

## PERSONAL COMMENTARY: Farming and canned hunting of animals...

I believe my history of decades of action speaks for my stand in favor of environmental conservation. My photography speaks for my love of exotic animals. My work over the years in Public Safety has given me extensive history and experience with the idea of “risk vs. gain” and considering “calculated losses”. And my love of pets and going through their traumatic losses with them has given me the feelings associated with an animal’s pain or suffering. On that note, I’d like to take a moment to give my perspective and address an issue that is growing in practice as well as in controversy... the farming and/or canned hunting of animals.

The philosophy of animal protection can be boiled down to, what I consider, are two types of ideals; ‘individual’ and ‘species’. Individual protection seems to revolve around the care and welfare of each individual animal and its sole experience in life. Species protection revolves around not looking at individual animals, but rather the entire species as a whole.

We live in a world that is growing in population at an uncontrollable rate and losing the essence of ethics and ‘right and wrong’. Therefore, it is inevitable that the resulting actions against animals will become an attack on both individuals and their quality of life, as well as their entire race. When such a conflict occurs, it will force a decision to be made...do I want to save the individuals, or the species? As proven with many recent stories, ranging from shark finning to rhino poaching, there is no way to save both. I understand that there are those that may disagree with this thought and those that believe that this world is the kind of world that can do both. But in all honesty I would have to challenge that person if they have really SEEN the real world out there.

Laws allow the KKK to demonstrate, burning crosses and waving confederate flags, while miles down the road someone is not allowed to hang an American flag on an overpass. A drunk driver kills a child after their 12<sup>th</sup> DUI violation and gets 6 years in prison with 2 of those years suspended, while a first time purse robber without a weapon gets 8 years in prison. An EMT is sued because he acted off duty and saves someone’s life, but causes some injury, while 3 EMTs get no discipline for standing by watching someone choke to death because they were “afraid of getting sued”. Politicians no longer vote on whether a bill is right or wrong in their eyes, but vote strictly based on if the opposing party wrote it. In fact, it has been shown that over half of bills and laws are not even read by most politicians. Over 60% of Americans think Europe is a country. Almost a 10<sup>th</sup> of the world’s population adamantly believe that it’s okay to kill their wife if she cheats, but no fault on a husband for cheating. Thousands of tons of edible food is thrown away into garbage cans specifically designed to keep hungry people out. This food is destroyed rather than given to the hundreds and thousands of homeless people living literally blocks away.

To those who believe we are a world that can save animals, I say; THIS is the same world you are expecting to protect all animals as both individuals AND species?

If we were cavemen, we would be out killing anything we could find for food, clothing, or tools; cows, deer, elephants, rhinos, and lions. All would be found at the tips of our spears. Arguments that there have been races that lived in balance are one-sided. Native Americans ran hundreds of Bison off cliffs and only used a few. South Americans would capture and kill many fish and animals, only to use a few. Arctic populations would kill hundreds of whales and seals leaving a majority to rot. This is the fact of life of human beings throughout history.

As demand for trophies, medicines, and food increases, the strain on the animal world becomes evident. The answer to the equation is simple... reduce the demand or meet the demand. Today we cannot keep up with the demand and simply put, no one with any power in any country is willing to take on population control which is the #1 factor influencing demand. As my arguments have already proven, expecting to reduce the demand is simply not a realistic option in this world today. Therefore, a sacrifice must be made. What is that sacrifice? We must give up either protecting individual animals or protecting species. Thus comes into play farming/canned hunting of exotic animals.

In order to save species, there must be profit in today's world. Sure conservation organizations can struggle along as they see their results constantly countered. In one country anti-poachers wipe out a whole conservation camp burning buildings and killing animals while in another country, regulations, property seizures, and permitting close non-profit sanctuaries. As much as I hate it, it simply is; without profit there is no guarantee of success.

So how much do we sacrifice our principles? That is a tough question. Do you allow a canned hunting farm to keep a species alive for 5% being hunted? How about 10%? 20%? What about 50%? In my eyes the answer is simple...extinction is FOREVER, sacrifice as many as needed to keep the species alive on the planet. There could be a day when the only way a species survives is to keep 100% of the species in a zoo. Yes it is a horrible way for the species to live, and hopefully a day would come that the world would become civilized enough to export those animals back to the wild, but at least in the meantime they exist!

Let's take the Scimitar Oryx as one example of this. This beautiful animal once roamed in massive herds in the hundreds of thousands, migrating throughout North Africa. Today it is extinct in the wild. However, the world's largest population of them, over 10,000, resides on the hunting farms of Texas. Exotic animal farms have embraced them as a source of income from hunters. It is not uncommon for a single farm to have a herd of 2,000 or more animals. The farms allow between 2%-10% of a herd to be hunted each year. Hunters come from all over the world and spend as much as \$10,000 to drive or hike 3 days over a 30,000 acre farm, with a 1 in 10 chance of even seeing their prize, let alone killing one. For the price of less than 100 animals, a number that would be close to what a wild herd would lose to natural causes, a species not only thrives, but genetically survives viably. For the last several years, Friends Of Animals has been petitioning to stop the hunting of Scimitar Oryx in the U.S. They are against the killing of even one animal, saying how it is cruel for only the purposes of a trophy. Quite honestly, I have to agree with their philosophy. But what is the sacrifice that is made when that philosophy is successful? This past year Friends of Animals succeeded, and starting in 2013, it will be illegal to hunt

Scimitar Oryx without a special permit. The result? A poll found that over 90% of the farms will lose the hunting funding that was feeding and housing the Oryx. These farms have said they will get rid of their stocks completely. How? They have offered as many animals as wanted to any conservation or zoo in the world. Because of limited facilities and funding, only approximately 400 of the 10,000+ have been spoken for. The rest will be killed. What's worse is, it has been proven that even with the 400-600 distributed around the world, the population will not remain genetically viable for long, and it is estimated that the species will be fully extinct in 20-30 years. Thus, by trying to protect individuals, a species has been condemned to extinction.

Now there is talk of Rhino's being farmed. The Rhino horn if cut at a certain place, will re-grow fully within a couple years providing an endless supply from a living Rhino. By farming Rhinos until the demand has been curbed, we can be sure to keep the species both physically alive, but also genetically alive. Yet there are those aggressively fighting against it, as it is disgraceful and cruel to the animals. I agree, but again, at what cost?

I would love to live in a world where people say no to killing animals for entertainment. But that world simply doesn't exist, and isn't foreseen to exist for many many more decades. Therefore, animal conservation activists need to re-evaluate their tactics and look at the long term goal, if we are to keep species alive. Set a goal of both protecting individuals and species, but if compromised, don't sacrifice the species for philosophical ideals on the individuals. Like a war, there must be multiple contingency plans devised. Plan A is saving both individuals and species, plan B is sacrificing some individuals to certain methods, Plan C is sacrificing more individuals, etc. Regardless of how many defensive lines are drawn, it should be unanimously agreed that the final defensive line is saving a species. There is definitely a difference between battles and wars and it is simply not true that you can win a war by the number of battles won. This is something so true it can be found in military tactics throughout history, throughout the world. The philosophy to protect all animals is sound, but we cannot blind ourselves to the true world we live in, and we should not focus on winning battles only to lose the war.

Based on these deductions and arguments, as much as I disagree with the idea, I must agree with the tactic that farming or canned hunting does have a place in the conservation and survival of a species.