



Written by [Selwyn Duke](#) on November 19, 2017

Trump's Trophy-hunt Troubles: What if Big-game Hunting Saves the Elephant?

Is the road to the elephants' graveyard paved with good intentions? This is an apropos question now that President Trump, after reversing a 2014 Obama-era ban on the import of elephant trophies from Zimbabwe and Zambia, has put the decision on hold in the face of withering criticism.

The backlash is understandable. Elephants, and other large African game, are magnificent, much-romanticized animals whose populations have dropped drastically the last few decades. But what if, counterintuitively, controlled legal hunting of these species can ensure their survival?



The most compelling argument is this: Unlike Westerners, Africans view these animals as nuisances; the creatures kill their livestock, destroy their crops and at times harm humans (I knew a Kenyan priest whose nephew was killed some years ago by an elephant). Consequently, Africans sometimes try to eradicate them — e.g., the poisoning of lions.

But the large fees and other revenue trophy hunting brings — perhaps \$40,000 to \$70,000 for a lion or elephant, a fortune in Africa — create an incentive to keep these creatures around. Wealthier Africans will open their private lands to them, protect them and facilitate their breeding.

This isn't just theoretical. As liberal *Slate* just [reported](#), "A [2001 paper published in Science](#) points to how legalizing trophy hunting in Zimbabwe has 'doubled the area of the country under wildlife management relative to the 13% in state protected areas,' since the program at the time included private lands. 'As a result, the area of suitable land available to elephants and other wildlife has increased, reversing the problem of habitat loss and helping to maintain a sustained population increase in Zimbabwe's already large elephant population.'"

As for a specific example, *National Geographic* [wrote](#) last year:

The Bulye Valley Conservancy is a privately owned wildlife area, or to put it another way, it is a business. The fact that it is a well-run business is the reason why it is one of the greatest conservation successes in Africa, converting from cattle to wildlife in 1994 (only 22 years ago) and now hosting Zimbabwe's largest contiguous lion population at one of the highest densities in Africa, as well as the third largest black rhino population in the world (after Kruger and Etosha).

This is only possible because it is a business, and is self-sufficient in generating the funds to maintain fences, roads, pay staff, manage the wildlife, pump water, and support the surrounding communities — all extremely necessary factors involved in keeping wildlife alive in Africa.

For the record, I have no dog in this race. I've never hunted, and I'm the kind of person who'll stop his car to rescue a turtle from the road or put a bug outside rather than kill it. I have a St. Francis-like love



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of Creation. But I also know that, as Ben Franklin warned, “Passion governs, and she never governs wisely.”

And passion is leading here, causing a backlash against Trump from left, right and center, from Bohemian film star Brigitte Bardot to rightist radio raconteur Michael Savage. As for Savage, on whose show I once had the pleasure of being a regular guest (until the Duke species became extinct there), he [wrote](#) Thursday:

Permitting the importation of elephant trophies? Are you kidding? This is a stereotype of the ugly Republican ... on steroids. Everything the left says about the insensitive, earth-killing, animal destroying, oafish Republican is coming to fruition all in one move. Who advised you on this Mr. President? You still have time to reverse this order and restore common decency. Stop the importation of elephant trophies and stop it NOW. If you do not do this you will forever lose the independent, animal-loving voter.

This may be true, as a commenter at *American Thinker* evidences, [writing](#), “If Trump allows this barbarity I will not be able to vote for him again. Many ‘forgotten Americans’ who embraced Trump will turn away from him over this.” Sadly, though, this may be an example of good intentions leading to bad outcomes — owing to a lot of blinding passion.

Like it or not, your and my concern over animals is what Africans might call a “First World problem.” We’re comfortable, wealthy and safe and grow up watching cartoons in which beasts are anthropomorphized, with the lions, tigers and bears (and elephants) talking and laughing and singing. The reality is that if you were three inches high, your cat would toss you around sadistically before ripping you to shreds.

This brings us to the African perspective, [related well](#) by medical researcher Goodwell Nzou in the 2015 *New York Times* op-ed “In Zimbabwe, We Don’t Cry for Lions”:

In my village in Zimbabwe, surrounded by wildlife conservation areas, no lion has ever been beloved, or granted an affectionate nickname. They are objects of terror.

When I was 9 years old, a solitary lion prowled villages near my home. After it killed a few chickens, some goats and finally a cow, we were warned to walk to school in groups and stop playing outside. My sisters no longer went alone to the river to collect water or wash dishes; my mother waited for my father and older brothers, armed with machetes, axes and spears, to escort her into the bush to collect firewood.

A week later, my mother gathered me with nine of my siblings to explain that her uncle had been attacked but escaped with nothing more than an injured leg. The lion sucked the life out of the village: No one socialized by fires at night; no one dared stroll over to a neighbor’s homestead.

I’m not suggesting we adopt an African attitude; we’re called to be good shepherds of the Earth, and thank God we have the luxury of being such. But there’s a happy medium between African fear and, sometimes, contempt, and blind Western romanticism-cum-nature worship. Moreover, to solve problems in Africa, the remedies must factor in African attitudes and not be shaped solely by Western attitudes.

Speaking of which, Savage wrote, “Remember [sic] Mr. President, we are the elephant. I am the elephant, you are the elephant.” Well, I suppose the Hindu may say “We are the cow,” but we eat cows and wear leather. The Muslim may say “We are not the pig,” but we still have bacon and sausage. And the vegan may find the eating of any animal flesh abhorrent, but why are cows, pigs and chickens not



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endangered despite our consumption of millions of them annually?

If anyone can explain why the laws of the market and man's nature would be suspended in Africa, I'm all ears. But conservation efforts by African governments that are generally weak and/or corrupt may not save the lions, rhinos and elephants. Rendering them monetarily worthless to the law-abiding may ensure their destruction by the lawless (poachers). Game preserves are just that — *preserves*.

It's the difference between fishing out a body of water and creating self-sustaining fish farms. A fisherman could, conceivably, pull the last member of a species from the ocean, either indifferent to or unaware of having done so. But does a fish farmer let his fish go extinct?

It's also the difference between having just the government try to perpetuate the species (i.e., wildlife preserves), and in addition harnessing the power of the market to perpetuate these species. Is this really a tough decision?

Then again, we could just get emotional, virtue-signal and watch Africa's greatest fauna go the way of the dinosaurs.



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