

Speech by Robin Hurt at the CIC Assembly Madrid, May 2018



Text: Robin Hurt // Photos: Robin Hurt, Rolf Baldus, CIC

The following is a speech given by professional hunter and conservationist Robin Hurt, at the 2018 General Assembly of the International Council for Game and Wildlife Conservation (CIC) in Madrid, Spain. Robin was born in London in 1945, but grew up in Kenya. He became a fully licensed professional hunter at the age of eighteen, and has guided clients in many African countries ever since. During the last thirty years he has been involved in a number of conservation projects. Robin and his wife, Pauline, now live in their own private game reserve in the foothills of Gamsberg Mountain in Namibia. There, he continues his fight for conservation, particularly for the protection of free-ranging rhino.

It is a great honor to have been invited to address the membership and delegates at this CIC gathering. It has also been good to see so many of my old friends who safaried with us in the past - and to make new friends and acquaintances here in Madrid.

I have been a professional hunter and wildlife conservationist (in the true sense of the word) my entire adult life. This year marks my fifty-fifth season as a full-time professional hunter. In that time I have witnessed huge changes for Africa's wildlife, some good and others tragic. I have seen the islands of people of my boyhood surrounded by wildlife change to what we mostly have today - islands of wildlife being flooded by a tsunami of people.

I have witnessed poaching throughout my adult life, gradually escalating over the years, leading to horrific losses to elephant and rhino numbers in particular - down to the remnant herds we have left today, minuscule numbers compared to half a century ago. I can remember seeing northern white rhino at Sudan's Lake Nyubor in groups of up to a dozen. That was only forty years ago, and in terms of history, a snap of the fingers. Today

they are extinct in the wild, all at the hand of man. I can remember once seeing a herd of over 200 bull elephant congregated together at Kenya's Tana River. Such a gathering will probably never be seen again.

Over the same five-decade period the safari industry has changed. In 1963 when I was first granted my professional hunter's license, at age eighteen, there were only about a hundred full-time professional hunters. Today, there are well over a thousand. Sometimes I wonder if there are not now more PHs than clients. Safaris have changed from thirty to forty-five-day expeditions, with fully mobile, tented camps, to hunts today based in permanent camps or lodges that rarely exceed two weeks. Not a bad thing, as this increase in hunting helps pay for conservation.

But this is not about me. This is about the continuing threat we collectively experience daily to our wild places, wild animals, and ourselves. And, more importantly this is about what we can do to help reverse this trend.

There will always be two sides to any argument. Wildlife conservation in particular is a sensitive subject, with many viewpoints

and opinions. But, from my point of view there is no real argument because we all have the same interest: the long-term well-being of wildlife. Whether we support legal hunting or not, it's time to work together for a common cause and put aside our various prejudices. It's time to look at things in a realistic light. In order for wildlife to survive in a rapidly changing Africa, with a huge human growth problem, protecting it must be a competitive form of land use compared to agriculture.

But, having said that, I would like to clarify things from my perspective. I hate the term 'trophy hunting', as this gives totally the wrong impression. I prefer the term 'safari hunting' or 'conservation hunting' which more adequately describes what my colleagues and I do. As the Spanish philosopher José Ortega y Gasset articulated in his book *The Philosophy of Hunting*, "One does not hunt in order to kill. On the contrary one kills in order to have hunted." There is a difference, and I have tried to live by that standard.

The 'trophy' is not the sole reason for a safari, at least not for my clients. Yes, the trophy may well be part and parcel of a



safari's outcome, but it is not everything to a safari hunter - there is so much more to the experience. The feeling of being in wild places with wild animals, up close on foot, the excitement of the stalk, the danger, the chance of the chase, the companionship around the campfire in the evening, are just a few of the intangibles. Some other aspects are: the conservation of wildlife and wild places paid for by legal hunting, the anti-poaching efforts undertaken and funded through legal hunting, and the love we have for wild animals and wild places. Yes, it is love!

