



PIRSCH INTERVIEW with Dr. Rolf D. Baldus

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INTERVIEW

AFRICA NEEDS HUNTING

Animal rightists and hunting opponents are making a new effort to abolish hunting tourism. Dr. Rolf D. Baldus explains why Africa needs hunting tourism, and calls for all hunters to donate one percent of the cost of each hunting trip to pro-hunting PR.

Photos: Sascha Numßen

PIRSCH: Will Africa, as a destination for foreign hunters, soon be history?

Dr. Rolf D. Baldus: We are not quite so far yet, but powerful forces are working for it. Animal rightists started by defaming any and all hunting in Africa through a cunning worldwide campaign. In the last year they managed to bring a side issue, which hunting tourism used to be, onto the front pages of international news, including the Tagesschau, BBC news, the New York Times and the Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung. Especially hunters who stand in the limelight of the public were and are now targeted. Then they put airlines under massive pressure, resulting in a boycott of trophy transport by many companies. And now they are pushing European governments, the EU Commission and the United States to restrict the import of trophies, or to prohibit the import entirely. This has been orchestrated in a highly professional way.

PIRSCH: How do politics react?

Dr. Rolf D. Baldus: Politicians often follow the opinion where they suspect majorities. The anti-hunters are present everywhere - in the public, the media, the social networks and in the offices of many

members of national parliaments and the European parliament.

A few examples of the consequences:
- Some Members of European Parliament are pushing a „Written Declaration“, in which they demand for the Commission to restrict trophy imports.

- The Dutch EU Presidency organized - obviously in tandem with animal rights' activists - an international conference on poaching in The Hague. It was opened by the Minister of Agriculture van Dam, with a narration of what has to be done „if we want to curb poaching and trophy hunting“.

- Ex-NABU-boss and now Secretary of State in the German Environment Ministry, Jochen Flasbarth, received a letter from Deutscher Naturschutzbund and NABU, demanding a ban on the import of trophies into the EU, which is precisely what he is already working on, at an EU level. The Ministry of Environment, which decides in the federal government on hunting issues outside Germany alone and without much involvement of other Ministries like agriculture or development cooperation, can now rely on the opinion of 91 environmental NGOs in Germany.

PIRSCH: How do they justify import-bans for hunting trophies?

Dr. Rolf D. Baldus: Conservation hunting in Africa is a very complex issue. As Prince William, Duke of Cambridge, recently said in a TV interview, it may be a justifiable means of nature conservation, but it is important to maintain a fine balance. Hunting in Africa must meet high standards if it is to be sustainable. Mostly this is the case. 99.7% of all applications for trophies to be imported into Germany in the last decade corresponded to the strict CITES regulations.

Opponents of hunting in Africa have stopped arguing on the basis of facts. They work with simplistic, emotional assertions: „Trophy hunting contributes to the loss of iconic species“, the „Written Declaration“ of the twelve EU Parliamentarians simply states. This is a blatant lie. We are presently experiencing „green“ populism. Just like right-wing populism, it appeals to the emotions, while turning off the brain. A simple „No“ is enough to denounce hunting. No word on practical alternatives or how the protection of wildlife in Africa should be financed instead.



Wiebke Utsch from Blaser and Diana Airgun's CEO, Michael Swoboda, handed over the check to Dr. Rolf D. Baldus who represented the International Council for Game and Wildlife Conservation (CIC). On behalf of the the German government, Dr. Rolf Baldus worked in the Selous Game Reserve in Tanzania for 13 years.

PIRSCH: Will there be import bans for trophies?

Dr. Rolf D. Baldus: Individual embargoes already exist in the United States and in France, for example. We are dealing with restrictions at the moment. But as a whole, these may act just like a ban. Reacting to a proposal by Germany, the EU has decided last year to impose new import rules for some Annex II trophies, which clearly go beyond those of CITES. And this will continue now. The EU Commission has already submitted a draft Resolution with further restrictions to member countries for the forthcoming CITES-Conference of Parties next September in South Africa. All Annex II trophies would need import and export permits, if this resolution is accepted by the member states. And a jumble of unnecessary scientific requirements and bureaucratic red tape would, in practice, lead to a standstill of licensing procedures.

In Africa 100,000 elephants and a few hundred lions are poached, while hunting tourists only take off a few dozen, mostly post-reproductive males. By doing so, legal hunting finances half of all wildlife-protection and anti-poaching efforts in Africa. And still, Europe knows nothing better to do than to hinder legal hunting? All I can sarcastically say to that is: Congratulations, EU-Commission! You are doing a great job promoting poaching in Africa.

