

# Sustainable eNews

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## African Elephants: How to Die?

Editorial by Jaques Berney

For some months, and actually perhaps for years, South Africa has been confronting what appears, (although it should not) to be a serious dilemma: should culling of elephants be resumed in the Kruger National Park? It was stopped there in 1995 after long debates with animal rights groups such as IFAW and HSUS, which offered so-called compensations in the form of grants to buy land to translocate some animals, or to experiment with methods of contraception for them. Although the Minister of the Environment has not given formal approval, it appears that the decision to resume culling has now been made. Through *African Hunting Info*, we have learned that the Minister and officials of the South African National Parks have recently visited some key countries in Europe, to explain to representatives of governments and NGOs why elephant numbers need to be reduced and, we presume, to get some assurance that South Africa shall not be criticized too strongly, when culling starts again.

At the same time, dramatic reports are coming from the also famous Hwange National Park in Zimbabwe, where at least 50 elephants have died and many more are expected to die due to serious lack of food and water. This region, like others in southern Africa, is once more suffering a serious drought. Although officials of Zimbabwe have suggested the translocation of elephants from Hwange to Namibia, *African Hunting Info* has reported that the Namibian director of parks and wildlife management refuses; there is no way for Namibia to accommodate more jumbos; they have enough elephants of their own.

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These two situations have to be considered at the same time, as they are parts of the same problem. How can elephant populations be managed, when it is evident that their numbers are becoming excessive in view of the habitat available? While the population of the Kruger NP was for years maintained around 7000 elephants, it has steadily grown after the ban on culling. In spite of actual translocations and the opening to new grounds, including through the elimination of fences at the border with Mozambique, it has probably doubled by now. In Hwange NP, where the capacity is estimated at around 45,000 elephants, the population has soared to more than 75,000. Such densities are not without serious consequences on the habitat, especially in the case of negative climatic events, drought in particular. This has detrimental impacts on other species and on the elephant itself, as now evidenced in Zimbabwe. A solution should be found before very serious disasters occur there and elsewhere in similar circumstances.

This kind of problem is indeed not specific to either the African elephant or to southern Africa. Many countries throughout the world are confronted with similar problems, e.g. in Europe with wild boars, foxes and deer, in North America with deer, beaver and seals, in Australia with kangaroos and some parrots. In all these countries, the problem has not turned to a dilemma. It is simply and logically understood, in particular by governments, that these species have to be managed and, to prevent their demographic explosion, that they must be hunted or culled. Except for seals, this does not raise large campaigns of protest, if any. Regarding foxes, as an example, animal-right groups may be using them to produce posters and pamphlets but this is not to campaign against their hunt but against the use of their pelts because these groups are opposed to the fur industry in general. The United Kingdom is or was an exception, due to the traditional dog hunting. Few of these groups propose contraception for wild boar or deer, nor do they consider those species as endangered contrary to what they claim for the African elephant. Why this difference in attitude? Because they know well that their protests would remain without any effect on the authorities and, above all, would result in a complete failure in terms of fund raising. The elephant, on the other side, what a godsend! Millions of dollars have been collected to 'save' elephants, although not much has reached the range countries to assist them to conserve the species.

Therefore, we shall strongly support South Africa, as well as other countries such as Zimbabwe, when they resume culling where necessary to prevent African elephant overcrowding and the destruction of its habitat. There is no need to ask for permission from other governments or especially, from NGOs, to manage their own game. The former are not telling them whether hunting should be allowed or not on their territories and while the views of NGOs might be taken into consideration, they should not dictate the final decision. Similarly, the governments of these African countries should not listen to NGOs that are blackmailing them by claiming that it would be against tourism interests to cull elephants because international tourists would boycott them. Hunting and culling may perfectly coexist with tourism when properly conducted, as demonstrated in many places, including in Kruger NP before 1995. Concerning contraception, which is still considered by some NGOs as a potential solution, to suggest that a species should be prevented to breed is blatantly indecent from people who describe it as in danger of extinction. To close waterholes, as also proposed, does not inspire better feelings.

In addition, it should not be forgotten that before the culling ban in Kruger NP, elephants were providing considerable quantities of meat for the local human population, and other products of high value on the international markets. The economic return from culling, although it is not without costs, is far from negligible and is a benefit to the conservation of the elephant, of other

species, and to local communities sharing the same habitats. This supposes however that it is possible to trade internationally in these products. For that reason CITES should finally agree that countries which have been the best protectors of their populations of elephants have to be allowed to manage them in their (the countries' and the elephants') best interests.

**If these countries still have doubts on their rights in this matter, they should ask the relevant governments how they would react if they were pushed to ban any use of wild boar, deer or kangaroos. □**

## Taste – Sometimes It's All About Image

People eat food items that are appealing to them, and they often remember with nostalgia those items which their parents and grandparents cooked at family dinners when they were young. The idea of eating a food item that is non-traditional is often repugnant to a person who is not into experimenting. And, certain foods may always have been defined by one's own culture as something that "others" eat. In the case of modern white Australians, they apparently feel revulsion when it is suggested that they turn to eating kangaroo and wallaby species. After all, those species have always been identified as food for the "Abos" or Aboriginal people, who have traditionally not been treated very well or regarded with the respect they deserve as fellow humans. When seen from such an anthropological perspective, it would be surprising if many Australians suddenly decided to seek out kangaroo meat and make it a part of the national cuisine.

