

# **What are the Risks and Threats for Hunting Tourism in Tajikistan? - A Hunter's Perspective -**

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In the first half of the 20th century it was a privilege of the rich elites in Europe and the USA to travel to distant countries in Africa or Central Asia for hunting. Meanwhile it has become affordable for the middle class to hunt zebra and springbuck in Namibia, buffalo in Zimbabwe, maral in Kazakhstan or ibex and Marco Polo in Tajikistan. Such hunting tourism has developed into a major source of revenue in many countries, and at the same time it has boosted conservation.

Nevertheless such hunting tourism has increasingly come under pressure. It has turned into a fragile industry despite its positive achievements.

## **Hunting Tourism under Pressure**

The wise use of natural resources is a basic principle of major international conventions such as CITES and - most importantly - the CBD, the Convention on Biological Diversity. The principle was enshrined for the first time in the World Conservation Strategy of IUCN in the year 1980.

In recent years, however, the "animal welfare and animal rights doctrine" has gained importance worldwide. This should not be mixed up with serious and reputable conservation organisations such as WWF, FZS (Frankfurt Zoological Society) or Panthera, which aim at conserving nature by practical action and which are not ideology-bound.

Many different forms of this doctrine exist. There are, for example, "animal welfare" organizations, which do not entirely reject the principle that humans should be allowed to use animals, provided it is done humanely and the use is justified and unavoidable. On the extreme side of the spectrum are the hard-core "animal rights" protagonists who reject basically all use of animals including consumption. Each individual animal, in their opinion, should be allocated the same basic rights as humans. They should not be exploited for any human purpose. As much as they may differ, these organizations have one thing in common: they all totally oppose any form of hunting. For them this is an archaic occupation that is no longer needed for the survival of mankind. Instead it happens for sports or in order to obtain trophies. It is led by disreputable, mainly male instincts, and it violates the protection of animals and must be terminated. Whether or not sustainable hunting would indeed contribute to species conservation is irrelevant to them, as the individual animal must be protected irrespective of the effects relating to the whole species. These organizations are primarily led by belief or ideology and by

commercial or profit interests, and it is therefore not possible to find a compromise with them for practical conservation action. They are also not approachable with practical solutions for conservation. In their view, hunting must be stopped, irrespective of the effects on wildlife populations or on the local people who benefit from hunting.

To simplify, I call all these organizations the “anti-hunting movement”. They are a typical middle-class phenomenon of the urban societies of rich countries. Around the world there exist thousands of such organizations meanwhile, and their total income, which mainly comes from donations of members of the public, amounts to several hundred million of Euros every year. To give just a few names, I would like to mention the Humane Society, People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA), the International Fund for Animal Welfare (IFAW) and the Born Free Foundation. The list is long, as there are many organizations, which consist only of a handful of people. A number of the more obscure ones have even crossed the borderline to terrorism. They accept violence as a mean to reach their objectives.

The movement has meanwhile developed into a major industry as a result of their high earnings. Most of the money is used for employing staff, running the organisations, publicity and advertisement in order to generate more revenues. Very little of the earnings is actually used for the preservation of animals and nearly nothing goes into proper conservation. The business model is extremely successful, and, therefore, these organisations grow quickly and become politically more and more important, as they have much money to invest in public relations and marketing. To give you one example from Germany: The many anti-hunting organisations in Germany certainly employ around several dozens of well trained and qualified people who deal with international species conservation, protection of wild animals and international hunting, whereas the hunters do not have one single employee to look into these issues from the hunters' side. Consequently the public, journalists, the political parties and the administrations are permanently flooded with information from these groups, whereas the voice of the hunters barely exists.

