefit. While IUCN welcomes and encourages healthy debate, and includes both pro-hunting and anti-hunting groups among its Membership, IUCN advocates for decision-making based on sound scientific evidence.

Do pro-hunting organisations influence IUCN policy?

There are pro-hunting and anti-hunting organisations among IUCN’s over 1300 Members, all of which have been considered against established membership criteria before being accepted by the IUCN Council. IUCN policy is determined democratically by its Members at World Conservation Congresses. Individuals affiliated with Member organisations may also be members of Specialist Groups of IUCN’s Species Survival Commission, and are accepted as group members on the basis of their individual conservation expertise, not as representatives of an organisation.

For more information and detailed case studies on trophy hunting, please see IUCN’s Briefing Paper on the subject.

References


