

Best Practices In Hunting – Namibia Communal Area Conservancies

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1.0 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

2.0 BACKGROUND:

Namibia is a large country (823,988 km²) located in southwestern Africa, where it is sandwiched between South Africa to the south, Angola to the north, and Botswana to the east. With a population of 1,826,854 (Census Office, 2002), Namibia is one of the most sparsely populated countries in sub-Saharan Africa. A mainly arid land, famed for its two deserts, the Namib and the Kalahari, Namibia is a surprisingly species-rich country. Its vast wilderness areas and diverse ecosystems provide superb habitat for a range of Africa's megafauna, while endemism for both flora and fauna is exceptionally high (Barnard, 1998). The country has long been known for its abundant and high-quality plains game trophies, but also boasts free-roaming populations of Africa's big five (elephant, rhino, lion, leopard, and buffalo). In addition, Namibia contains the world's largest cheetah population and a number of desert-adapted species (i.e., Hartmann's zebra, black-faced impala, oryx, etc.) that are highly valued by the international trophy hunting community.

Since independence in 1990, Namibia has put in place one of the most innovative conservation management programmes in Africa, if not the world. In contrast to previous governmental policies, the passage of the 1996 communal area conservancy legislation has provided incentives and motivation for communal area residents across Namibia to conserve their wildlife resources. As a consequence, communities who form conservancies³ are now managing and sustainably utilizing their wildlife through trophy hunting, meat harvesting, live game sales, and other forms of non-consumptive tourism. These cash and in-kind benefits have fostered a greater appreciation of the value of wildlife and stimulated communities to incorporate wildlife conservation practices into daily livelihood strategies. Concomitantly, poaching of wildlife has decreased and unparalleled recoveries of wildlife across Namibia's communal areas are occurring. This national conservation movement has generated a total of 29 communal conservancies, involving almost 100,000 community members. In addition, a further 53 conservancies, involving an estimated 70,000 – 100,000 community members, are also under development. Given these figures, it is conceivable that one out of every nine Namibian citizens may eventually be resident to a communal area conservancy.

A fundamental factor in this conservation movement has been the contributions of the trophy hunting industry, and the speed at which trophy hunting proceeds have been returned to conservancies to underwrite conservation costs and support rural development activities. Shortly after registration of the first four conservancies in 1998, hunting concessions were awarded and much-needed cash almost immediately began to flow to conservancies. By the end of 2003, there were a total of 8 hunting concessions in 11 communal conservancies (see Figure 1), with plans being made to award an additional 2-3 hunting concessions in 2004.

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³ Conservancies are legally-recognized, geographically-defined areas that have been formed by communities who have united to manage and benefit from wildlife and other natural resources.

