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The IUCN and trophy hunting – a response to the “ethics” attack on hunting

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“Compatibility of Trophy Hunting as a Form of Sustainable Use with IUCN’s Objectives” is a disingenuous portrayal of IUCN objectives and regulations. The authors’ bias is exposed by the complete misuse of “Ethics” as a premise, incorrect definition of terms, manipulation of language, and use of interpretation in place of enumeration. These occur too many times to be mistaken for ignorance. The entire paper is a Texas Sharpshooter fallacy. If you are going to “clarify the ethical acceptability of trophy hunting,” you must first define your ethics. The authors never take any normative stance. The authors also never define Trophy Hunting. They never define what the IUCN’s ethics are or should be. Section by section let’s dissect this.

1.Introduction- The first attack is on “whether organizations that are supportive of trophy hunting may be eligible for IUCN membership” -We need a working definition of ‘organizations’, does this include governments or just NGOs? We need a definition of ‘Trophy Hunting’, does this include any hunting for which a hunter pays a fee? What exactly does ‘supportive’ mean? If a scientific, research or educational organization that is not comprised of hunters, supports trophy hunting should they be excluded? Is it ‘support’ or practice that should be grounds for exclusion? What about governments – should any government that supports trophy hunting be excluded? As you can see, a broad interpretation of these terms would exclude most countries and a large swath of NGOs.

The council has to determine five qualifications for a perspective member, yet the authors portray qualification C in the statutes as the 'particular' one. Logic dictates that A "the applicant shares and supports the objectives of IUCN" is the primary concern. They completely ignore that prospective members can do 'either or both' –ensure use is equitable and sustainable—and/or–influence, encourage and assist societies. There is no "credibility assessment" which would require investigation into the motives and conduct of members. The actions of the organization are all that need to be scrutinized. They add to the qualifications- the overall impact that the organization has had and would have as a member. They are placing the council in a position to predict the future. This is ridiculous. Determining if an applicant "adds to the potential" of the IUCN's objectives is not part of the statutes- the lawyers who wrote this understand the meaning of "shall become members of IUCN when the council has determined" points (a) through (e). Adherence to the statutes does not allow additional requirements, that's what 'shall' means.

The IUCN Statutes Part II says "The objectives of IUCN shall be to influence, encourage and assist societies throughout the world to conserve the integrity and diversity of nature and to ensure that any use of natural resources is equitable and ecologically sustainable." The precise words used are important. The article purposely misinterprets these objectives. They do so, by first claiming this is all one objective. Then they claim "This objective cannot be interpreted in a way that emphasizes one aspect at the expense of other aspects." This is patently false. Members are to influence, encourage and assist in one aspect, and ensure in the other aspect. Calling upon members to ensure is a greater demand than calling upon them to influence, encourage and assist. One is a MUST the other is an ATTEMPT. They actually reverse the importance enumerated in the objective. In the following quote notice the purposeful misstatement, "This clearly implies that sustainable use and sustainable development are both subservient considerations to the overarching aim of ensuring ecological integrity." The objective, what must be ensured and what must be encouraged are enumerated, there is no need for interpretation. Repeating the phrase "ensure integrity and diversity" multiple times is a device used to manipulate the reader. That is Not what the objectives state.

Now we should be reaching the heart the matter. In two short paragraphs the authors use 'ethics' twice and 'ethical' twice.

2. General debate around trophy hunting

We still have no definition of "Trophy Hunting" but now the debate is to begin. The pejorative language from the beginning of this section is blatant. The authors insinuate that all "ethics" are opposed to trophy hunting, "economic benefits at one end of the spectrum to fundamental ethical objections at the other." Economics is not ethics, ethics is not the opposite of economics.

The authors then cherry pick the 3% number (which has been debunked many times) reported for a single year in Zimbabwe. One case, one year, one country is a hasty generalization. This would need to be demonstrated as more than an anomaly for purposes of excluding members. They cherry pick lions as a species in decline, unfortunately for them the report cited does not name trophy hunting as causal. Habitat loss and conflict are the stated causes but that is not reported by the authors.

Next, we are presented with a self-defeating argument. "We can never identify all the direct and indirect benefits and costs of an action. This is especially true for wildlife conservation with its many unknowns... There are just too many uncertainties to justify trophy hunting pointing to benefits for wildlife conservation." If this entire statement is accepted as true, there are too many uncertainties to disparage trophy hunting and say it is detrimental to conservation. Argument from ignorance has no place in an Ethics discussion.

