

Extending Tanzania's Hunting Season – Two Points of View

When Tanzanian PH and Executive Officer of the African Professional Hunters Association (APHA) and Secretary General of Tanzania Professional Hunting Association Mike Angelides wrote to me, I knew I had to get expert thinking on the matter and turned to Rolf Baldus and Henry Brink.

Angelides wrote: *"The decision to extend Tanzania's hunting season by three months – January, February, March – has been met with some negativity from within the hunting industry. There are claims that hunting during this period interferes with the health and breeding of some game species;*

this is also when they fatten up for the season during those months of rains.

Hunting done correctly should have zero impact on the numbers of the general herd. We are not out there chasing animals around, and given the same quotas for each species, as far as I am concerned, the impact is the same

whether or not a trophy male is killed two days or two months before breeding.

Have you heard of any studies of the criteria for determining open and closed hunting seasons, when to hunt or not hunt? I know that in Europe, red stag are hunted during the rut, and the same for elk in the States."



One must question why Tanzania has decided to extend the hunting season by three months, adding January, February and March. Is it needed? Is it for biological reasons? Or economic ones? Or is it to fix a system that already was not working?

Is Tanzania's decision to extend the safari season from six to nine months a year a good idea?

An Argument Against

By Dr. Henry Brink

The hunting or open season is a time of year when it is legal to kill a particular species. The non-hunting or closed season is a time of year when it is illegal to hunt a given species. Typically, closed seasons are designed to protect a species when they are most vulnerable, for example during their breeding season.

Tanzania's hunting season ran six months, from 1 July to 31 December. Over the last few years, amidst much controversy, it has been extended a further three months, adding the dates 1 January to 31 March. This had led to the extension being cancelled and re-instated on several occasions.

It now seems "on" again, and I'm here to argue that it's a bad idea. The first key question to be asked is: Why is the extension needed? Is it for biological reasons? Or economic reasons? Is it to fix a system that was not working? Let's try and answer these questions.

In North America, the hunting of mammals, depending on species, may last from one to seven months. The hunting season is very much species-specific, with larger mammals tending to have shorter seasons. In Tanzania, it will now become legal to hunt all 74 species of big game (from elephants to crocodiles) for nine months of the year. There has been no biological consideration given to the needs of the different species; it is a blanket one-size-fits-all rule.

It's true that many species show a breeding peak during the main rainy season (March-May), and this is still mostly within the closed season. However, this is also the time of year when it is almost impossible to get around many of the hunting concessions because of the rain.

There are no biological reasons for extending the hunting season, but there may be economic reasons.

These economic arguments include that

the extension season be good for seasonally employed staff (e.g. trackers, skimmers, camp and cook staff), as it would provide longer employment, which is good for the rural economy. Similarly, this may benefit the general economy by giving more work to service providers of the hunting industry (e.g. hotels, suppliers of goods and services, transport). This may all certainly be true, but if extending the hunting season has harmful biological impacts leading to wildlife population decreases, we will have sacrificed the potential for long-term benefits for a quick buck now.

Criticism of hunting in Tanzania generally focuses on the government's

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over-reliance on trophy fees (i.e. the fee paid once the animal is dead) to generate income, and the fact that hunting outfitters are required to kill at least 40% of their quota or face fines/penalties. The quota, or number of each species that can be shot per concession during the annual safari season, in most cases is set through educated guesswork.

The bottom line is that the more animals shot, the more money generated by the outfitter for himself and for the government. If the hunting season is being extended for no other reason than to allow outfitters to better meet their quota fulfillment requirements, then the extension of the hunting season is a very bad idea.

One of the more compelling arguments

for the extension of the hunting season is that the prolonged presence of outfitters in the field will be a deterrent to poaching, in particular of elephant. This to me is a nonsense argument.

The management authority (the Wildlife Division of the Ministry) should be handling this during the closed season anyway; and the better safari companies already expend considerable resources patrolling their concessions in the closed season. What is clear is that the less reputable hunting outfitters will have longer access to harvest their blocks.

If the idea behind this "reform" is to improve the system, there are many other reforms that I would suggest before this:

- Increased transparency (all information pertaining to concession/block allocation, quotas, and numbers of animals hunted to be made available to any interested party);
- Greater scientific involvement in quota setting;
- Increased use of management monitoring tools (e.g. SMART: Spatial Monitoring and Reporting Tool) to assess the effectiveness of management/anti-poaching efforts.

Because of the lack of transparency, hunting in Tanzania has a serious PR problem. The extension of the hunting season will be viewed by people outside the hunting industry as nothing more than the industry trying to change the law so it can hunt more animals.

It is strongly hoped that the soon-to-be-created Tanzania Wildlife Authority (TAWA), a parastatal to replace the Wildlife Division, will embody many of the suggested reforms surrounding increased transparency and management monitoring. If these reforms were enacted, it would be easier to make the case for extending the hunting season.

Biologist Dr. Henry Brink has worked in Tanzania for over 10 years. He has studied lions of the Serengeti and Selous since 2003, and is passionate about making sustainable resource utilization work in conservation.

An Argument For.

By Rolf D. Baldus

Traditionally, Tanzania's hunting season was from 1 July to 31 December. This was introduced under colonial legislation and chosen to coincide with the main dry season when hunting areas were easily accessible, rather than for conservation reasons.

