

Should Kenya Revisit Hunting as a Conservation Tool?



Felix Patton is a rhino ecologist. He has an MSc in Conservation Biology and a PhD based on research on individual rhino identification and social behaviour. He is a frequent contributor to SWARA.

A paper published by two Kenyan academics in December 2016* appears to have been largely ignored although it recommended that Kenya re-introduce sport hunting to save its wildlife.

The main finding was that “there is evidence that wildlife populations especially for elephants, rhinos and buffaloes are increasing in the countries where sport hunting is encouraged and the reverse is the case where it has been restricted or banned.”

Kenya was once a prime destination for sport hunters until 1977 when big game hunting was banned in light of declining wildlife populations and in the prospect that these would then improve. However research suggests that habitat

loss and poaching resulted in further declining populations especially for elephants, rhinos, zebras, giraffes, lions and leopards amongst others.

A literature search by the academics suggested that sport hunting could provide incentives for landowners to conserve and restore wildlife as a land use alternative, could generate revenue for government, private and community landholders, and could reduce human-wildlife conflicts and poaching since wildlife has a value. But for these benefits to be realised, any trophy hunting industry must be regulated and accountable.

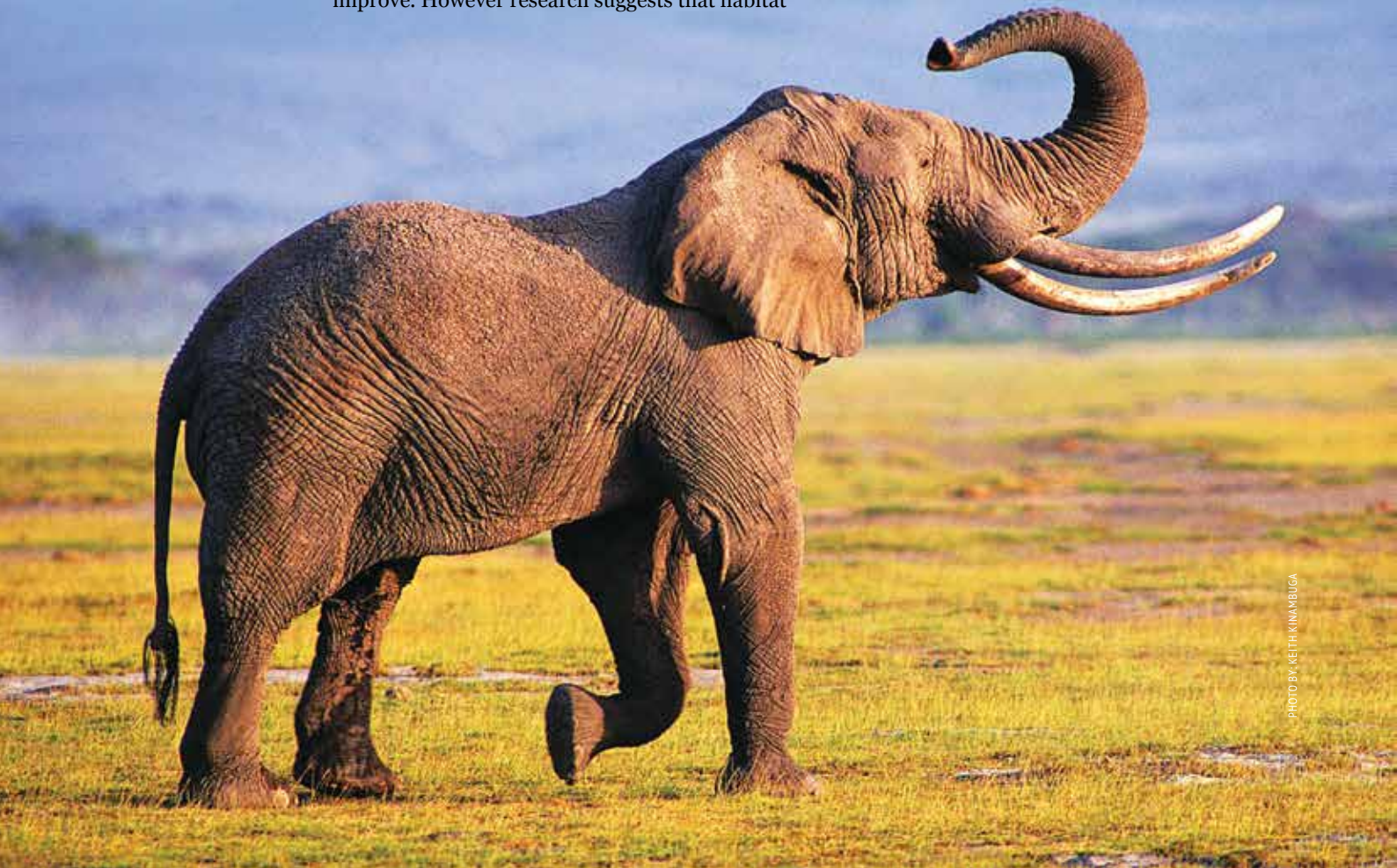




PHOTO BY: UGANDA WILDLIFE SAFARIS

IT IS OFTEN THE CASE THAT HUNTING AREAS ARE FENCED OFF WHICH FRAGMENTS THE HABITAT INTO SMALLER BLOCKS AND MAY PREVENT MIGRATORY PATTERNS.

The authors point out that there can be negative conservation impacts from poorly managed sport hunting, including over harvesting, artificial selection for rare or exaggerated features, genetic or phenotypic impacts (such as reduced horn size), introduction of species or subspecies beyond their natural range, and predator removal. However, understanding these drawbacks might enable appropriate legislation and regulation to be introduced to prevent these shortcomings, but the rules would need to be enforced and not corrupted.

One essential element of regulation was found to be the need for accurate species population counts from which quota levels for hunting can be set while the levels of poaching must be taken into account. If the hunting quota and/or poaching rate is greater than the reproductive rate of the species, populations would decline. An unsustainably high hunting quota for lions in Africa has led to their decline.

It is often the case that hunting areas are fenced off which fragments the habitat into smaller blocks and may prevent migratory patterns.

A herd of Eland antelope in Karamoja, Uganda.



\$2,500

Amount hunters pay as trophy fee to hunt a Eland antelope in Uganda.

THEODORE ROOSEVELT

When there is talk of sport hunting, South Africa and Tanzania are usually mentioned but perhaps Kenya's closest wildlife associate is Uganda where sport hunting has recently been renewed.