The authors present an actual ethical conclusion, but do not support it with any argument or normative theory. "It is unethical to place a monetary value on human life. On what grounds then should this be different with respect to animals?" - Well, the difference between moral agents and moral patients to begin with, which party controls the resources, is money a resource or a representation of resources, is this a deontological rule or can we discuss the benefits brought about by it? They incorrectly define "intrinsic value of animals" as "biocentrism" - and "instrumental value of animals" as "anthropocentrism." If you are going to bandy about terms in your argument at least learn the difference between intrinsic and extrinsic value; the difference between anthropocentrism, divine command, and object oriented ontology. Conflating unrelated ethical characteristics makes no sense. The contradiction which follows this denunciation of anthropocentric action is the inclusion of "cultural identity" as a "need." This is blatant pandering. The case is not bolstered by pejorative language and appeal to emotion - "certainly not killing for fun (experience, sport, trophies)" - so is the argument against the reason for the action or the result? The authors have never given any indication of their stance- so it is impossible to assess the validity of this statement. Taking the statement on face value- if I hunt for management reasons and not for "fun" - it's OK. The return to "the onus for justifying trophy hunting must lie on those who claim that the 'benefits' for wildlife conservation are greater than the 'costs' of loss of life." In the previous paragraph, it was stated neither of these could be accurately determined. This means placing the onus to do so on anyone is an exercise in futility. Why is the onus on the trophy hunter? The authors are shifting the burden of proof. They made the claim, they need to support it. What if the loss of life is beneficial? What if we adopt divine command theory or deontological imperative to manage and allocate resources? The IUCN's "overarching conservation ethics" would be supported by trophy hunting in either case.

The authors return to contrasting economic benefit with some unspecified ethical position. Trotting out phrases like 'ecological justice' and 'human responsibilities' with no explanation or foundation. They refer to killing an animal as an "ecological harm" which is simply not true. Offering no insight into the base principle of natural selection which states 'species produce more offspring each year than the environment can support'- and how the role off take / death of individuals is not a detriment, undercuts their premise.

This is perhaps my favorite misuse of terminology "Opponents of trophy hunting tend to argue from a moral and ethical perspective." No, no they do not. They argue from an emotion perspective. To support this ridiculous statement, they invoke 'rich-poor disparities, trickle down ideology, inter-generational justice, equality' - exactly none of these are ethics. The solipsism is quite astounding. This is an underhanded No True Scotsman fallacy. - "Your ethics are not true ethics" - quite self-righteous.

The segregation of Utilitarian ethics from consequentialism will certainly come as a surprise to everyone that has ever studied ethics. Mill, Bentham and even Singer are Utilitarians. Utilitarian ethics is a strict form of Consequentialism and has NO relation to economic concerns. This is the point where the authors are just making up their own definitions.

Section 3 IUCN's Current position

Here the authors go back to misstating the actual position of importance in the IUCN objectives. Once again placing extra demands on applicants which are not enumerated- and which go beyond the four corners of the stated requirements for membership. It is important to recall- the committee "Shall" approve all who meet the requirements. Each and every document cited in this section is anthropocentric in focus. I am still waiting for the authors to define 1) The IUCN's ethics 2) Their ethics. We get a statement about closure of domestic ivory markets "effectively bans trophy hunting of elephants" which is completely false. Closing markets bans commercial hunting NOT trophy hunting. The continued misplacement of emphasis from the objectives is almost comical at this point. The authors fail to acknowledge an axiom stated in the Preamble to the Statutes "Recognizing that conservation of nature and natural resources involves the preservation and management of the living world..." It is understood that humans will actively manage wildlife. Trophy hunting as a sustainable form of management is consistent with IUCN objectives. Reading the complete Statutes from Preface to Conclusion- one can only reach the conclusion that the IUCN has a deontological ethical stand. There are mandates not prohibitions. Effort and programming are the focus not results. What is the ethical stand of the authors of this piece of tripe? Who knows- they never state any ethical principle.

Section 4 Conclusion

This is nothing but a self congratulatory session. The authors repeat their misconceptions and misstatements one last time. The entire piece is nonsense based in false premises.

◀ ATTACK ON TROPHY HUNTING ◀ IUCN AND ETHICS OF HUNTING ◀ IUCN AND HUNTING



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