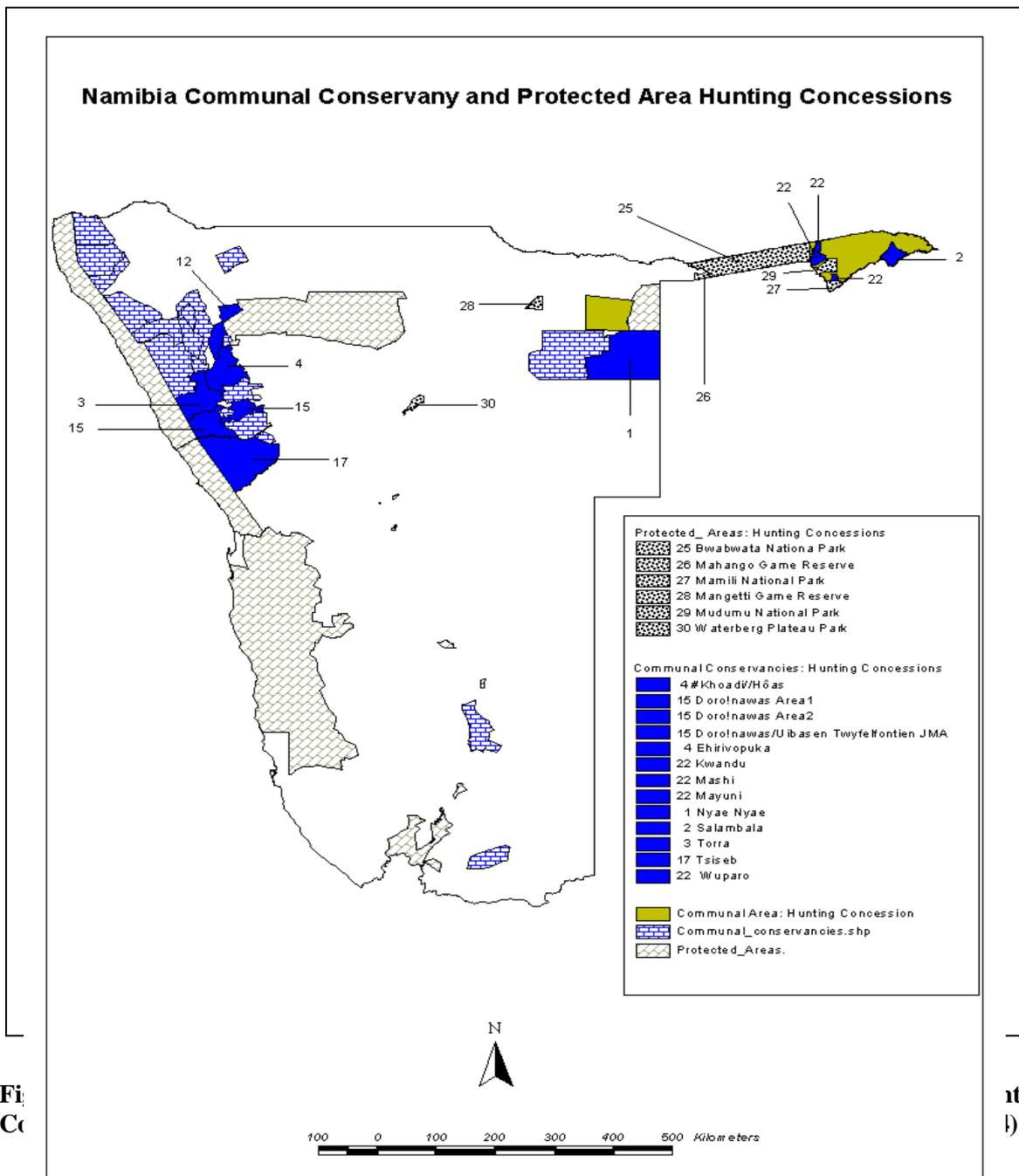


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AND

Namibia is fortunate in that it has benefited from visionary legislation that gives recognition to the merits of devolving rights over wildlife to private citizens. Presently, wildlife utilization is regulated by the Nature Conservation Ordinance, Ordinance Number 4 of 1975 under the Ministry of Environment and Tourism (MET). This legislation defines wildlife into three different categories: 1) *specially-protected game* – globally significant species such as elephant and rhino; 2) *protected game* – less common, but valuable species such as roan antelope, sable, eland, red hartebeest, etc.; and 3) *hunnable game* – common plains game such as kudu, springbok, oryx, and warthog, and common game birds. This legislation also prescribes the circumstances when wildlife and by whom wildlife may be utilized.

Specially-protected and *protected game* may only be hunted under the virtue of a permit issued by the Ministry of Environment and Tourism (MET), with permit allocations being based upon sustainable offtake quotas. In contrast, conditional rights of ownership to *hunnable game* have been given to private farm owners and conservancies, who in turn, may decide how to utilize their *hunnable game*.

Use options may entail: shoot-for-sell, shoot for own-use, biltong/meat hunting, culling (mostly restricted to springbok), game capture, and/or trophy hunting.

Namibia has a long history of ground-breaking conservation legislation, with its first visionary Act being passed in 1967 (Immelman, 2004) when the government of the day allocated use-rights to certain species of wildlife to Namibian landowners. The conservation results of giving these rights to private citizens have been dramatic, and it is estimated that wildlife numbers on Namibia's freehold land (some 44% of the country) have increased by almost 80% since the late 1960s (Barnes and de Jager, 1996). The passage of the communal area conservancy legislation in 1996 gives recognition to the success of the 1967 legislation and grants similar conditional ownership rights to communal area residents who form conservancies.

4.0 HUNTING IN PRACTICAL TERMS:

The trophy hunting season starts on February 1 and ends the last day of November, with the prime hunting period being during the cooler months of May – October. Trophy hunting must take place under the supervision of Namibian registered hunting guides, who must be certified by the MET. There are a number of categories for hunting guides. The entry level is a Hunting Guide, who is an individual that having passed his/her hunting examination, may guide clients on his/her farm. Following two years of successful hunting operations, a Hunting Guide may apply for registration as a Master Hunter, which will then allow him/her to hunt on a number of properties. After an additional two years, a Master Hunter can take theoretical and practical examination to become a Professional Hunter (PH). The final and highest category of PH is a registered Big Game (BG) Hunter. This level can only be achieved after two years of employment under a registered BG Hunter and a passing mark of 80% or more in the PH hunting guide examination.

