

**THE SIXTH MASS EXTINCTION: AFRICA'S
BIG FIVE**

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Abstract

The sixth mass extinction is on the verge if not already begun according to scientists. This is an extinction caused solely by human nature.¹ Africa has been home to some of the biggest and most iconic animals on the planet. For thousands of years these animals have been hunted down and killed for a number of reasons such as food, sport, tradition, etc. Nonetheless, Africa's "Big Five" are now some of the world's most vulnerable animals to extinction. Trophy hunting has always been a game of sport but now is a controversial topic among conservationists. Will hunting and killing an endangered animal actually help aid the species in the long run? This article will explore the laws set into place to protect these animals or lack thereof and the variables that contribute to these rulings.

¹ Gerardo Ceballos, Paul R. Ehrlich & Peter H. Raven, *Vertebrates on the brink as indicators of biological annihilation and the sixth mass extinction*, PNAS, (2020), <https://www.pnas.org/doi/10.1073/pnas.1922686117>, (last visited Apr 6, 2022).

Introduction

South Africa has 21 national parks and over 500 private game reserves that hold wildlife.² Africa's Big Five are lions, leopards, elephants, buffalo, and rhinoceros. The International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) is a union holding both government and civil society organizations founded in 1948.³ The IUCN is known internationally to be the "authority on the status of the natural world and the measures needed to safeguard it."⁴ The IUCN Red List assesses species by using quantitative criteria to determine their extinction risk.⁵ According to the IUCN Red List, the African Lion⁶ and leopard⁷ are listed as Vulnerable while the Black

² *Capturing the Beauty of Africa's Wildlife and Fighting to Save It*, National Geographic. 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6bgBRLWdaVQ>, (last accessed February 17, 2022).

³ International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), <https://www.iucn.org/about>, (last accessed March 1, 2022).

⁴ IUCN, *A brief history*. <https://www.iucn.org/about/iucn-a-brief-history>, (last accessed March 1, 2022).

⁵ IUCN, *Red List of Threatened Species*, <https://www.iucn.org/resources/conservation-tools/iucn-red-list-threatened-species>, (last accessed March 1, 2022).

⁶ *Conservation Status of the African Lion*, CMS. <https://www.cms.int/en/conservation/conservation-status-african-lion>, (last accessed March 1, 2022).

⁷ Cat Specialist Group, *Leopard*, <http://www.catsg.org/index.php?id=110>, (last accessed March 1, 2022).

Rhino is Critically Endangered⁸ and the African Buffalo is Near Threatened.⁹ The African Forest Elephant is listed as Critically Endangered and the African Savanna Elephant as Endangered.¹⁰

Discussion

Africa is a continent filled with some of the poorest and most corrupt countries in the world with many of these countries relying on the wildlife for jobs and income. South Africa is known to tourists to hold the “Big Five” contributing to 8.7% of the region’s GDP through tourism and travel.¹¹ While it is illegal to hunt in national parks, the private game reserves rely on it. A customer can pay a private game reserve for a hunting trip to hunt

⁸ International Union for Conservation of Nature, <https://www.iucn.org/>, (last accessed 1 March 2022).

⁹ *Conservation Status of the African Lion, IUCN Red List of Threatened Species*, Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals, https://www.un.org/Depts/los/general_assembly/contributions_2009/Convention%20on%20the%20Conservation%20of%20Migratory%20Species%20of%20Wild%20Animals.pdf, (last accessed March 1, 2022).

¹⁰ *African Elephant Species now Endangered and Critically Endangered, IUCN Red List*, ICUN, <https://www.iucn.org/news/species/202103/african-elephant-species-now-endangered-and-critically-endangered-iucn-red-list>, (last accessed February 17, 2022).

¹¹ *South Africa Contribution of travel and tourism to GDP (% of GDP), 1995-2019*, knoema.com. <https://knoema.com/atlas/South-Africa/topics/Tourism/Travel-and-Tourism-Total-Contribution-to-GDP/Contribution-of-travel-and-tourism-to-GDP-percent-of-GDP>, (last accessed February 17, 2022).

and kill one of Africa’s “Big Five” to take home as a trophy. Trophy hunting in South Africa was valued at R1 billion in 2013,¹² which is roughly 67 million U.S. dollars.