Other people in far away lands have apparently accepted kangaroo meat as something exotic, and have thus discovered that they not only like the taste, but they feel no social stigma about consuming it – they do not feel that they would be labeled as akin to Aboriginals if they identified themselves as connoisseurs of this product.

The BBC News recently reported that the kangaroo meat industry in Australia is seeking new names for the product, in hopes that it would sell "at home". At present, it is mainly sold overseas. The industry is trying to entice Australians to come up with a name for the product that shall make it more attractive, more "mainstream", and less identifiable with its former associations with Aboriginal people.

While IWMC sympathizes with those in the kangaroo control industry in their efforts to sell their product at home, we hold out no great hope that this shall happen overnight, and while the cultural integration into society of Aboriginal people is still less than complete.

When kangaroo food is no longer identified as appropriate only for a certain social class, it may be accepted by young Australians who may think it is "cool" to consume it, partly in an effort to shock their elders, and partly because it may be a good buy, and perhaps, even, because it tastes good to them.

IWMC welcomes any effort to popularize kangaroo meat for domestic consumption. There would be no more efficient way to manage these animals, as they compete with sheep and cattle

for grassland down under. Better a sustainable, culturally supported use than a waste of the product, or a situation where it is forever shunned on the home turf.

Good luck, Australia. □

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## Now There is a “Save the Bears” Organization – To No Avail

Opening day of the 2005 hunting season for black bears in Pennsylvania was a historic event: More than 2000 (actually 2,026) bears were recorded at check stations throughout the wooded state, where the harvest was the largest ever recorded on the opening day of the Pennsylvania season.

This occurred in spite of the efforts of a new organization to “save” the bears from hunters.

Fred J. Aun reported in the Tuesday, November 22 Star-Ledger that *Win Animal Rights*, (or WAR) is recruiting people who shall be trained in a WAR boot camp to enable them to successfully go out in the woods and keep bears safe from hunters, all without committing the crime of hunter harassment. Their plan is to commit these acts in New Jersey, New York and Pennsylvania. Aun calls them the “Bear Guerillas”. The organization has adopted a “military motif” and is training recruits in hunt sabotage techniques.

We don’t know how many foolish people have signed up for this dangerous idea. It’s not that hunters would intentionally shoot at such people. It is dangerous because the hunt saboteurs may unwittingly put themselves in the line of fire in an area where bears are common in the woods, and people are not. Further, why would any bear take safety advice from some flea brained human who explains that he/she only wants it to go and hide somewhere? By hiking about and singing, yelling and banging on tins, hunt saboteurs are more successful at making foolish nuisances of themselves than they are at “saving” bears or any other game. The Pennsylvania opening day record is proof enough of this.

We note that blatant hunt sabotage is called “hunter harassment” in many states, where such activity is now illegal, and for good reason. Bears and deer must be kept at manageable populations, which are defined as those at which a minimum of human/animal conflicts are observed and property and crop damage are also kept to tolerable levels.

IWMC applauds the hunters of Pennsylvania on their opening day success in the black bear hunt. We wish all hunters a safe and exciting and rewarding season, as they put food on their tables, teach their youngsters the skills and values necessary for carrying on this tradition, and keep their game animals from becoming nuisances instead of the respected prey that they now are. We wish to point out that those whose values differ from our own have every right to talk about their ideals, but no right to go out in the woods and fields and get in the way of legal hunting. Society is best served by those conservationists who practice safety, sustainable use, and good sportsmanship. □

## Ocean Noise – Implications and Realities

The human quests for national safety and for ocean bed oil and gas reserves have both led to increasing intensity of human-caused, unnatural noises in the world's oceans.

Near the Kuril Islands there are extensive gas and oil extraction facilities. The noise they create has had a fatal effect on a dwindling population of gray whales, whose winter feeding grounds coincide with these facilities. The gray whale population in this area has crashed, presumably because the animals avoid their winter feeding grounds due to avoidance of the noise.

The Inupiat on Alaska's north slope hope and pray that the American quest for new oil reserves does not lead to further exploration offshore, because the bowhead whale, now back up to around 10,000 animals, would be adversely affected by the noise of further oil exploration and that of drilling rigs. Their Indian cousins, the Gwich'in, have argued that oil exploration and drilling in the Alaska National Wildlife Reserve, or ANWR, would similarly be bad news for the caribou herd on which they have always relied. Those in favor of drilling in ANWR instead of offshore reply that the precedent set in Prudhoe Bay indicates that caribou need not be adversely affected and in fact, that herd has increased since the oil fields went in. At this time, it does appear that offshore drilling would be more harmful than would drilling in ANWR, given these data. Nevertheless, the Gwich'in groups have been told for years by an "environmentalist" organization that the caribou would suffer from the presence of another oil field. They believe this information and fear for their future, thus they lobby both the US and Canada along these lines.

