



Written by [Selwyn Duke](#) on July 7, 2022

Internet Cheers African Trophy Hunter's Murder. But Was He Really a Wildlife Savior?

"Hunter Was Hunted," reads the headline. The story concerns the murder of professional "trophy hunter" Riaan Naude, found shot to death next to his Toyota truck, which had become disabled on a lonely hinterland road in Limpopo, South Africa. The killers, two men we're told, fled in a vehicle after stealing the victim's firearm. But apparently there are some other people with as little regard for Naude's life as the murderers:

Most of those commenting on his death on the internet.



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Evoking this reaction is that Naude ran the business Pro Hunt Africa, which offers "eco-hunting" safaris in which people pay hefty sums to bag African wildlife, including giraffes and "Big Five" game such as lions and rhinos. Pictures of Naude [posing](#) with such felled creatures inspired comments at [MSN.com](#) such as, "It's called Karma. Good riddance," and "Yes, good riddance to BAD RUBBISH. One less useless human mouth to feed." But what if, just perhaps, something seemingly unthinkable is the case?

What if Naude was actually serving as a wildlife savior?

I should preface what follows by stating that I'm not a hunter; I have never hunted. I say this with neither pride nor regret, and I respect honorable hunters. I do eat meat (lustfully), but am also the kind of man who'll put bugs outside when possible rather than dispatch them; I don't like killing anything unnecessarily. I have done much target shooting, and my camping expeditions include three weeks in the North Maine Woods, where the lakes are cold enough in August to make your toes curl. My point is that I'm not just some computer-bound journalism geek; I've spent time in the outdoors and love the natural world. I don't have an emotional horse in the eco-hunting race, and, if anything, my profile might suggest I'd oppose the practice. Yet I also know something:

The lucrative trophy hunting trade can preserve African wildlife by ensuring that threatened species are *worth more extant than extinct*.

Consider the story about one of Zimbabwe's largest private wildlife areas, the Buby Valley Conservancy. In 2016, Buby [announced](#) that its more than 500 lions exceeded its carrying capacity and that, consequently, it would have to cull approximately 200 individuals. It then had two choices:

Expend resources eliminating the animals themselves.

Or let wealthy Westerners pay perhaps \$50,000 to shoot one lion and possibly collect millions that could fund conservation efforts or, in the least, help fuel the Zimbabwean economy.

Which is the better choice?

National Geographic itself, hardly a pro-hunting magazine, wrote about trophy hunting's benefits in 2007. Citing a study led by a conservation biologist, *Nat Geo* [informed](#) that the "southern white



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rhinoceros grew from just 50 animals a century ago to over 11,000 wild individuals today, because hunts gave game ranchers a financial incentive to reintroduce the animal.”

And what an incentive it is. “According to a recent study, in the 23 African countries that allow sport hunting, 18,500 tourists pay over \$200 million (U.S.) a year to hunt lions, leopards, elephants, warthogs, water buffalo, impala, and rhinos,” *Nat Geo* also reported.

Yet critics are none too pleased. As *Africa Geographic* [related](#) in 2016, trophy hunting proponents “argue that this revenue goes back into conservation and community upliftment schemes but separate reports, by Economists at Large, the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) and Humane Society International questioned the validity of these claims[,] stating that most of the money is for profit by private landowners and government officials.”

This does sound more likely than not. It also misses the point. The late Rush Limbaugh would, when apropos, mention that there’s a good reason cows aren’t in danger of extinction but rather are plentiful everywhere: There’s an incentive to breed them because they’re used widely for food.

No one is suggesting we all start dining on sautéed [panthera leo](#), only that Limbaugh made an airtight point: Increasing something’s “production” is accomplished by making it highly *marketable*. Animals are no exception.

So while some complain that these trophy hunting operations are private entities “driven only by profit,” what if they are? The bottom line is that if you’re making millions a year off African hunts, you’ll darn well make sure extinction doesn’t end your business.

Realize, too, that as the heartbreaking stories of mass lion poisonings evidence, ([here](#), [here](#), and [here](#)) many Africans consider such animals pests. While I’m as bothered by this as most people, Westerners probably shouldn’t get too high and mighty. In 2006 in Germany, a liberal place where people would be aghast at trophy hunting, [they killed](#) one of their few wild brown bears (they’d been reintroduced after being wiped out) because they considered it a “problem bear” for being a bear and doing unbearable things such as killing sheep and chickens. Well, African large animals don’t just kill livestock, but also [thousands of people](#) annually.

Africans with an incentive to kill these majestic beasts can be counterbalanced by Africans who, enticed by trophy hunting profits, have an incentive to keep the animals alive and thus will open their private lands to them. It has worked, too. “Private hunting operations in these countries control more than 540,000 square miles (1.4 million square kilometers) of land,” *Nat Geo* also tells us. “That’s 22 percent more land than is protected by national parks.”

So final question: What will maximize threatened species’ survival chances? Having national parks and private lands open to them?

Or having available just national parks, which can be bedeviled by poachers?

Of course, some people will still react emotionally, having an antipathy for hunting and for the world’s Riaan Naudes and complaining that the private reserves are about cash, not conservation. But rather than griping, they should pool their monies and create an African reserve that, by their lights, is sufficiently eco-oriented and employs trophy hunting either not at all or only as required to fund their pursuits. That would be a noble endeavor — and a lot more helpful than activism that could ensure Africa’s most beautiful beasts aren’t worth keeping around.



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