Trophy hunting takes place through three different types of tenurial arrangements in Namibia. The vast majority of plains game hunting takes place on private land, where the land owner serves as the Hunting Guide or has a contractual arrangement with an MH or PH to provide rights to game found on the farm. Big Game (elephant, buffalo and lion) hunting takes place under contract to government (MET) or communal area conservancies. The State controlled concessions are periodically auctioned (to the highest bidder) to Big Game Operators (approximately every three years). The State's six Big Game concessions are located in remote areas of national parks or game reserves, or on communal lands where a conservancy has yet to form. In contrast, the communal area conservancy hunting concessions are found within registered conservancies or encompass several conservancies, should they be small in size. There are presently eight hunting concessions operating in 11 communal conservancies. Communal conservancy concessions are generally tendered by post to the registered Big Game Hunters in Namibia, with conservancies opting to interview the three best offers to assure compatibility between the PH and the conservancy management authorities.

5.0 CONTRIBUTIONS OF THE HUNTING INDUSTRY:

The latest MET statistics indicate that approximately 5,000 trophy hunters from different parts of the world visit Namibia annually (MET, 2003), with the estimated economic contributions from trophy hunting being in excess of N\$160 million⁴. The vast majority of this income is returned to operators and spin-off benefactors of the industry (i.e., airlines, hotels, tourism facilities, etc.). Yet, increasing portion of the industry's benefits are beginning to return to communal area conservancies, and in the process, precipitating major conservation benefits to local communities and Namibia as a country.

Since the commencement of communal conservancies in 1998, trophy hunting returns to conservancies have increased annually. During 2003, the participating 11 communal conservancies received more than N\$2.5 million (US \$400,000) in cash returns, and an additional N\$500,000 (US\$75,000) of benefits from meat from trophy animals harvested and wages from staff employed by the hunting operator. At surface value, this may not seem like much income. However, when one views the significance of this income and the changes in peoples' livelihoods and attitudes towards

⁴ The Namibian Dollar exchange rate at the time of writing this article was roughly N\$6.6 to the US dollar.

wildlife, one gains a greater appreciation of the changes the trophy hunting industry is catalyzing in Namibia's communal areas. Following are some significant, related impacts:

- **Uses of the income** – The trophy hunting revenues are being returned as cash directly to conservancy committees, who in turn, use the income to pay salaries of community game guards and other conservancy staff members who carry-out conservancy wildlife management policies and plans. This income is allowing conservation activities to be conducted at the grassroots level, and facilitating involvement and ownership of conservation activities by the broader community;
- **Changes of attitude** – Prior to passage of the conservancy legislation, wildlife were considered pests and competition to subsistence agricultural livelihoods. The income generated by trophy hunting, combined with other forms of wildlife use (harvesting for own-use meat, sale of live game, and non-consumptive tourism), has altered this situation by demonstrating that wildlife can be a valuable community resource;
- **Changes in livelihood and land-use strategies** – The continuous flow of benefits and demonstrated returns from wildlife are stimulating conservancy formation across Namibia's communal areas. There are currently 29 registered conservancies, with an additional 53 under development. The 29 registered conservancies encompass approximately 7,099,000 hectares of prime wildlife habitat, while the developing conservancies will place an additional 7-8 million hectares into wildlife production. Thus, wildlife and tourism are becoming nationally recognized as legitimate land-uses, and this recognition is being reinforced at local conservancy levels through the development and introduction of land-use plans that promote core wildlife management areas;
- **Enhancement of national park system** – Namibia's national park system encompasses approximately 114,080 km² of land, or slightly more than 13.8% of Namibia's surface area. Significantly, 17 of the 29 registered conservancies are either adjacent to national parks or in key corridors between them (Weaver & Skyer, 2003). Cumulatively, these 17 conservancies add an additional 47,515 km², or roughly 42%, more critical wildlife habitat to the existing national park system. Given Namibia's patchy rainfall patterns and frequent periods of drought, this increased habitat is particularly meaningful; and
- **Recovery of wildlife populations** – Community recognition of the value of wildlife has led to a marked reduction in poaching, while the introduction of grassroots wildlife management practices (i.e., development & maintenance of wildlife water points, dedicated wildlife production zones, reintroduction of game to facilitate faster recovery rates, etc.) have precipitated massive recoveries of wildlife populations in large communal regions of Namibia. Such recoveries have been documented in Caprivi, Nyae Nyae, and the entire northwestern Namibia where annual game counts since 2000 have shown increasing population trends (see Figure 2).

The conservation impacts of the conservancy program obviously cannot be fully attributed to the trophy hunting industry. However, it can be safely stated that trophy hunting has been a key catalyst. Trophy hunting income came on the heels of the first four communal conservancies' registration, and was and remains instrumental to demonstrating the value of wildlife to community residents. The resultant change in community attitudes towards wildlife has precipitated a reduction of poaching and introduction of proactive wildlife management practices. Concomitantly, the income received by conservancies empowers Namibian communities, for the first times in their lives, with the financial resources to invest in their community development needs. This is an upward, spiraling situation that is a "win-win" situation for hunting in Namibia, wildlife conservation, and community empowerment.