Trophy hunting is defined as, “. . . shooting of carefully selected animals – frequently big game such as rhinos, elephants, lions, pumas and bears – under official government license, for pleasure.”¹³ The hunter will keep a part of the animal as a souvenir to display, called a trophy. Trophy hunting of endangered species is largely a controversial topic among hunters and conservationists. Hunters argue that the trophy hunting aids conservation efforts by generating funds that would not otherwise be received. These funds are allocated to wildlife conservation efforts by protecting habitat spaces and aiding surrounding communities by providing jobs. For example, Namibia permits five male rhinos to be killed each year in exchange for payment to conservation funds and the meat is distributed to the local community.¹⁴

¹² *FACTSHEET: How much does hunting contribute to African economies?* Africa Check, (2015), <https://africacheck.org/fact-checks/factsheets/factsheet-how-much-does-hunting-contribute-african-economies>, (last accessed February 17, 2022).

¹³ *An introduction to trophy hunting*, Discover Wildlife (2022), <https://www.discoverwildlife.com/animal-facts/an-introduction-to-trophy-hunting/>, (last accessed Mar 31, 2022).

¹⁴ John Campbell, *The \$400,000 Death of a Namibian Black Rhino*, 2019 Council on Foreign Relations, <https://www.cfr.org/blog/400000-death-namibian-black-rhino>, (last accessed March 1, 2022).

Some countries in Africa have banned trophy hunting, some eventually lifting the bans. In 2014 Botswana temporarily banned trophy hunting due to a decline in the wildlife populations.¹⁵ However, due to human-elephant incidences and loss of jobs, the ban was lifted shortly thereafter. Kenya has banned all forms of hunting wildlife since 1977.

The endangerment of rhinoceros and elephants are largely credited due to the ivory trade. A rhinoceros's only predator are humans, being hunted and killed for their horns. Elephants have some predators, but humans are considered to be the greatest threat to their population. With the demand for ivory rising, so has the illegal killing of elephants and rhinoceros. A large factor of the ivory trade is the health theory in Vietnam and China that ivory is "medicinal" or can be used to show wealth. The international trade of ivory was banned in 1989¹⁶ by CITES in attempt to save these animal populations. The United States enacted a near-total ban on commercial trade of African elephant ivory on July 6,

¹⁵ Krista Mahr, *Why Botswana Is Lifting Its Ban On Elephant Trophy Hunting*, Npr.org (2019), <https://www.npr.org/sections/goatsandsoda/2019/09/28/763994654/why-botswana-is-lifting-its-ban-on-elephant-trophy-hunting> , (last accessed March 31, 2022).

¹⁶ *Ivory sales get the go-ahead*, CITES.org, https://cites.org/eng/news/pr/2007/070602_ivory.shtml, (last accessed February 23, 2022).

2016.¹⁷ All international trade of rhino horn has been illegal since 1977.¹⁸

The United Kingdom has taken a step forward in international conservation by planning to ban the importation of trophies from endangered and threatened species with the Animals Abroad Bill. This ban will protect Africa's Big Five, which includes lions, leopards, rhinos, elephants, buffalo, and thousands of other species from being imported into Great Britain.¹⁹

The Endangered Species Act of 1973 was designed to protect endangered and threatened species and their habitats from extinction in the United States.²⁰ The Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) was agreed upon in 1973 and entered in effect in 1975 as a treaty or agreement among governments to "ensure that

¹⁷ U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, *What Can I Do With My Ivory*, 2022, <https://fws.gov/media/what-can-i-do-my-ivorypdf>, (last accessed February 23, 2022).

¹⁸ Jon Taylor, *New Directive aims to Curb Wildlife Trade in Vietnam*, Save The Rhino, 2020, <https://www.savetherhino.org/asia/vietnam/new-directive-aims-to-curb-wildlife-trade-in-vietnam/?cn-reloaded=1>, (last accessed February 17, 2022).

¹⁹ *Importing of hunting trophies banned to protect world's threatened species*, GOV.UK, 2021, <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/importing-of-hunting-trophies-banned-to-protect-worlds-threatened-species>, (last accessed March 2, 2022).

²⁰ *Endangered Species Act*, Legal Information Institute, [https://www.law.cornell.edu/wex/endangered_species_act_\(esa\)](https://www.law.cornell.edu/wex/endangered_species_act_(esa)), (last accessed February 17, 2022).

international trade in specimens of wild animals and plants does not threaten the survival of the species.”²¹ This treaty is signed by 184 parties, including the United States, South Africa, the European Union, and more.²² To import a protected animal into the United States it is required by the Endangered Species Act and CITES to acquire a permit from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

In 2013, David K. Reinke was allowed a permit to import a black rhino, shot and killed in Namibia, for the first time in 33 years.²³ This action was received with an abundance of criticism from conservationists. Many argue that this action set a precedent for the future applauding the trophy hunting of endangered species and undermining conservation efforts. However, Reinke’s lawyer, John Jackson of Conservation Force, argues that “hunters and anglers are an indispensable and essential force for wildlife conservation.”²⁴ Conservation Force holds the position that the importation of trophies from endangered species are beneficial to the conservation of

²¹ *What is CITES?*, Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora, <https://cites.org/eng/disc/what.php>, (last accessed February 17, 2022).