Former CITES Secretary-General Willem Wijnstekers called the proposed procedures 'a sledgehammer crushing a mosquito'. The underlying administrative problems were minor, and the new rules, in particular for Annex II trophies, would overburden exporting countries with bureaucratic monsters, in return for minimal improvements for species conservation.

PIRSCH: What do the affected countries in Africa say to all this?

Dr. Rolf D. Baldus: Up until now they have neither been asked, nor been involved. What personally annoys me the most, is that the rich countries and their citizens are making decisions condescendingly and in a neo-colonial manner that affect nature conservation and natural resources in Africa. If I am to believe the animal rights activists and their friends in the parliaments and governments, then the Africans are totally unable to decide for themselves whether and how to use their nature and wildlife sustainably. Those who decide for them assume that Africans are not able and not wanting to comply with CITES. As they are supposedly highly corrupt, Europe and the United States have to prevent them from completely eradicating their wildlife. This is the essence of „green populism“ and it is precisely why I am accusing these green populists of racism.

Of course there are problems with the weak administrations of poor countries. Corruption is an issue that I can sing a song of. But in 13 years of work in Africa I have also learned that very significant achievements in conservation work have been reached.

Affluent Europe could learn a lot from conservation success stories in Africa. Countries like Tanzania, Namibia and Zimbabwe have put more than a quarter of their land area under protection. Only a third of it is in the form of National Parks. The rest is under sustainable hunting regimes. What should be wrong with that?

A ban on conservation hunting in Africa would destroy 75% of all wildlife sanctuaries in southern Africa and in parts of East Africa. It would result in millions of wild animals disappearing within a few years and it would cost hundreds of thousands of jobs. The green populists accept this, knowingly or unknowingly.

PIRSCH: How did the hunters respond to the challenges?

Dr. Rolf D. Baldus: Well, pretty hopelessly, with a few letters to Members of Parliament and a few articles in the hunting press. 19 years ago, I once published a satire. A Secretary of State of a Ministry of Environment gives a speech at the occasion of the final termination of hunting. After politics have cut off one slice after another of hunting rights for years, wildlife management and hunting has finally been transferred completely from hunters into the hands of Government employed rangers. The State Secretary says a word of thanks to all groups that were instrumental in this process. Last but not least he addresses the hunters and says: "A final word of thanks also goes to the hunters, who have observed what we were doing with stoicism and indifference while they were busy stalking or sitting on their high-seats in the forest."

PIRSCH: What can the hunters do then?

Dr. Rolf D. Baldus: First they should stop burying their heads in the sand like an ostrich! Sustainable hunting and hunting tourism are success stories of nature conservation. Without hunting many wildlife populations and large natural areas would no longer exist. We need to make this public knowledge. A defensive attitude does not bring us anywhere.

Secondly, we need professionals in our national hunting associations and in CIC and FACE at the international level, who specialize in international conservation and species protection and who are communication experts. We now need professional pro-hunting PR for quite some years to come. In Germany for example, this issue is presently being discussed between the German CIC delegation and the German Hunting Association. The main problem, as always, is money.

The other side, against hunting, has a few dozen salaried people, who do

exactly this, in Germany alone. Of course, one has to be aware that the opponents of hunting in Africa have also lined their pockets tremendously in the last year. For example, every time „Cecil, the Lion“ was dragged into the media, this was accompanied by a call for donations. That's the paradox: The same people who rob the African conservationists of the hunting revenues make a lot of money themselves in this process.

Now the hunters have to take money out of their pockets. It is not acceptable that hunters spend 5,000 or 50,000 euros for a hunting trip, but then shy away from giving 100 euros to their hunting association for communication purposes.

I therefore propose, that all who deal with hunting tourism, be it as clients, agents, professional hunters or operators, launch a program together: 1% of the cost of each hunting trip is donated to their national hunting association or to CIC in order to finance pro-hunting PR campaigns.

Third: "Nobody is perfect". There are shortcomings and criminal offences in African hunting too. There is much room to improve. First and foremost every hunter himself is responsible for ensuring that his hunting is in order, ethical and sustainable. Today, customers ask at the hunting shows what can be hunted, where and at what cost. This is not enough. We also need to ask how the hunting is done and whether it meets legal and ethical standards.

And last: Very important - continue to hunt in Africa! Our partners there need us.

THE INTERVIEW WAS CONDUCTED BY KATHRIN NÜSSE.



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