

... Celebrating the world's richest continent.

NOMAD

AFRICA
ISSUE 5



THE SCRAMBLE FOR **AFRICA** 130 YEARS AFTER



BIOCARBON PARTNERS
COMMUNITY BASED FOREST
PROTECTION PROJECT
CHANGING ZAMBIA

ZIMBABWE
MINISTER CALLS
FOR TOURISM TAX
REDUCTION

SOUTH AFRICA
STILL BEHIND
ON RESPONSIBLE
TOURISM



DELTA'S

HUNTING TROPHY BAN DIVIDES SOUTH AFRICA

The American based Airliner, Delta Delta has announced a ban on hunt trophies on their flights from South Africa. The decision has divided the country between those who see the turn of the events as a victory for the conservation of nature and bio-diversity, and those who fear its economical impact on local sustainability.

Words: ALESSANDRO PARODI

The prohibition was announced by Delta Airlines on the 4th of August, with the following media statement: "Effective immediately, Delta will officially ban shipment of all lion, leopard, elephant, rhinoceros and buffalo trophies worldwide as freight." American Airlines and Air Canada swiftly followed suit, releasing equivalent statements on the same day. The five animals, known as the Big Five, are among the most characteristic symbols of South Africa. Famed for their majesty and fierceness, the Big Five were feared by the first European settlers, who hunted them to survive in the unwelcoming bushveld. History, however, has turned its tables on the old kings of southern Africa, which have been hunted or forced into captivity and are now to be safeguarded.

Immediate reactions followed Delta's ban. Both the South African and American society dissented between those who identify a lost potential in the game industry and those who call the 4th of August a landmark for the preservation of wildlife. Naturally, radical consequences are to be expected, as Delta was the main transporter of trophies to the United States. The USA is the largest consumer of wildlife hunting, importing, among other animals, about 64 percent of almost a thousand African lions legally killed every year.

It is unfortunate that, in the collective imaginary, the mighty Big Five still represent the wilderness of the continent and their sighting is an almost 'compulsory' achievement for any visitor to Africa. The bridge between enjoying their view and taking photos, to hunting them for an authentic safari 'souvenir' is, unfortunately too short. Despite the large number of game being killed in South Africa annually, the activity is regulated by both national and international laws, which, may be argued, ensure the sustainable conservation of the environment and fauna.

Against the backdrop of formal regulation is the practice of illegal poaching, which has been the root cause of the endangerment of the rhino species in South Africa.

The plague, not to be confused with other forms of hunting, has spread menacingly in the past years. The rhino losses are epidemic, fast driving them towards extinction. White rhinoceros especially are so treasured in the black market for their horn, which is hailed as a powerful remedy in Asian, especially Chinese medicine.

Adding to the woes of wildlife hunting and illegal poaching is the so called 'canned hunting'. The phrase defines a trophy hunt in which an animal is kept in a confined area, such as in a fenced-in area, to guarantee the hunter achieving a "kill" with virtually no effort and absolutely no risk. Canned hunting is more often used in the case of lions. The creation of reserves where they are bred and killed is accepted by the Law but has been opposed by South African public opinion, particularly sensitive to the defence of local nature.

Chris Mercer, Director of the Campaign Against Canned Hunting (CACH), describes the ban as "terribly important" to conserve local wildlife. He mentioned a specific victory which they gained with authorities in Australia, where importing lion trophies became illegal earlier this year.. And he adds: "the current laws are not working. Far more needs to change to arrest the catastrophic decline of wildlife in Africa,

■ Despite the large number of game being killed in South Africa annually, the activity is regulated by both national and international laws, which, may be argued, ensure the sustainable conservation of the environment and fauna.





particularly for rhino, lion and eland”.

Mercer, furthermore, salutes the step taken by Delta as having both financial and humanitarian benefits in the long run: “The market requires up to 30 percent of any country’s land, producing as little as 1 percent of the GDP. The same territories, adapted to farming, would boost the production of primary resources and increase employment”. Canned hunting is one of many industries built in Africa driven by foreign demand, whose objective does not consider the needs of locals.

Delta’s course is not being lauded by all stakeholders. Adri Kitshoff, CEO of the Professional Hunters’ Association of South Africa (PHASA), expresses the hope that Delta will reconsider its position: “There are strict regulations for hunting and the export of trophies. Delta’s embargo does not consider the entire picture and is driven by people’s emotions. Professional hunting has the scope of safeguarding biodiversity and does not diminish the gene pool of the animals”. United Parcel Service (UPS)’s public relations director Susan Rosenberg also criticized what has been termed as decisions based on emotions. To the Washington Post, Rosenberg stated: “There are many items shipped in international commerce that may spark controversy. The views on what is appropriate for shipment are as varied as the audiences that hold these

views”.

The impact of hunting on the local economy is conspicuous. Statistics by the Rhino Resource Centre (RRC) quantify that the “estimated average turnover per rhino hunted in the last four years (trophy fee plus daily rates for 10 days for hunter plus two observers) is about \$27 250 (using yearly average prices and exchange rates)”. Unofficial data refer to more than \$100 million spent in South Africa every year by hunters.

The main claim of CACH, however, is that hunting does not produce employment, as, in Mercer’s words, “only 3 or 4 employees are required in a reserve. Farming moves more human capital, but the policies introduced since 1994 made it more profitable for a land owner to convert into the game industry”.

Adri Kitshoff tackles the claim of hunting’s supposed positive environmental benefits, pointing out that “hunting takes place in marginal areas, where there was no farming. There is nothing else that the community can benefit from. In Botswana, where several hunting projects were stopped, tourism decreased and human conflict arose against the wild animals, which are now seen as pests”.

Charlaine Baartjes, Managing Director of EcoPartners, explains that many factors are related to trophy hunting and ethical reasons are not enough to judge Delta’s ban. “Some of the species need safe-

guarding, and their gene pool might be affected positively or negatively by policies about hunting. Other species are considered as pests in determined areas, as for example elephants in the north of the country. Furthermore, epidemiology has to be taken into account. In particular, the transport of water buffaloes is potentially harmful for the cattle as it can cause the spread of the foot and mouth disease”.

Delta Airlines did not release any further statements on the matter. The conduct of the company was implemented regardless of the legality of trophy hunting, as it followed popular pressure resulting from the killing of Zimbabwe’s beloved Cecil the Lion, by the American Walter Palmer. Nevertheless, the ban will change the shape of recreational travelling into South Africa and its application is likely to cause a reduction of hunting facilities in the country.

Despite the controversies on the effects of such decisions, the parties involved will have to take appropriate measures to ensure a sustainable transition. The changes should be made to result in an increased awareness about the state of wildlife in South Africa, rather than to the loss of interest about its conservation; rather develop alternative forms of tourism which will allow the increase of employment, rather than the economical downfall of the areas affected. ■