In recent years, the season was extended until 31 March, but this was discontinued. Now, the Government has once again extended the season for the three months of January, February and March. The question that any wildlife manager/conservationist has to ask is: Is this extension justified?

In most countries, hunting seasons are species-specific; females can be hunted as part of the game management plan, but not during the breeding season. Tanzania has a fixed season for all 50 of its game species, because it would be too complicated to introduce a species-specific system; females are not hunted at all.

In general, any disturbance caused by human activities is negative for wildlife. Selective trophy hunting for old males is undoubtedly such a disturbance, though not a particularly important one. Such hunting affects only relatively few animals, is practiced mainly on foot, and females and their offspring are not hunted.

Nevertheless, it is generally agreed nowadays that disturbance caused by hunting should be as limited as possible, and that hunting seasons should be as short as possible. And any professional hunter worth his money will reduce his impact as much as he can, not least because too much pressure makes the game shy.

The most common argument used against the extension of hunting seasons is that it interferes with rutting, breeding, and the upkeep of calves and cubs. This argument does not stand up to scrutiny since the rut and breeding seasons of many species rarely peak between January and March. Furthermore, it can vary depending on the region and rains. For some species, breeding peaks during the hunting season in July to September.

Those who object to hunting anyway will consequently also object to any extension of the hunting season. Their arguments are mostly ideological, and to argue with anti-hunting activists will not lead to any conclusion that is helpful for the practical wildlife manager.

If the extension of the hunting season is



Some wildlife specialists hold for true, and others don't, that the extension of the hunting season would allow for an extended presence of outfitters in the field, which acts as a deterrent to poaching, especially of elephant.

not determined for biological reasons, but for management and economic reasons, it must be weighed whether the positive factors outweigh the negative ones.

First of all, wildlife is killed in Tanzania through four types of hunting:

- Selective trophy hunting of a relatively small number of adult males; this results in the smallest take-off numbers and by its nature creates the least disturbance.
- By contrast, year-round poaching takes by far the most animals of all sexes, ages and classes; it is highly wasteful of wildlife resources and stressful for animals;
- The same refers to legal crop-protection by authorized officers and landowners who kill wildlife (male and female) in order to protect lives and property.
- Resident hunting is also highly stressful, as more often than not, animals are chased and shot at from vehicles; it is good that the resident hunting season remains restricted to six months or less.

Trophy hunting produces high revenues that finance conservation to a great extent; has substantial multiplier effects for the economy; and provides incentives for the rural communities to conserve game in wildlife management areas. Organizing expensive hunting safaris is a challenging management task for the private sector,

and the operators should be allowed to do this with as much flexibility as possible.

Let me sum up some of the more important factors:

- In many hunting blocks, if there are late rains, hunting cannot start in early July. Most often, hunting only commences in mid-August. The actual hunting season is, therefore, rather short, and consequently it is difficult for the operator to manage the quota efficiently, especially in smaller or marginal blocks.
- In contrast, there are blocks, in particular semi-desert ones, where the best hunting conditions are during the first months of the year. With an extended season, outfitters in these blocks can utilize this time period, and consequently will hunt less during the last half of the year.
- A longer season spreads the hunting pressure more evenly.
- The extension does not necessarily lead to more hunting, as the given demand for safaris in Tanzania is not determined by the length of the hunting season. However, it does give the operator the liberty to manage his hunting according to the individual needs of his particular enterprise. This possibility for optimal management is actually the main supporting argument; even marginal blocks, which under the present system

cannot break even, would benefit and could be maintained in the long run.

- For the blocks in Southern Tanzania, including the Selous, the extension is not very relevant, as these blocks are often not accessible January through March due to rains.
- The presence of hunters in the blocks suppresses poaching. Nowadays, some of the more dedicated operators keep a skeleton staff in their blocks during the closed season, in order to support the anti-poaching activities by the Wildlife Division. A full presence is, however, more effective.

My arguments are valid, of course, only in the case of the law-abiding operators. Those who overshoot and neither respect the law nor the game are, in any case, an intolerable burden on nature, and they cannot be kept at bay by a shorter hunting season.

The Tanzanian hunting industry undoubtedly needs further reforms in order to become more sustainable, although some reform steps have recently been implemented. The length of the hunting season is not a primary issue.

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More important is transparency; a more effective tendering system in order to select better operators and obtain competitive prices for the right to hunt; and dropping the present system that links the number of animals killed/requirement fulfillment of quota to government earnings.

Much has been proposed in the past, but these proposals need to be accomplished. (See Tanzania Tourist Hunting Analysis:

<http://www.wildlife-baldus.com/tanzania.html>

The paramount problem in Tanzanian wildlife conservation is, presently, the absence of an effective anti-poaching system. More than ¾ of the elephants have been slaughtered in recent years. Plans have been announced and promises made, but the Government still has to prove that, from now on, it will perform substantially better in fighting poaching on the ground.

Government authorities and the hunting industry must cooperate to eradicate the poaching plague. If the extension of the hunting season can support an effective anti-poaching presence on the ground, and greater economic stability and benefits to local communities, then it is worthwhile to have it.

Dr. Rolf D. Baldus is an economist and has worked for 13 years in wildlife management in Tanzania, in particular in the Selous. He authored the authoritative book on the Selous: “Wild Heart of Africa.” He lives now as an author, consultant, and hunter in Germany. ♡



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