How do we fund our rhino conservation in Namibia? It is paid for through legal and selective hunting of our plentiful plains game. I haven't had any offers from any other sources to pay for the conservation of our rhino. And I can tell you it is an expensive undertaking - what with armed anti-poaching personnel and support feeding in times of drought, a project started

by my wife Pauline. She named it "Habitat for Rhino". We do this because we want to do our bit to help conserve an iconic animal that is being poached daily, in South Africa at the rate of between three and four a day, and because we love our wildlife - especially our rhino. By the way, our rhino will never be hunted. We are simply too close to them, and love to watch and admire them. Apart from that, they are a valuable addition to our photo-safari program. We can now offer rhino tracking as an activity, an activity our clients love.

Hunters are not so different from herders who manage domestic animals. We choose instead to manage wild animals. I personally would prefer to see wild animals rather than cattle and sheep on the land I care for. But, as is the case of the farmer of domestic animals, the animals must pay for themselves to survive in today's Africa. If a herder can't use his livestock, he would have little reason to keep it. The same applies to wildlife,

Robin Hurt delivering his speech at the 2018 General Assembly of the International Council for Game and Wildlife Conservation (CIC) in Madrid, Spain.

whether the income is from photo safaris or legal hunting safaris. If it pays, it stays.

We eat what we hunt, and nothing goes to waste. If there is any excess it is distributed. (Obviously, we don't eat hyenas, but I don't hunt hyenas anyway. I was brought up with the superstition that it is bad luck to shoot a hyena, so they have always been safe from being hunted by my clients!) Can those who oppose hunting justify going to a supermarket and buying plastic-wrapped meat, fish, and poultry without a second thought of where it came from? What about our shoes, handbags and belts made from leather? Have they ever thought of how many animals have died by what I term



Attendees and speakers at the 2018 General Assembly of the International Council for Game and Wildlife Conservation (CIC) in Madrid, Spain.

‘passive killing’? By not thinking about it they unknowingly promote letting others do the killing on their behalf. Sometimes this takes place in awful conditions in slaughterhouses, with the stench of death permeating fear amongst the victims.

Legal hunting gives employment to previously disadvantaged people who then enjoy a higher standard of living. This is certainly the case in Tanzania and Namibia, where poachers have been turned into anti-poaching rangers. Where wildlife has meaningful value to people, they no longer look at it as cheap or easy meat.

Regarding poaching, there is a lot of misunderstanding amongst the general public

as to what is poaching and what is legal hunting. It’s a common mistake to place both under the same umbrella. A poacher is the illegal, non-selective taker of wildlife, simply a thief bent on the harvest of wildlife for quick reward. The legal hunter on the other hand is the legal steward and manager of wildlife. His very existence and way of life depend wholly on healthy wildlife herds and sustainable use. The amount of off-take is set by management quotas. In fact, I practice wildlife conservation with my family by funding it through both legal hunting and photo safaris. There is room for both to coexist in our lives and on the land we call home.

It isn’t legal hunting that has led to the decline in elephant and rhino numbers. It is entirely due to unchecked commercial poaching that is fueled by the demand for illegal products. Where legal hunters have been forced to leave the bush through hunting closures, wildlife numbers have plummeted. A good example is Kenya, where there has been a 70% reduction since the

total hunting ban started in 1977. On the other hand, where hunting is allowed we have seen a trend of increasing numbers, for example, in Namibia.

Where legal hunters vacate the bush, for whatever reason, they are replaced by poachers. When we consider elephant and rhino poaching trends, what hasn’t been addressed nearly enough is the end user. As long as there is demand for ivory and horn, poaching will continue. That in a nutshell is the problem. No demand equals no poaching. It’s a dilemma however, because rhino horn is hugely valuable. But, this fact could actually be its salvation. There is a growing case for harvesting horn from live rhino and trading it legally. Giving rhino horn a legal trade value will only encourage people to steward them, while ensuring the species’ survival. As I said before - if it pays, it stays!