6.0 CHALLENGES TO THE HUNTING INDUSTRY:

The trophy hunting is beginning to prosper in the communal area conservancies, but it is only in its infancy and massive upside potential has yet to be developed and tapped. In this regard, there are a number of challenges facing Namibia's communal area conservancies and their ability to harness the full potential of the trophy hunting industry, including:

- **Zoning in conservancies** – Conservancies are multi-use areas, supporting non-consumptive tourism, subsistence agriculture (i.e., livestock and crop production), settlements, and other forms of wildlife utilization such as meat harvesting for local use and live game sales for income. There is a need to spacially and temporally zone conservancies to minimize conflict between uses and to allow optimal utilization of conservancy wildlife resources. In particular, zoning between hunting (trophy and own-use) areas and non-consumptive tourism must be developed and the capacity developed in conservancy staff to manage and enforce these compatible use zones;
- **Development of industry** - There is extensive scope for expanding the number of hunting concessions offered by communal conservancies, particularly given the large number of registered and emerging conservancies that do not have hunting concessions. The average size of the existing eight communal area hunting concessions is almost 409,000 hectares, with these concessions being found in some of the wildest and least developed areas of Namibia. There is potential to at least double this number, with future concessions also being found in vast, unspoilt, wild tracts of land. Similarly, given the large numbers of game found in many of these conservancies, their continued positive growth trends, and the outstanding trophies being harvested, there is room to substantially bolster the offtake quotas in the existing concessions. Lastly, given the abundance of plains game species (more than 100,000 springbok, 35,000 oryx, and 14,000 Hartmann's zebra in the northwest conservancies alone [NACSO, 2003]), it is envisioned that sport hunting for non-trophy animals offers substantial opportunities for conservancies to increase their income from hunting;

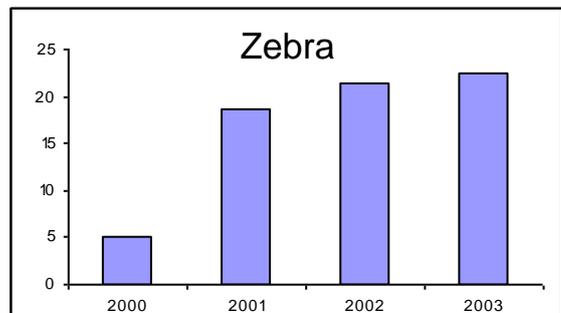
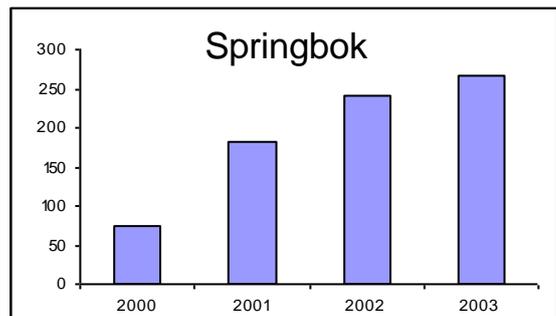
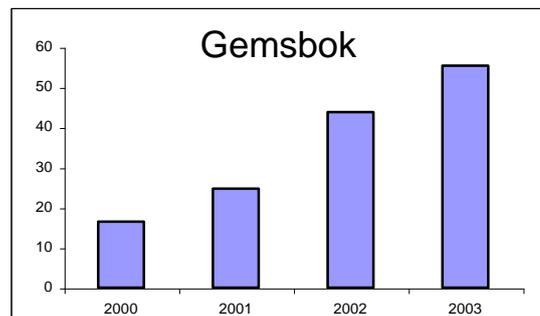


Figure 2. Population trends for gemsbok, springbok, and Hartmann's zebra in NW Namibia from 2000 through 2003 based upon animals observed per 100 kms driven (Source: MET/WWF/NACSO, 2003)

- **Involvement of black sector** – Namibia, as with nearly all of Africa, has suffered from a lack of involvement and ownership by black Africans in the hunting industry. Unless this situation is addressed, it is doubtful there will be little long-term governmental support for this industry. Thus, there is a need to foster and promote more black Namibian professional hunters in the industry, and to build the skills and capacity of such individuals to become competitive professional hunters who can champion the industry with governmental policy makers;
- **Anti-hunting lobby** – As with the trophy hunting industry in the rest of the world, there is a need to continuously educate the public about the conservation and development merits of trophy hunting and to counter emotional and misleading propaganda against the industry by the anti-hunting lobby; and
- **Hunting Industry Regulation** - The Namibia trophy hunting industry strives to provide professional and ethical services. Nonetheless, there is a need to further strengthen the standards and ethics of the Namibia trophy hunting industry, and to put in place mechanisms through which the Namibia Professional Hunters Association (NAPHA) and conservancies can ensure professional hunters are guiding their clients in accordance with the highest hunting ethics and codes of conduct.

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