### **What Has the Anti-Hunting Movement Achieved?**

International hunting used to be a marginal topic in the international press. It was rarely mentioned. This has changed completely since last year. Trophy hunting makes headlines and is international news. Millions of people feel motivated to comment in the social media and politicians, and political parties jump on the bandwagon and include the fight against hunting in their political agenda. This all came with a very old male lion in Zimbabwe, nicknamed “Cecil”, which was killed by an US hunter, a dentist. He shot the lion with bow and arrow at night in artificial light and wounded it only. The beast was not followed immediately, but only found the next day. The hunt might have violated some administrative regulations, but was not illegal as such, and no court case was ever opened. However, it was just another example of doubtful ethics, of bad hunting, and it served the purpose of orchestrating an international campaign, which the world had never seen before. In the heyday of this campaign there were up to 12,000 articles and reports in newspapers, TV and radio-programmes per day. The anti-hunting movement had organized the perfect storm, which mobilized millions of people against hunting and

at the same time poured millions of dollars into the coffers of the anti-hunters.

The political fruits could be harvested quickly. Over 40 airlines banned the transport of certain hunting trophies. France, the Netherlands and the USA banned the import of certain hunting trophies. There were numerous attempts in the European Parliament, in individual European countries and in the USA to ban all imports of hunting trophies. As a result of all this political uproar it has become unpleasant, even dangerous for public figures or important business people to become connected with hunting tourism. They either go hunting clandestinely or go golfing instead now. This is one reason why the number of hunters has already fallen considerably in many African countries.

### **What Does this all Mean for Central Asia?**

So far the battle against hunting tourism has centred on Africa. Why was Central Asia left aside until now? The reason is simple: The battle is fought over the media, and therefore charismatic animals like elephants, rhinos and lions are in the centre of the campaigns. Couch potatoes and urban animal lovers get wet eyes when they see the photo of such an animal, killed by a hunter. At the same time nearly everybody in the USA and Europe knows the national parks in Africa, the animal migration in the Serengeti and the elephant- and rhino-poaching crisis. The belief that all animals in Africa are endangered is widespread.

The wildlife of Central Asia is mainly unknown in the public. Only hunters have heard of Marco Polo sheep, and even they in most cases do not know what a markhor is. Central Asia as a region is also less known as compared to Africa.

Nevertheless, it is amazing that the international campaigns have spared Central Asia so far. However, this part of the world will have its turn too. This is only a matter of time. Campaigns need new sensations from time to time. You can expect any day a headline like "Rich doctor from country x or y kills the world's rarest mountain goat in the Pamir mountains". Eight weeks ago "Die Welt", one of Germany's leading daily newspapers carried already an article that rural communities in Tajikistan defend a rare mountain goat against trophy hunters. We could inform the H&CAT, and they fortunately sent a letter to the editor, which said that they indeed protect these animals, but together with the hunters, and that hunting serves a conservation purpose. This letter was indeed published.

The delay in attacking hunting tourism in this part of the world gives the industry the time it needs to get prepared. And there is some time needed, indeed, as quite a bit of clean up is necessary to counter the offensive. Why is that so?

As in the case of the lion "Cecil" that I have mentioned, the anti-hunting movement needs a suitable bad example on which a campaign can be based. The question is therefore how many bad examples does Central Asia have to offer in the field of hunting. I do not want to point fingers, but let us all sit back for a minute and contemplate.

Does overshooting of quotas happen? Does it occur that a second, a bigger animal is

killed, if the first trophy was too small? Do shepherds get paid, if they find and kill a record-trophy Marco Polo that can be sold to a voluptuous hunting tourist? Do hunting operators try to eliminate predators in their blocks in the belief that their ungulates would benefit? Do illegal markhor, urial or Marco Polo hunts still happen? And is it possible that hunters are even so trophy-horny and hard-nosed at the same time that they register an illegally shot markhor trophy in the record book of the Safari Club International?

As I said, I do not want to discuss these issues here. I mention them for contemplation. We should all ask ourselves, whether the anti-hunters would find enough bad examples, if they decide to orchestrate a campaign against hunting tourism in Central Asia.

