

Animal rightists and hunting opponents are making a new effort to abolish hunting tourism. In an interview with Kathrin Nüsse of the German hunting magazine *Pirsch*, Dr Rolf D Baldus, at the time of the interview advisor to the president of the International Council for Game and Wildlife Conservation (CIC) and since retired, explains why Africa needs hunting tourism and calls on all hunters to donate one per cent of the cost of each hunting trip to pro-hunting PR. *

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

Dr Rolf Baldus:

We are not quite that far yet, but powerful forces are working towards 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, to the front pages of international news, including the *Tagesschau*, *BBC News*, *The New York Times* and the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*. Especially hunters who are in the public limelight were and are now targeted. Then they put airlines under massive pressure, resulting in a boycott of the transport of hunting

trophies by many companies. Now they are pushing European governments, the EU Commission and the United States to restrict the import of trophies, or to put a total ban on it. This has been orchestrated in a highly professional way.

***Pirsch*: How do politicians react?**

Dr Rolf Baldus:

Politicians often follow the opinion where they suspect majorities. The anti-hunters are present everywhere – in the public, the media, on 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 parlia-

ment pushed a 'Written Declaration' in which they demanded for the commission to restrict trophy imports. [*The written declaration in the EU parliament has since then fallen through, as only 20% of the parliamentarians supported it. – Editor*]

The Dutch EU presidency organised – 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 had to be done "if we want to curb poaching and trophy hunting".

Ex-Nabu (a major German environmental NGO with an anti-hunting agenda) boss and now secretary of state in the German environment ministry, Jochen Flasbarth, received a letter from the German League for Nature, Animal Protection and Environment 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, and does so without much involvement from other ministries like agriculture or

'Africa needs hunting'



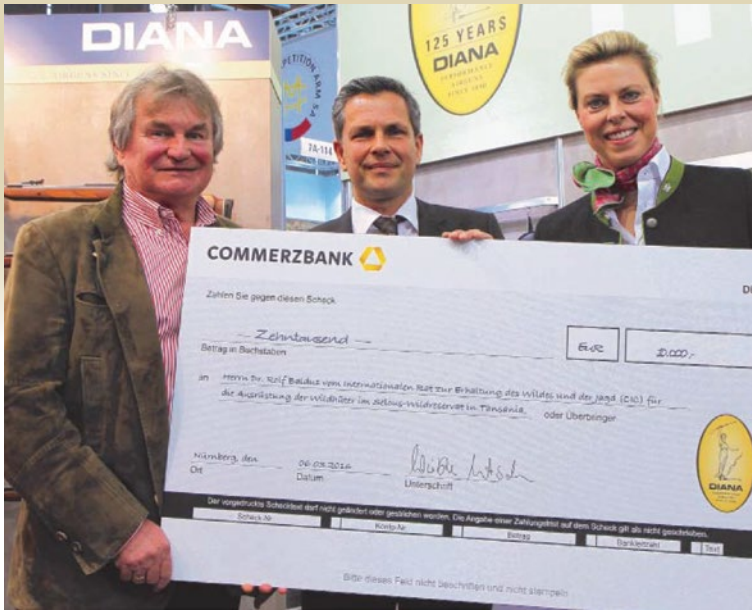


Photo: Sascha Numsen

Wiebke Utsch of Blaser and the CEO of Diana Airguns, Michael Swoboda, handed over a check for 10 000 euro to Dr Rolf D Baldus (left) at the IWA Outdoors Classic Fair 2016. The money had been generated through the auction of a special commemorative airgun, made on the occasion of the company's 120th anniversary. The funds will be used for anti-poaching in the Selous Game Reserve, Tanzania.

development cooperation, can now rely on the opinion of 91 environmental NGOs in Germany.

Pirsch: How do they justify bans on the import of hunting trophies?

Dr Rolf Baldus:

Conservation-based 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. This is mostly the case – 99.7% of all applications for trophies to be imported into Germany in the last decade adhered to strict Cites regulations.