Hunting was widely practiced in Uganda from the early 1900s and particularly made famous by the exploits of Theodore Roosevelt and his Rhino Camp in Western Uganda in 1909/10. In 1963 after Uganda gained independence, the Game (Preservation and Control) Act introduced Controlled Hunting Areas which regulated the hunting of scheduled species. However after some 90 per cent of Ugandan wildlife was decimated during the regime of Idi Amin, hunting was made illegal in 1979 to allow for wildlife populations to recover.

In 1996 the government passed the Wildlife Statute which introduced Wildlife User Rights - a right granted to a person, community or organisation to make use of wildlife in accordance with a grant or 'licence'. The Uganda Wildlife Act of 2000 grants Wildlife User Rights to motivate communities to sustainably manage wildlife on both communal and private land based on the principle that economic benefits from wildlife can lead to better custodianship of wildlife resources. One of the six ways to benefit was from hunting.

In 1999, the Uganda Wildlife Authority (UWA) introduced a cropping programme for impala in the Lake Mburo area to supply certified impala meat to selected restaurants in Kampala in hopes that significant returns would accrue



TOP: Female sitatunga at the Mayanja River.

BELOW RIGHT: Nile bushbuck in the Kafu River basin.



\$5,000

Amount hunters pay as trophy fee to hunt a Sese Island sitatunga in Uganda.

to local landowners. The scheme saw the first implementation of the hunting Wildlife User Right but the quota set was so low that returns did not cover costs.

So, in 2001 at the end of the pilot cropping programme, UWA, believing that some wildlife populations had recovered sufficiently to allow hunting, started a pilot project on private land of around 100 km² adjacent to Lake Mburo National Park to test the feasibility of community based sport hunting as a wildlife management tool. A family run business Game Trails was chosen to implement it. UWA gave annual quotas to the communities to hunt animals such as impalas, zebras, topis, hippos, baboons, duikers and buffaloes.

The project was considered a success after three years with poaching and illegal charcoal burning reduced as local communities received financial benefit from the hunting. The project was expanded to other areas. In 2009, Uganda Wildlife Safaris were granted a licence to manage, under quota, game on ranches in the Aswa-Lolim area outside of the Murchison Falls National Park. The landowners were to receive 50 per cent

of trophy fees with the other 50 per cent shared between UWA and the local government.

However, hunting was suspended throughout Uganda in 2010 to review and improve the quota setting process against new population surveys and to ensure that benefits were being properly shared. The quota level maximum was set at two per cent of a species total population but the population counts were considered by many as inaccurate.