²² *List of Contracting Parties, CITES.org, 2022*, <https://cites.org/eng/disc/parties/chronolo.php>, [last accessed February 24, 2022].

²³ John R.Platt, *Hunter Allowed to Import Rhino Trophy into U.S. for First Time in 33 Years*, Scientific American Blog Network, 2013, <https://blogs.scientificamerican.com/extinction-countdown/hunter-rhino-trophy/>, [last accessed 17 February 2022].

²⁴ *Id.*

that species. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service released a statement reading that because of the considerable donation made to Namibian conservation efforts, the permit was allowed because it enhances the long-term survival of the species. Jackson was also the lawyer representing Chris D. Peyerk in another controversial story involving the import of a black rhino in 2019.²⁵

The conservation of African animals heavily relies upon the proper care given by the countries in which the animals reside. Because of Africa's extreme poverty and corruption, it is very difficult to have proper management of animal species. Africa is known to allow criminals who poach to go unreprimanded, often with the same individuals being repeat offenders. Wayne Pacelle, the Humane Society's president, made this statement,

- *“Under the prior administration, FWS made the eminently reasonable decision that Zimbabwe – one of the most corrupt countries on earth – was not managing its elephant population in a sustainable manner... Government officials allegedly have been involved in both poaching of elephants and illegal export of ivory tusks. Zimbabwean President Robert Mugabe even*

²⁵ Michael Biesecker, *U.S. to allow Michigan trophy hunter to import body of rare black rhino*, Detroit News, 2019, <https://www.detroitnews.com/story/news/politics/2019/09/06/us-allow-mich-trophy-hunter-import-body-rare-black-rhino/40088515/>, (last accessed February 17, 2022).

celebrated his birthday last year by feasting on an elephant.”²⁶

The United States is limited in its legal capabilities of conserving African species due to the geographical location and the supporting laws of African countries. The United States has no say in whether a U.S. citizen is allowed to trophy hunt in foreign countries, but does have the right to regulate coinciding actions such as trophy importation. The United States is the world’s top importer of trophies from CITES-listed species²⁷ and the second largest consumer market for wildlife.²⁸

The United States has ample opportunity to ensure healthy conservation of threatened and endangered animals. By funding conservation and research activities, the United States would be able to aid in solving the mismanagement and inaccurate population numbers in

²⁶ Stephen Casimiro, *Reversing Obama, Trump lets trophy hunters import elephant heads*, Adventure Journal, 2017, <https://www.adventure-journal.com/2017/11/reversing-obama-trump-lets-trophy-hunters-import-elephant-heads/>, (last accessed March 30, 2022).

²⁷ *GRAPHIC: The United States Plays a Major Role in Trophy Hunting*, Born Free USA 2020, <https://www.bornfreeusa.org/2020/06/01/graphic-the-united-states-plays-a-major-role-in-trophy-hunting/>, (last accessed February 24, 2022).

²⁸ *The Endangered Species Act*, World Wildlife Fund, 2022, <https://www.worldwildlife.org/pages/the-us-endangered-species-act>, (last accessed February 24, 2022).

Africa which is a large contributor to the decline of these animals. Independent third-party authentication systems should be in place when evaluating the companies and conservation efforts of trophy hunting operations.

Conclusion

Africa's Big Five are in danger of extinction with disputable proposals of conservation. Trophy hunting has long been a subject of controversy and continues to flame the fire of conservationists and hunters around the world. While there is discussion on whether or not trophy hunting is morally correct, it is only responsible to fairly examine research on the animal populations being hunted. Because of Africa's poor and corrupt economic circumstances, it is almost impossible to be able to rely upon any government reports. Foreign countries such as the United States and the United Kingdom have policies set into place to help aid overseas animal populations. The United States has implemented the Endangered Species Act of 1973 and adhere to the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES). To import a protected animal into the United States it is required by the Endangered Species Act and CITES to acquire a permit from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Hunters are able to acquire permits from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service by proving that their kill will contribute to the overall conservation of that species. The United Kingdom has even banned the importation of endangered species entirely. Because the United States is the world's top importer of trophies from CITES-listed

species and the second largest consumer market for wildlife, there should be some sort of urgency to change or make improvements. Although the United States has importation policies in place, it is simply not enough to protect the endangered animals. There are many actions that can be explored and should be. Overseas research and conservation efforts should be funded, independent third-party authentication systems should be in place, and overall, all issues concerning trophy hunting importations should be made publicly available.