Some countries that previously had bans, have recently reopened legal hunting as a means of combatting poaching. Two examples are Uganda and Zambia. There is also

very welcome news from Kenya. It is now reconsidering its position on wildlife harvesting and use on private and communal land. That this is even being discussed is a huge step in the right direction. If Kenya should reopen consumptive legal wildlife use, there will be a stampede of hunters wishing to hunt there. It was, after all, the original safari country. On top of that, it probably has some of the finest buffalo in Africa.

The examples and high standards for sustainable use set by Namibia are now being used as a model in other African states. Namibia has rapidly-increasing wildlife numbers, bucking the downward trend in other countries. The conservancy program has given user rights to communities living in the bush, changing attitudes from one of indifference to wildlife, to one of stewardship.

Not many are aware that Tanzania was the first country to completely ban hunting in 1973. The result was disastrous for wildlife, as poachers replaced legal hunters in the bush, resulting in colossal losses in wildlife. Fortunately, Tanzania canceled its ban in good time. It's a proven fact that legal safari hunting is one of the best deterrents to poaching. It is in the personal interest of a concessionaire or landowner to have healthy wildlife numbers. Poaching simply isn't tolerated. This is just one of the reasons I always claim that professional hunters are among the most dedicated conservationists. Their very livelihood depends on healthy and increasing herds.

Another fact we need to be aware of is that the continual threat to wildlife and habitat is not just from poaching, but also through human encroachment into the wilderness. More humans mean the need for more space. The result of such encroachment is slash-and-burn agriculture and unchecked numbers of cattle. Cattle grazing is detrimental to wild animals. Along with grazing comes man-made droughts, the poisoning of predators, and bush meat poaching. This is one of wildlife's biggest perils. How do we counteract this? The answer is simply by giving wildlife real value from legal sustainable use to people who live with or near wildlife. This encourages them to conserve it.

What we can't do is try to transform the whole of Africa into one huge national park. The unprotected areas currently carry most of Africa's wildlife populations. It's in these outlying and often marginal lands, mostly unsuitable for photo-safari use, where it is vital that legal hunting continues as an effective tool for saving wild animals.

By the way, the word conservation keeps popping up. It is often misunderstood, and misused as an expression for total protection. It most certainly does not mean or imply total protection. It actually means wise use. If you don't believe me just look it up in the *Oxford English Dictionary*.

More recently, the banning of the importation of elephant and lion trophies into the USA from Tanzania has led to some of the southern elephant hunting blocks becoming unviable. This has forced operators out of the bush and in some cases to close down. The vacated blocks are now the domain of poachers, bent on the destruction of wildlife for quick reward. So often well-meaning regulations passed without meaningful research lead to dire consequences. In fact, this thoughtless move has only served to fuel the further decline in the numbers of wild animals. A more recent development has been the degazetting of over a dozen hunting areas. They are being turned over to alternative forms of land use, primarily cattle grazing. This spells the end for wildlife in those areas, especially the predators. Pastoralists do not tolerate lion killing their livestock.

Hunters will not hunt in areas simply to kill an animal, and then not be able to take the trophy home, even if the trophy is not the main reason for a safari. Which is better, a few animals taken legally within sustainable quotas, or unchecked slaughter? We don't advise the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service on how to manage their white-tailed deer, so I ask what gives them the right to interfere with Africa's right to manage and use her wildlife? Some of you will recall my open letter several years ago warning of the consequences of this ruling. My prediction, which fell on deaf ears, has unfortunately proved correct.