Offshore of eastern Newfoundland, seismic exploration for oil was done with dynamite.

The resulting seabed damage and the noise and turbidity may have severely damaged the spawning grounds and success of the Atlantic cod and other species. The decline of the cod in particular may be related to this oil exploration. Newfoundlanders are skeptical that the promises of their government that oil fields offshore would bring them wealth, when all they have noted so far has been a decline in their fish stocks.

Offshore of the eastern and southern US, and eastward to the Canary Islands, there have been many instances of stranded toothed cetaceans subsequent to Navy exercises with the use of low and mid frequency sonar for detection of enemy submarines. Apparently, these bursts of mid-ocean sound are damaging to cetaceans and perhaps also to fish species.

The developed countries of the world need more oil and gas, and they all need to be secure from the threat of offshore submarine attacks with rockets. This dilemma may not be solved in the near future. Legislative bodies in developed countries are not likely to stop sonar scanning of the ocean for enemy submarines and they are not likely to stop the exploration and drilling of the seabed for oil and gas reserves. We humans are going to pursue both safety and resources for as long as any threat of attack exists, and for as long as there are no substitutes for oceanic oil and gas. The human species has prioritized itself and will continue to do so.

IWMC hopes that a genuine effort will be made by both scientists and legislative bodies to find ways to mitigate these effects of our needs and apprehensions. The dangers of oil spills are always with us and our use of these finite resources can not be sustainable, by definition. In the future, it is anticipated that ocean bed supplies of methane shall be exploited, presumably with the same or greater levels of noise intensity and even more pollution of the surrounding area.

**We believe that in order to continue to use this world, we need to find economically and socially benign supplies of energy, and safer technology through which to protect ourselves from outside harm.**

The creatures of our oceans are adaptable, as proven by their survival through millions of years.

**However, we have a moral responsibility to not only exploit these creatures sustainably in the direct sense, but to protect their habitat through changing our own behavior in the depths.**

Sustainable use and habitat conservation are both vital to our continued existence on this planet. Because we are optimists, we believe that this is possible and that humans will learn how to conduct security operations in more benign ways. Good luck, Homo sapiens! □

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## **The Foie Gras Ban Debate It's Not About Being Nice to Geese**

**T**he gourmet food known as foie gras is produced by the agricultural practice of force feeding geese in order that their livers shall have a specific size, taste and consistency due to this dietary practice. Whether or not this mode of production is unpleasant for the geese, is actually unknown. No geese have been interviewed. They are mechanically fed to what appears to be over-satiation, and when butchered the resulting huge liver is an extremely profitable by-product of the goose production business. Foie gras has been a staple farm product in France and elsewhere for generations, and is a renowned culinary tradition. Animal activists commonly object to the fact that high end restaurants in the US and Europe feature foie gras on their menus. The ALF (Animal Liberation Front) has often taken credit for doing damage to American restaurants that feature foie gras. The eco-terrorism specialty of this group of thugs is broken windows, graffiti, and other acts of vandalism.

Idiot Hollywood celebrities such as Loretta (Hot Lips) Swit occasionally make statements supportive of the ALF position that foie gras should be banned in the US, claiming that foie gras production is comparable to torture. Ms Swit claimed that such "torture" is similar to that allegedly carried out at Abu Ghraib. Does she mean that geese used in that production have been sexually exploited by camera wielding persons, or deeply embarrassed by being exposed to sexual taunts by military women? See the Center for Consumer Freedom, November 1 "Headlines" website for recent details.

We think this is the most nonsensical claim made so far on behalf of well fed geese.

IWMC believes that the attempts at a foie gras ban recently in Chicago, and previous ones in California are seen by the ALF as one small step for the principle of a foie gras ban, and a huge step forward for activism, as they test the way for banning all the other alleged “cruelties” of meat production techniques. The ALF threats of vandalism are nothing more than a power play that deserves to be handled as a law enforcement matter.

Activist vandalism, bullying, and the media coverage of this behavior should not result in legislatively mandated changes to restaurant menus or in changes to the availability of certain ethnic foods. The acts of animal activism are simply annoying noises in a system that makes a wide diversity of foods available in major cities all over the world.

**While activists believe that they can either shame or frighten people into choosing foods that are “morally correct”, they are neither accomplishing acceptance of this narrow perspective nor convincing restaurant goers that they should heed the demands of this socially dysfunctional segment of society.**

We strongly urge local governments not to cave in to the ALF demands that any legal foods should be banned. No free society should have to submit to the threats of the “food police” to ban anything. Today foie gras, tomorrow, prime beef and pork, veal, Long Island duckling, tuna steak, shrimp, sashimi and sushi. □

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## Obituary

I WMC friends and collaborators were saddened to learn of the passing away of Mrs. Willem Winjstekers, wife of the CITES Secretary General. We wish to convey to him and his family our deepest sympathy. □

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## Subscriptions / Submissions

**Editor-in-Chief, Dr. Janice Henke**  
**Design Director, Mr. Charles Fechko**

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