

By Kimberley L. Kanapeckas



*Africa is potent, and those of us who fight for her best interest are as courageous and passionate as they come. And we might not even come from Africa...*

That I am a young American should not call for a dismissal of my relevance to the conservation of southern Africa's wildlife. While I am not a self-proclaimed expert, I do stay informed as to the goings-on of the international hunting world at large. Cooperation and interaction with WomenHunters®, the African Hunters Guild, and other sporting and conservation organizations facilitates the extent to which those of us living overseas can participate regularly in the safari industry. Active in game conservation, I have worked and have been educated alongside top wildlife veterinarians and game wardens to ensure the health and quality of the most sought-after big game in my home country. Opportunities to remain connected with Africa are invaluable to me. It is a privilege to have several close friends who run hunting concessions and related businesses in South Africa and Zimbabwe. I am privy to first-hand accounts of the Zimbabwean land seizures as well as other related current issues affecting Africa. International hunters require the most up-to-date access to current legislative, scientific, and political happenings in order to make responsible and profitable decisions.

One would not be exaggerating in saying I yearn to do everything possible to go against the popular current of African safari suspicion and anti-hunting sentiment. My life is not as far removed from southern Africa's bosveld as the miles might indicate. Balanced insight is imbibed with experiences I have gathered from listening and learning from my father, PHs, and other seasoned sportsmen in the field. I respect Africa's age-old way, and as a young biologist-researcher, carry the hope that more of us can continue to collaborate for the benefit of

Africa, her wildlife, and those who enjoy and utilize her resources.

Yesterday I came across a letter from a dear South African friend who wrote to me a simple but penetrating phrase: "Africa is no place for 'sissies.'" Granted the loaded term "sissy" might not be the most sophisticated word choice, it undeniably speaks volumes about appreciating the real experience of Africa. Despite the drought that wreaked havoc on her family's hunting concession, this strong woman shared with me a hope that God would send rain for the herds of game... Rain came shortly thereafter. I would like to share with you, the reader, a different rain of relief from across the Atlantic: There are people not currently on the continent with grounded visions of working trans-nationally to see that the safari hunting tradition of Africa perseveres! What's more, there are responsible young hunter-naturalists with such visions. The international scope of the African Hunters Guild and Safari Club International is a prime example of how such visions and dedication can be effectively harnessed and applied.

The Dark Continent has no place for sissies or know-it-alls. That which contributes to sustaining Africa and allowing her to flourish is often grossly misunderstood and misrepresented by outsiders. During presentations at professional meetings and conferences, I come into contact with scientists armed with little true knowledge of Africa and of hunting and realize that many theories in the academic sphere of "African conservation biology" lack much to be desired. In my judgment, this problem resembles that of "book-smarts" and learnedness overshadowing-not complementing-common sense. These researchers arm themselves with just enough knowledge of an overly romanticized Africa to be dangerous.

I am most grateful for my upbringing in America, but I admit it is difficult for those of us who recognize the truth of Africa-and happen to be American-to be surrounded by people who cannot or refuse to accept Africa's unique and oftentimes harsh method of operation. The ideology of protectionism should not eclipse the science of species management. Legislation spawned from those who tend to impose their own values and criteria for management in an ecosystem they have "wrongly pegged" can take root, gain ground, and prove injurious. For goodness sake, one cannot take ethology studies of the African elephant (*L. africana*) from a UK or US zoo (or worse yet, a film production) and subsequently infer that the elephant is a good-natured, harmless and defenseless buffoon (that, courtesy of Fantasia, pirouettes in a pink tutu and escapes from mice on tiptoe). On the contrary, the hunter having followed the spoor of an old bull olifant through his home territory-having witnessed the creature's natural habits-recognizes that this massive, unpredictable, wild animal is equipped to plunder anything.

The failure of outsiders (and insiders) to understand the reality of Africa is detrimental to the continent's wellbeing. Be that as it may, we mustn't lament too long, lest the opposition gain

ground...we must get in motion and persevere now! Africa is potent, and those of us who fight for her best interest are as courageous and passionate as they come. We must not underestimate our power to protect Africa's resources. Safari hunting is an effective, efficient, and self-funding way to conserve wildlife, provide immediate benefits to rural people in remote areas, and promote biodiversity. The knowledge of the veteran African sportsman is a prized resource that should be tapped-not questioned-by the rest of the world. No matter the context, success lies in adhering to the basics: having such a veteran with proper ideals directing the ambition of a knowledge-hungry apprentice. Then, student potential is neither wasted nor used for the opposition; instead, potential is invested to ensure a promising future for the continent home to the most ecologically diverse selection of cultures, landscapes, and creatures in the world.

There are people not currently on the continent that still understand and fight for Africa's best interest. Some find themselves a small yet mighty voice among the noise and clamor, and others unite through commendable organizations like SCI. I am grateful for the medical professionals, lawyers, businessmen, educators, theologians, and scientists that hunt in America, hunters that donate their time, talents, and funds to aid in Africa's game regulation. Hunter-naturalists from every land are too passionate about the utilization of hunting in African conservation to be discouraged or silenced when our vision for cooperation is not accurately represented.

Nearly everybody has heard the saying that "everything in Africa bites, but the safari bug is the worst of all." Yes, from the other side of the ocean I chuckle with knowing consent: no tsetse fly could compare to the urge to escape to the bush! Since childhood, I have escaped to Africa through the works of Peter Hathaway Capstick, James Mellon, Robert Ruark, and Beryl Markham whenever I couldn't break away from the constraints of society by my own power. The beauty of the safari is boundless, nearly indescribable and uncontainably wild. PHs awaken before daybreak day after day to brave tough conditions and share the experience of the hunt with their clients. Clients return again and again to participate in these once-in-a-lifetime adventures with knowledgeable professionals that frequently become sincere friends. And how remarkable it is that the returns of the modern safari and hunting industry benefit the very animals we enjoy!

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