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LEOPARD HUNTING ESCALATES

An increasing number of hunting guides are being arrested in connection with leopard hunting

In Namibia, leopards are increasingly being hunted in unacceptable ways. Hunting practices that come close to animal cruelty and no longer have anything to do with conservation-oriented hunting in harmony with nature are increasingly gaining a foothold in the industry - this must be put to an end. A guest post.

Helge Denker

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By Helge Denker

Illegal leopard hunting practices are adding further shame to the long-discredited trophy hunting industry. We should be talking about shooting trophy animals rather than hunting, because what is practiced here no longer has anything to do with hunting in the actual sense.

As if the many negative headlines in recent years - think of lions specially bred for shooting ("canned lion hunting") or the lion Cecil, which was lured out of a protected area to be shot - and the resulting attempts to restrict or completely ban trophy hunting worldwide, weren't already enough. Too many Namibian hunting guides are actively contributing to the demise of an industry that seems unable to eliminate their unacceptable practices.

Leopard hunting is an extremely lucrative business. Although the shooting fee for a leopard in Namibia varies considerably, depending on the provider, it is usually well over N\$150,000. Accommodation, meals, guidance and other fees are not included. Although leopards are relatively common in Namibia, they are extremely shy and difficult to see. They are rarely seen even in national parks. Hunting leopards outside of a protected area in a "fair" hunt is extremely difficult. However, customers want guarantees of success in return for their expenses - and providers use all means to ensure that the cats are killed and they can earn the money. Illegal practices include hunting at night and hunting with dogs (leopards will quickly retreat from a pack of dogs to the nearest tree, from which the cats can then be shot down with ease); Leopards are also caught in box traps and kept in unsuitable enclosures or cages until the next customer arrives from overseas who wants to shoot a leopard. In particularly disgusting cases, illegally killed leopards are frozen in order to smuggle them into the realm of legality when the opportunity arises.

The Ministry of the Environment, Forestry and Tourism has strictly regulated approval and reporting procedures and only issues a limited number of permits for leopard hunting each year.

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Trophy hunting of leopards has long been viewed as a questionable endeavor. The leopard is usually "baited" for a long time, meaning that meat is laid out as bait for it long before the actual "hunt". Substandard meat from donkeys, horses or zebras is hung in a tree so that other predators cannot reach it, but a leopard can eat it with ease. Once the animal has gotten used to the baiting area, the hunting guest can be led into a "shelter" from which he can shoot the cat as soon as it approaches the usual feeding area. However, leopards are very vigilant and often only come to a bait at night. Therefore, every kind of technology is used to enable an already ruthless killing. Camera traps, for example, show in advance whether the animal is suitable as a trophy, sensors signal the arrival of the leopard at the bait even in the dark, night vision devices and special headlights enable a good view through the rifle scope, etc. In

order to enable the Namibian trophy hunting industry To stand out from all the disgusting and often illegal practices that the media in other countries have highlighted, the Ministry of Environment, Forestry and Tourism has for 10 years been committed to the concept of "conservation hunting". clearly measurable benefits for the conservation and preservation of wildlife and nature. Too few Namibian organizers have adopted this concept; too many think that they can do whatever they want unmolested out in the bush because it is difficult or even impossible to monitor them there.

But they are wrong. The Ministry of the Environment, in close cooperation with the Namibian police, has decided that rigorous prosecution remains the only option if the industry itself fails to put a stop to illegal practices. Modern information and surveillance technologies allow targeted investigations even in places where the hunting organizers previously felt untouchable - in their own remote or inaccessible hunting grounds.

In fact, in recent months in various parts of the country, a handful of hunting guides have been arrested and charged with various illegal activities related to leopard hunting. Indeed, some means are so abhorrent that even passionate advocates of the conservation benefits of a legal hunting industry are gradually reaching the point where they can no longer defend the sector - even in Namibia, long a shining example of good practice and fairness There was hunting.

Will prison sentences, hefty fines and license revocations shake up the industry so much that it finds appropriate behavior? Now it has to be shown.

Helge Denker is a Namibian conservationist, writer and artist. From 1998 to 2008 he was registered as a professional hunter. Since then, conservation and environmental protection in rural communities and supporting the government in combating wildlife crime have been the focus of his work, as well as writing and art.



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