

# Spreading the gospel

## – *conservation through sustainable utilisation*

*It is a scary fact that there are now more than 7 billion people on planet earth. Globally, there are at least 1,2 billion people – most of them are in rural areas – relying directly on the natural resources for food, water, fuel and fibre. The growing human population is inevitably putting the world's natural resources, including wildlife and wilderness areas, under increasing pressure.*

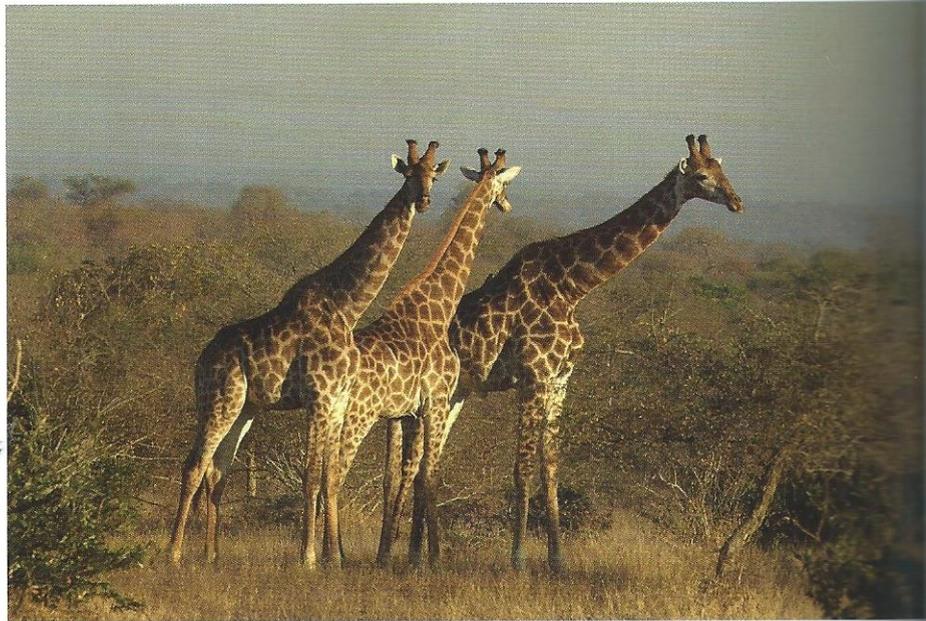
*By Willem Frost*

As a consequence, the concept of “sustainable development” has evolved over the last 25 years, covering all spheres of economic activity, including technology, resource management, transport, capital markets, energy, trade, forestry, food and agriculture. Simultaneously, the related concept of *conservation through sustainable utilisation* has emerged in the world of conservation and wildlife management. *Leading international development and conservation organisations (such as IFAD and IUCN)* are all supportive of sustainable utilisation of the world's natural resources. The reason is logical and simple: since all life on planet earth (including human life and wildlife) is dependent on the natural world, our planet will be turned into a wasteland if we don't utilise our natural resources in a sustainable manner. This is particularly important for rural development.

It is, therefore, also essential that hunting conforms to sustainable utilisation of our wildlife resources.

Biodiversity is globally recognized as fundamental to economic growth and development. South Africa is the third-most biologically diverse country in the world after Indonesia and Brazil but, like the rest of Africa, it has too many unemployed people who live in poverty in degraded environments. The pressure on the remaining wildlife areas, conservancies, and biodiversity is now more extreme than ever, and Africa's best chance of improving the lives of impoverished people is through sustainable development and *conservation through sustainable utilisation*.

Unfortunately, a large section of the



*There are eight distinct giraffe species in Africa. With the exception of the southern giraffe in South Africa, they are all in trouble as numbers are declining fast due to various factors. The southern giraffe is not hunted as frequently as other plain-game species. However, private game ranch owners have been able, thanks to the hunting income from other species, to introduce giraffe on their land. Today they are a common sight on the southern bushveld savannahs.*

public (particularly those living in the cities of the Western high-income countries) has not yet grasped this basic, yet critically important philosophy, or is wilfully not prepared to acknowledge this necessity. This has profound implications for the hunting industry.

In South Africa, sustainable utilisation by the private sector has resulted in saving the bontebok, mountain zebra, blesbok and black wildebeest from probable

extinction.

In 1968 the country started to permit the controlled hunting of white rhino. Since then, the numbers of white rhinos have increased from about 1800 to more than 20 000 today. The same happened in the USA where Rocky Mountain elk increased from less than 41 000 in 1920 to about 1,7 million today. White-tailed deer increased over the same period from less than 500 000 to more than 30 million. Whereas the

antelope populations in most of Africa is drastically on the decline, the numbers of most species in Namibia and South Africa are either stable or on the increase, thanks to a unique wildlife management system that relies primarily on sustainable utilisation by private enterprise.