The other huge problem and danger we face is through social media. It often

Not so long ago, after a sleepless night worrying about our rhino, I wrote this rhyme that I think says it all:

The cry of the rhino
A lost voice in the wilderness

I am a rhinoceros
And I mean you no harm
I am one of earth's oldest inhabitants
Almost prehistoric some say

Nature gave me two horns
Just to protect myself, and my young
But I am no match for a rifle's bullet
A poisoned arrow, or a misused
tranquilizer dart

Man will kill me by any means
My northern cousins, both black
and white
Are no more, extinct by the hand
of man
To feed man's greed for a misguided
fantasy

No more in Somalia, Sudan, Ethiopia
Or C.A.R., the Congo, Cameroon,
and Chad
All gone, just for my horn

You see, my horn is my dilemma
On one hand, it is causing me to
Be poached to the brink of extinction
On the other, it could be my salvation

Much has been tried to stop the
carnage
Nothing has worked thus far
But here is a thought

If you must use my horn for some
sexual fantasy
For a dagger's handle, or for
treatment of an imagined disease
Or to snort with cocaine
Then please don't kill me

You see, my horn is like human hair
and fingernails
Cut it off and it soon grows back
So if you insist on using my horn
Please don't kill me

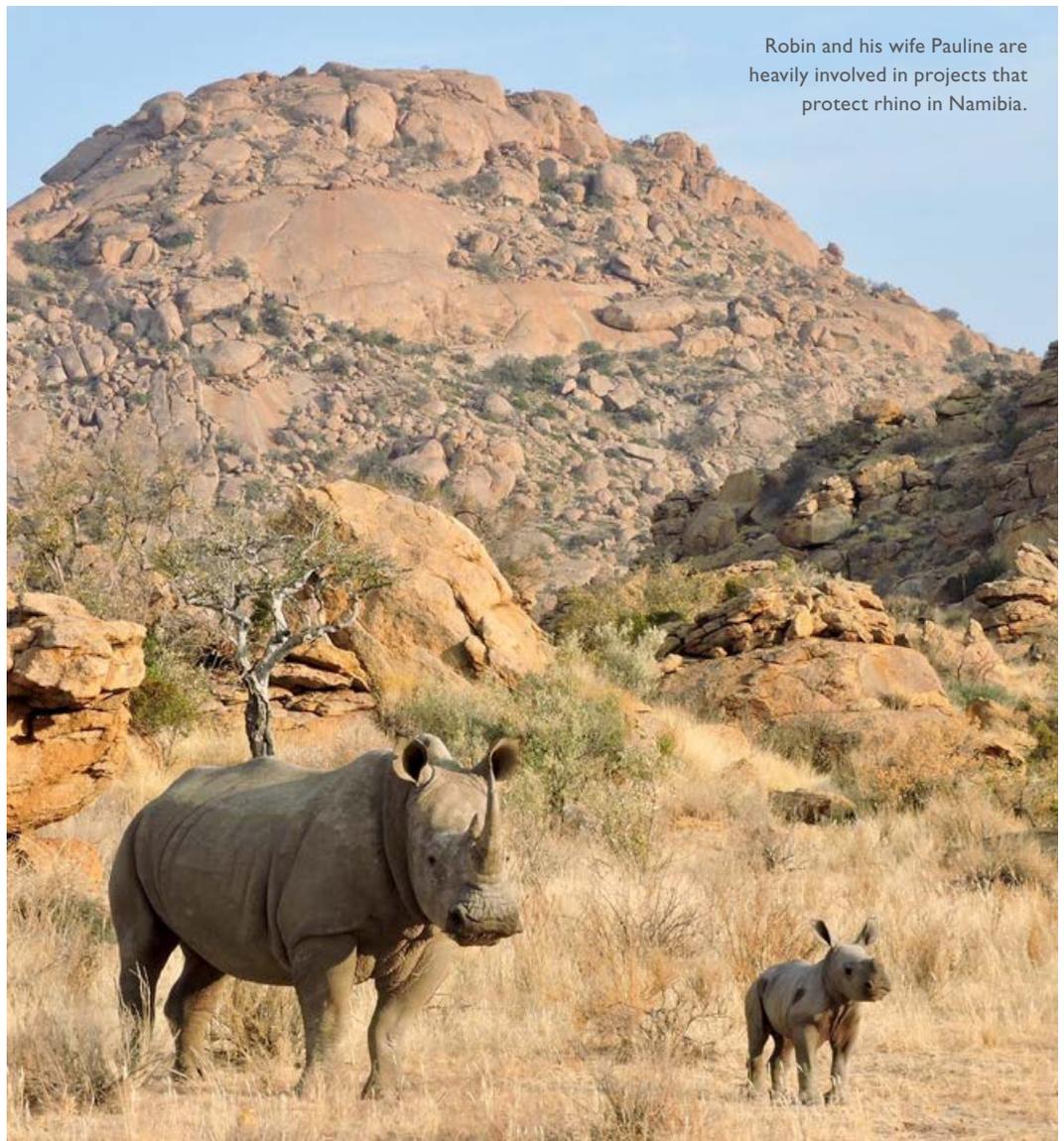
Harvest my horn
It will grow back
Up to five times in my life