### **What Are the Expectations towards us as Hunters?**

Sustainable hunting can be a powerful tool for biodiversity conservation and the change for the better of rural livelihoods. This is at least the credo of us hunters. I said “can be”.

Fortunately this conviction is not limited to us hunters anymore. Development assistance agencies such as GIZ, EU-Commission and US-AID etc. have included sustainable wildlife use in a good number of their conservation projects around the globe. Equally major conservation organizations like IUCN or the WWF recognize in principle the potential of sustainable hunting and have published policy papers to that effect. The most recent powerful pro-hunting statement was a hunting resolution by the CITES-members during the last Conference of the Parties in Johannesburg in October.

However, these positive statements do not come without conditions and obligations. All these organizations make it very clear that they distinct between bad and good hunting, and that the bad hunting that exists will increasingly come under pressure.

What are the principles of sustainable hunting and good hunting practices? I refer to the “IUCN Guiding Principles on Trophy Hunting as a Tool for Creating Conservation Incentives”, to the WWF policy paper and the recent “CITES Hunting Resolution”.

Let me sum up the major principles in a nutshell.

Any exported trophy must be legally obtained, and the take off must not be detrimental to the survival of the species. This must be proven by a correct review of wildlife status and trends and of the sustainability of the harvest including mortality due to illegal killing. It is required to have a robust regulatory framework, effective enforcement mechanisms, a monitoring system and an adaptive management system in place through which harvest levels can be adjusted according to the needs of the specific population and based on monitoring results.

Trophy hunting activities should produce conservation benefits for wildlife and its habitats.

Last, but not least, the local population should benefit from harvesting and thereby should have incentives to conserve.

Community based wildlife management and the revenues going with it has been a core issue in explaining why hunting tourism is of importance in the developing world. The

question posed to hunters is always “How much money stays locally?” The conservation agencies like IUCN ,but also hunting organizations like DJV, FACE, the representation of the European hunting associations, or the CIC have therefore community based hunting high on their agenda. John Scanlon, CITES Secretary-General, said two weeks ago that the better integration of rural communities in wildlife use would be a major topic at the next CITES-meeting in Sri Lanka.

### **Tajikistan: A Win-Win-Situation or Trouble Ahead?**

I guess that in the foreseeable future there will be no general import bans by CITES, EU or the USA. However, the import of trophies of endangered respectively CITES-listed species from countries which do not conform with “good practice” requirements will increasingly come under scrutiny.

Markhor is a good example in this respect. In recent years several illegal imports into EU were detected, and the importers were fined. CITES authorities are on the watch out, and so is the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Hunting markhor is therefore presently a very fragile undertaking.

Imports of a small number of trophies have been allowed, as their hunting by enterprises run by the local population, be it in Pakistan, be it in Tajikistan, is very much in line with the present thinking in conservation and in hunting circles, as it complies with the concept of supporting rural livelihoods. This has become an important principle of CITES too. However, if illegal hunts occurred and were detected or if the quota of the present quota holders were be taken over by others, I don't have much hope that imports into EU and USA would continue.

The present situation, with Tajikistan having a private hunting sector and at the same time a community based hunting sector is a win-win-situation for both sides and for the Government, as it benefits the country as whole. My strong advice is to keep it like that. The world looks increasingly at the success of the community based hunting sector in Tajikistan, which during the last CBD-Conference was awarded the prestigious Markhor-Prize of the International Council for Game and Wildlife Conservation (CIC), the world's oldest hunting association with members in 80 countries, including many Governments. Therefore, the Government would be well advised to further strengthen this sector, for example by granting a number of Marco Polo permits to suitable community based hunting areas.

If the community-based wildlife management sector would be strangled by competitors or politics and failed, I see troubled times ahead for the products of the hunting industry of Tajikistan on the world market.

I end with a quote from Napoleon Bonaparte: „If you can't beat an enemy, you have to ally with him“

Thank you for your attention.

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