Despite these successes, the anti-hunting fraternity seems to have more success in getting their message across to the general public, and governments in particular.

Hunting is part of our cultural heritage. Most hunters have grown up with rifles and/or bows. So have their fathers, grandfathers and great-grandfathers. However, the hunting heritage of our grandchildren and great-grandchildren is under threat – not only in Western Europe and North America, but also in Africa. Out of more than fifty countries in Africa, it is only South Africa, Namibia, Zimbabwe, Zambia, Mozambique, Tanzania, Cameroon, Central African Republic and Burkina Faso that still offer the international hunter worthwhile hunting opportunities. Elsewhere, wildlife has been

extirpated outside of a few conservation areas, or hunting has been outlawed as a result of undue influence by the anti-hunting lobby – the most recent case being Botswana. The consequences are inevitably disastrous: the degradation of ecosystems, and the disappearance of wildlife outside of a few game parks.

In Europe, particularly the Scandinavian countries and Britain, hunting is now regarded as socially unacceptable by a large section of the public. The situation in Britain is so aggressively anti-hunting that the international hunter would be well-advised not to travel through Heathrow in London for fear of “losing” luggage that contains hunting equipment. Schiphol in Amsterdam is probably worse. We have already had clients that almost got arrested when in transit through Schiphol – their broadheads, arrows and bows being regarded as ‘contraband’. *Yet the Dutch seems to have no problem in legalising abortion, prostitution and the use of certain drugs such as marijuana.* It would appear that our Western Christian civilisation has

become morally lost in its concrete jungles. For the hunting industry, however, the consequences of man’s ignorance regarding wildlife management coupled with his moral confusion could be too ghastly to contemplate.

An example of poor decision-making in the corporate world as a result of ignorance was the recent decision by South African Airways to place an embargo on the transport of all hunting trophies of rhino, elephant, lion and tiger, whether obtained legally or not. As far as could be ascertained, SAA did not consult with any hunting or conservation organisation prior to this unfortunate decision. Perhaps the responsible executives thought they were on the moral high ground; perhaps they meant well, but this shows how the ill-informed can unknowingly cause more damage than good. Some other airlines followed with a similar ban after a much publicised lion hunt in Zimbabwe, but South African Airways fortunately lifted its embargo after discussions with Safari Club International and the Professional Hunters

## A Hunter Speaks Out

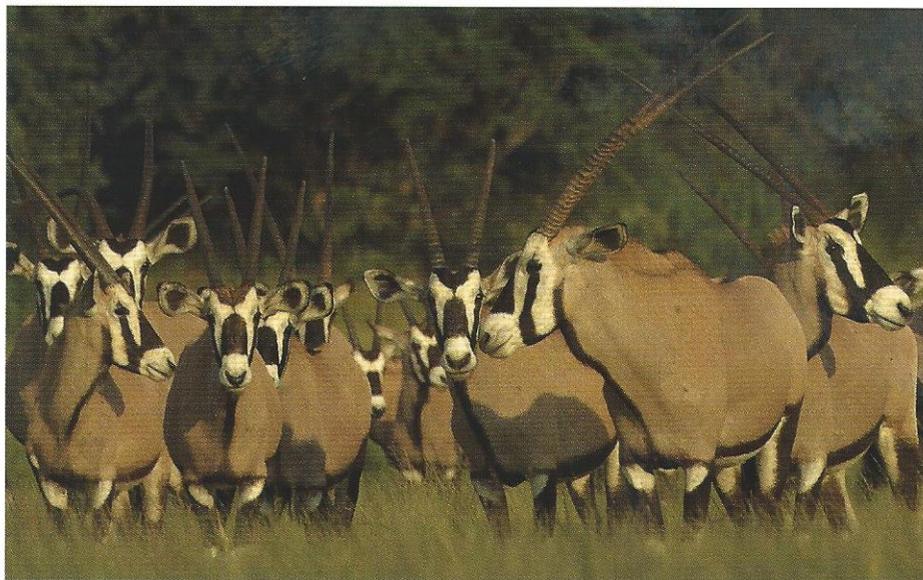
Association of South Africa.