The suspension was lifted in 2011. Hunting safari outfitters bid for the available hunting concessions offered by UWA. With only five outfitters, the bidding was highly competitive. The successful bidder signed a collaborative agreement with UWA and the district involved which, in turn, has a Wildlife Association.

THERE ARE SEVERAL TROPHY HUNTING CONCESSIONS VARYING IN SIZE FROM AROUND 210 KM² TO 5,000 KM².



PHOTOS BY: UGANDA WILDLIFE SAFARIS

UWA is responsible for law enforcement in the concession areas and rangers from UWA accompany the hunt and may even be stationed on the concession. Especially where incentivised by the concessionaire, improved security against bushmeat poaching benefits wildlife populations.

There are several trophy hunting concessions varying in size from around 210 km² to 5,000 km². In the Karamoja region, three community-owned hunting areas have been designated Community Wildlife Areas in which local people are allowed to live, graze livestock and other regulated activities if they do not adversely affect wildlife. Other concessions include some government-owned Wildlife Reserves such as Ajai (although it is believed that hunting is not being practiced there at present) and Game Reserves such as Bokora-Matheniko, and designated areas such as privately-owned ranches within the Kafu River basin. Hunting within a National Park is strictly forbidden.

Agreements for hunting in these areas stipulate that a significant percentage of the trophy fees goes to the local communities and another percentage to the government via UWA. Fees vary depending on the quality of the hunting block, the targeted wildlife species and the negotiations made between the parties to the agreement.

However, it is difficult to find examples of where the districts have spent any income to the benefit of their communities.

Uganda Wildlife Safaris revenue from hunting in 2016

Landowners	\$90,000	4.5%
District wildlife associations	\$156,000	42.5%
District local government	\$23,000	6%
UWA	\$44,000	12%
Anti-poaching funds	\$54,000	15%
TOTAL	\$367,000	

Source: Uganda Wildlife Safaris

A group of Buffalo in Karamoja Uganda.



\$2,000

Amount hunters pay as trophy fee to hunt a Nile buffalo in Uganda

Sought after species by hunters in Uganda include the Ssesse Island sitatunga, the Uganda kob, Nile buffalo, Chandler's mountain reedbuck and the East African eland. Individual hippo and leopard can be hunted if they are considered problem animals.

While not all hunters are interested in taking a trophy (usually the horns), example trophy fees for each species appear to be \$5,000 for Ssesse Island sitatunga, \$2,000 for Nile buffalo and \$2,500 for eland, \$2,000 hippo and Uganda kob \$2,950. Where a leopard is said to be a nuisance, it may be offered for sport hunting at \$5,000 for community development.

In addition to the specific hunts that clients undertake, they also get to interact with local communities and sample local cultures and may take tourist visits to National Parks to see more of the wildlife that Uganda has to offer.



PHOTO BY: UGANDA WILDLIFE SAFARIS

A draft hunting quota is set by UWA as the CITES (Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora) Scientific Authority, through the technical team called the Wildlife Use Rights Committee composed of technical staff within UWA and representatives from Ministry of Tourism Wildlife & Antiquities and the Ministry of Agriculture Animal Industry and Fisheries It is presented to the UWA Board of Trustees for approval and then certified by the CITES Management Authority which is the Ministry of Tourism, Wildlife and Antiquities

There are many regulations to control hunting, prevent illegal hunting practices and for the import of firearms. No mention of hunting on the UWA website and difficulty in acquiring recent reports on hunting is a concern especially by those opposing hunting as a conservation tool.

Aside from ethical questions surrounding the killing of wildlife for sport, the high levels of income earned by hunting companies can

Ugandan Kob in Aswa-Lolim.



\$2,950

Amount hunters pay as trophy fee to hunt a Ugandan Kob.

result in intense competition to win concessions, creating an environment ripe for corruption. Equally, due to the high cost of a hunt, there is the incentive for outfitters to engage in illegal practices to ensure a satisfied client.

Additionally, some have questioned the methods and results of estimating species populations from which quotas are based and which could lead to unsustainable off-takes.

Since sport hunting may have the potential to improve livelihoods in local communities around protected areas, may produce funds for authorities to manage wildlife, may lead to reduced poaching and thereby increase wildlife populations, should Kenya look again at its ban? It's a matter of opinion. ●

FIND OUT MORE

Read *Sport hunting as a sustainable wildlife conservation strategy in Kenya: prospects and challenges* by Prof. Evaristus Irandu and Esther Makunyi