Opponents of hunting in Africa have stopped using arguments based on facts. Instead they use simplistic, emotional assertions: ‘Trophy hunting contributes to the loss of iconic species’, the ‘Written Declaration’ of the 12 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 instead of the mind. A simple ‘no’ is enough to denounce hunting; it gives no practical alternatives or advice on how the protection of Africa’s wildlife should be financed instead.

Pirsch: Will there be import bans on trophies?

Dr Rolf Baldus:

Individual embargoes already exist in the United States and France, for example. We are dealing with restric-

tions at the moment. However, as a whole, these may act just like a ban. Reacting to a proposal by Germany, the EU decided last year to impose new import rules for some Annex II trophies, which clearly goes beyond those of Cites. And this will now continue. The EU Commission has already submitted a draft resolution with further restrictions to member countries for the forthcoming Cites Conference of the Parties next September in South Africa. [The draft resolution has since the time of the interview been submitted as a proposal with only minor amendments. – Editor] All Annex II trophies will 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 will, in practice, lead to a standstill in licensing procedures.

In Africa, 100 000 elephants and a few hundred lions are being 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 yet Europe can do no better than to impede legal hunting? All I can say to that is, “Congratulations EU Commission! You are doing a great job in 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, particularly for Annex II trophies, will overburden exporting countries with bureaucratic monsters in return for minimal improvements for species conservation.

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Pirsch: What do the affected countries in Africa say about all this?

Dr Rolf 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 affects 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 natural resources and wildlife sustainably. Those who decide for them assume that Africans are not able and not wanting to comply with Cites regulations. 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 administration of poor countries. Corruption is an issue that I can sing a song about. But in 13 years of working in Africa, I have also learned that there have been very significant achievements in conservation work.

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 this land is in the form of national parks; the rest is under sustainable hunting regimes. What could be wrong with that?

A ban on conservation hunting in Africa would destroy 75% of all wildlife sanctuaries in Southern Africa and parts of East Africa. It would result in millions of wild animals disappearing

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within a few years and 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 Baldus:

Well, they were pretty hopeless, with a few letters to members of parliament and a few articles in the hunting press. Nineteen 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 been cutting off one slice after the other of hunting rights for years, wildlife management and hunting have finally been transferred completely from hunters into the hands of government-employed rangers. The state secretary thanks 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 Baldus:

Firstly, 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 (Federation of Associations for Hunting and Conservation of the European Union) at the international level, who specialise in global conservation and species protection and who are communication experts. We now need professional, pro-hunting PR for quite a few 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, the anti-hunting brigade, has a few dozen salaried people, who do exactly this in Germany alone. Of course one has to be aware of the fact that the anti-hunters

in Africa have also lined their pockets over the last year. For example, every time that the Cecil the lion saga featured in the media, it was accompanied by a call for donations. That is the paradox: The same people who rob the African conservationists of hunting revenues make a lot of money themselves in the process.

Now the hunters have to take money out of their pockets. It is unacceptable 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 programme together: 1% of the cost of each hunting trip should be donated to their national hunting association or to CIC in order to finance pro-hunting PR campaigns.

Also remember that nobody is perfect. There are shortcomings and criminal offences in African hunting too. There is much room for improvement. 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 game can be hunted, where and at what cost. This is not enough. Hunters also need to ask how the hunting is done and whether it meets legal and ethical standards.

And lastly: Very important – we must continue to hunt in Africa! Our partners there need us.

* The article is an updated version of an interview that appeared originally in the German hunting magazine *Pirsch Jagdmagazin*, 8/2016.

Dr Rolf Baldus, a retired German civil servant, has been engaged professionally in wildlife conservation and hunting, in particular in Africa and Central Asia, for the last three decades. Amongst others he worked on behalf of the German government in Tanzanian wildlife areas for 13 years. He has been the author of several books and many articles on hunting. 🦋