When asked why antis are opposed to hunting, they usually cannot give a convincing rationale. Other than the ridiculous animal rightist's bizarre claim no man has the "right" to benefit in any way from animals, I have come across only two answers to this question. The first is that they regard themselves as arm-chair conservationists and they believe that hunters "...kill exactly the things that we want to conserve". This, as all hunters and conservationists know, shows a complete lack of insight into conservation and biodiversity management, and cannot be taken seriously. Reality is that wildlife is doing much better in those countries that offer hunting (e.g. Namibia and South Africa) than in those countries that do not allow hunting (e.g. Kenya, Angola and most of West Africa). Conservation, is not about "saving" individual animals, but rather about the wellbeing of ecosystems and species.

The second answer is that hunting is "unconscionable". This thinking is typical



*White rhino have recovered from less than 2000 individuals in the 1960s to more than 20 000 today, largely due to sustainable utilisation by the private sector.*



*Africa has four different oryx: the scimitar oryx (extinct in the wild), Beisa oryx and Fringe-eared oryx (the numbers of which are declining fast), and the southern oryx or gemsbok whose numbers are on the increase, thanks to the hunting industry. They are quite popular with both trophy and meat hunters, and therefore their distribution range in South Africa has expanded.*

of modern, urbanised man who has lost touch with the natural world. Hunting, as practiced by the modern 21st century meat or trophy hunter, is certainly not unconscionable – the good that comes from controlled and legal hunting is simply too overwhelming. Unfortunately, the uninformed non-hunting masses do not know any better and are gullible to the emotional propaganda of the anti-hunters. One should also recognise that any debate on the “morality”, or otherwise, of hunting is unlikely to lead anywhere as (i) views are based on raw emotion rather than scientific fact, and (ii) views on morality can be very selective – different peoples often have different views on morality.

The questions we as hunters have to ask are:

1. “If the anti-hunting arguments are so weak, why is it that they so often override common sense and the truth, and gain acceptance by policy- and decision-makers?”
2. “If the world’s leading scientists in the fields of development and conservation are supportive of *conservation through sustainable utilisation*, why is there still so much opposition to sustainable utilisation in the form of hunting?”

The antis seem to be more successful in getting their weird message across to the uninformed public. We as hunters need to change this. We have to convince

an uninformed, yet skeptic world, of the conservation value of hunting. The world should know about the good that comes from sustainable utilisation of our wildlife resources through hunting. Hunters should be seen first and foremost as conservationists, not as “*blood-thirsty killers*” who only take pleasure in killing. We should be seen as caring for biodiversity, ecosystems, wilderness areas and all forms of wildlife as things of value in their own right, and not only as serving hunting purposes.

Changing public perceptions is not easy, but this is what is required. It is, however, not only the responsibility of the elected leaders in our hunting organisations; each and every hunter should take co-responsibility to reposition hunting as a conservation necessity, and to educate and inform those who do not understand the functioning of conservation and hunting in the 21st century.

Sustainable utilisation of our wildlife resources through hunting is an important element of the cultural heritage of many peoples around the world; an innovative contributor to socio-economic development in rural sub-Saharan Africa, and an important and effective conservation tool recognised by the World Conservation Union (IUCN) and the International Council for Game and Wildlife Conservation (CIC). Because it is a significant contributor to the economy

of many countries, it is frustrating that conservationists (including hunters) are patently not able to get these truths across.

Although we are committed to *conservation through sustainable utilisation*, we should recognise that human greed and mismanagement can cause it to go wrong at times, especially if offtake quotas are mismanaged. Under these circumstances the fingers will quickly be pointed at the hunting community – whether the accusations are valid or not. But we should be equipped to demonstrate that mismanagement of the system by the corrupt and the incompetent does not mean that *conservation through sustainable utilisation* is flawed as a conservation concept. An example of hunting going wrong is the recent, much publicised hunt of a lion next to Hwange National Park in Zimbabwe.

The real tragedy of the public hysteria that followed on the hunting of Cecil the lion, is that it got disproportionate public and media attention compared with the poaching of lion, elephant, rhino and antelope that happens on a daily basis. The anti-hunters were quick to get the maximum mileage out of the incident, and hunting suffered a further setback in the battle for the hearts and minds of the non-hunting masses.

The media plays a very significant role in forming public opinion. So, we need to get the media on our side. There is simply too much poor reporting and misrepresentation in the popular media on hunting and conservation matters. We should also learn to use the social media more effectively.

One thing is clear: A large section of the public regulatory and governmental institutions is telling us that hunting will eventually be outlawed unless the hunting community is able to demonstrate convincingly that hunting is essential for conservation. So, if the hunters of the world do not become more effective in getting their message across to the uninformed and the ill-informed, we may well lose our hunting heritage, and we will only have ourselves to blame.

Losing this war will not only affect the hunting industry, but the entire wildlife industry as a whole. We simply have to spread the gospel of *conservation through sustainable utilisation*

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