Surely, that's worth a try
Because that won't hurt me
That won't kill me
Please don't kill me

Robin Hurt



Dr. Rolf D. Baldus and Robin Hurt
together in Namibia.



Robin and his wife Pauline are
heavily involved in projects that
protect rhino in Namibia.

happens that a person or organization, that doesn't understand what proper conservation is all about, makes an uninformed opinion that isn't based on facts or scientific understanding, but solely on emotion. These opinions sometimes go viral, and many uninformed people take them as fact. The tendency is to make all hunters appear evil. In fact, some so-called conservation organizations actually capitalize on bad news and sensationalism to encourage an unwitting public to contribute funds for whatever cause they promote.

Recently in Namibia a tourist in his caravan was camping illegally in a national park, in a place where no hunting is permitted, and he was mauled by a leopard. There are official campsites available, but he decided to camp wherever he chose, having no idea of the dangers of the bush. I am sure you have seen this reported in European and British newspapers. Blame was immediately placed on hunters. The media stated that the leopard had been wounded. Nothing could have been further from the truth. There is no hunting allowed within dozens of miles from the place of the accident. I feel sorry for the poor man and his terrible mauling. He should be happy he escaped with his life. A much more likely scenario was that the camper discarded food waste that the leopard found. When he was disturbed during

his midnight snack, he attacked, which is a normal reaction for a leopard, one of Africa's most dangerous animals.

This is just a small example of the problems we face. Hunter/conservationists are a minority. We are outnumbered worldwide by anti-hunters by a large margin. Yet it is we, that minority, who pay the most to support conservation. Take the recent example of our good friend and CIC member Willy Pabst, who from his private conservancy in Zimbabwe, and at his own expense, sent hundreds of big game animals to repopulate wildlife reserves in other countries that have had their wildlife decimated by poaching. A conservationist in the true meaning of the word!

What can we do to reverse the negative trends?

- Take time to talk to people and explain the benefits of legal hunting as a tool for funding conservation.
- Explain that you are a manager of wildlife.
- Explain that poaching is theft, the harm it causes to wildlife, countries and people.
- Don't participate in the making of videos or news channel films unless you are sure of their motivation. In particular, be careful of sequences and images that show wounded animals, thoughtless behavior, or lack of respect for wild animals.

Some will try to trap you with careless or unguarded remarks or actions. Insist on reviewing any footage before it is released.

- Don't post sensitive hunting photos on social media.
- Always hunt legally by adhering to wildlife laws.
- Support hunter/conservation organizations.
- Show respect for the wild animals we love.
- Support hunting operators that have community wildlife projects benefiting local people.
- Support programs that educate young people about hunting as a tool for conservation.
- In particular please support CIC tonight and its important Hunting Auction and Contra Fund.

I would like to leave you with one parting thought. Wildlife in Africa today stands on a cliff's edge. By eliminating legal use, a death warrant is being signed. We can't let that happen!

Thank you again - and thank you for the wonderful Spanish hospitality.

Robin Hurt, Madrid, May 2018 ■
