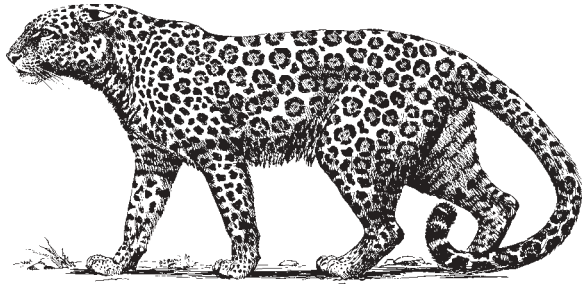


Chapter 3



The Safari Industry Today

Africa is a troubled continent, but she remains a hunter's paradise.

One's first African experience seems to elicit universal responses that are strange yet consistent. A first-time parachutist or scuba diver usually doesn't consider himself or herself an expert at the sport, but the first-time African hunter almost invariably comes home an expert on all things African. It is common for the first-time hunter to speak and write authoritatively and expansively about his or her experiences. I did it myself! Those in the audience who have genuine African experience are usually amused, but the inexperienced are likely to take such a limited viewpoint as gospel. Africa does offer a truly marvelous experience, and the intensity of the first safari is such that it is almost always a pivotal experience in one's life, an unforgettable episode that can never quite be relived. One's first professional hunter is almost certain to be the greatest of heroes, and the first country or area almost certain to be the most legendary of all game areas. Maybe the professional hunter was really that good, and maybe the area was really that good . . . but what is the basis for such a comparison?

Usually there is little harm in the pontification of a first-time African hunter, and professional hunters benefit immensely from the enthusiasm of new clients. From a pragmatic standpoint, however, it's always best to take such impressions with a grain of salt. One predictable statement that I find harmful is the prophesying of gloom and doom

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There remains a great deal of wonderful hunting country in Africa, but today's operators are often hunting areas that, twenty years ago, would have been too much trouble to reach.

for the future of African hunting. Clear back in 1909 Roosevelt expressed misgivings about the future of African wildlife—this when he was literally creating the concept of safari as we now know it. Hemingway did it in the thirties and Ruark did it in the fifties, and yet African hunting and the safari industry remain vibrant and vital. No, not the same, never the same . . . but still wonderful and still a proper and possible dream for any hunter.

From my first African safari (when I knew much less than I thought I did) until today (when I'm still learning), I have written a great deal about Africa. As I have mentioned, my own African experience started in Kenya, shortly before Kenya closed and when the safari industry was at its nadir. It seemed the doomsayers were right, that African hunting was on its way out. I hope that I have never contributed to this legacy of negativism. Certainly I have tried to avoid the temptation, but I must admit that I bought into it in my own safari planning!



Just a decade ago most of us thought elephant hunting was nearly over. Today the animals and the hunting opportunities are increasing, and will continue to increase. In Zimbabwe, where this jumbo was taken, meat and hide recovery has progressed to a fine art, with nothing going to waste.

Secretly believing that African hunting was dying, during the past twenty years I have indulged my African passion to an obsessive degree. I count more than forty separate hunts (many of them back-to-back) in a dozen different countries. This is far more African hunting than I can realistically afford and, as a gunwriter and hunting writer, far more than I can ever write about. Now that the millennium has turned, I see that there was little reason for such haste.

As we have seen, the great days of East African hunting are gone, but much great hunting remains. Countries are open now that were not open then. Back in '89 I was in a great hurry to get a decent tusker, for fear all elephant hunting would be history. Now we can see that we have turned that corner. The days of the hundred-pound tuskers are pretty much over, but elephants are on the increase in many countries. Opportunity today is better than it has been since the mid-1980s and will continue to improve. At this writing, all of the principal spiral-horned antelope can be readily hunted, which certainly was not always the case. Black

rhino hunting is a thing of the past, but hunting for the rest of the traditional Big Five, plus white rhino, is secure.

I do not regret my longtime immersion in African hunting, but I might have taken things at a more leisurely pace. As I reach middle age I find the mountains are growing steeper; I might have put off a few flat-country African hunts in favor of some sheep hunts I might have done when they were not only physically easier but also more affordable. We all have choices to make, and there was a time when I could have chosen to hunt desert sheep or polar bear at a small fraction of today's cost. To this day I count neither of these important animals among my life's experience, but I have hunted several times in each of the relatively costly safari countries such as Botswana, C.A.R., Tanzania, and Zambia!

Africa has her problems. Few countries are truly stable in the way the western world thinks of political stability. Over the next few years I am certain that some countries now open to hunting will close, and some now closed will open. The players will change, but there will be African hunting as long as there are African hunters, simply because the economic viability of an organized and regulated safari industry is too attractive for it to be otherwise. But this view does not apply in every locale. The great threat to African wildlife and African hunting is not politics but human encroachment. Wildlife habitat is being lost to agriculture, ranching, and other human development at an alarming rate. Although the worldwide ban on ivory trade has greatly reduced elephant poaching across the continent, meat poaching is an ever-escalating threat as the number of hungry people increases. Some remote areas have become virtual wasteland, and there is little money and apparently even less incentive to do anything about it. Countries with extremely active safari industries will be able to set aside land for wildlife, and have found it in their best interests to maintain active anti-poaching measures. Programs such as Zimbabwe's CAMPFIRE and Zambia's ADMADE, which

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allow local villages to share directly in concession and trophy fees from safaris, have made tremendous progress in promoting the concept of wildlife coexisting with man. As Africa's human population continues to increase, such programs are ever more essential. But ultimately they might not be enough, because there is only so much land.

In the short term I envision few sweeping changes to safari hunting as it is today. The old Africa, where wildlife roams freely and lions still roar, will continue to shrink gradually, but intensive wildlife management on private lands will continue and will gradually increase. One day, I fear, private land will offer the only viable hunting remaining in Africa—but that day is many years away, and the change will continue to be gradual. One very real risk, however, is that a number of countries currently open to hunting will have very small safari industries, with just a handful of outfitters.

Regardless of the local traditions, it comes down to economics and politics. Zimbabwe, South Africa, and Namibia, with huge and economically vital safari industries, are firmly entrenched as hunting countries. Botswana, Zambia, Ethiopia, Central African Republic, and Cameroon are hunting countries with viable safari industries, but the number of outfitters and thus the overall economic impact is very small. They will remain open so long as there is no compelling reason for things to be otherwise, but in my opinion there are no guarantees. Tanzania is a special case. She has a large and economically significant hunting industry and also a huge landmass that can support a large number of safaris. But she has previously experimented with a hunting closure (1973 to 1981); she has continuing difficulties with allocation of hunting areas; and she has experienced scandals with unscrupulous operators, which have rocked her safari industry, her government, and the international hunting community. I think Tanzania will remain a hunting country, but I wouldn't stake my life on it.

African Experience

The players will change, but there will be African hunting for many years to come. It will not be the same, but it will be wonderful and there will be choices. Unlike much of the world's great hunting, most African hunting can be enjoyed by hunters well past their middle years. No, I don't regret pushing as hard as I have to see as much of Africa as I could, but I don't think it was necessary to hurry. Roosevelt's Africa is gone. So is Hemingway's, and Ruark's, and even Peter Capstick's. Change will continue. But if I'm still able to follow buffalo tracks thirty years from now, I believe there will be tracks to follow. And young hunters just starting out should not fear there will be no African hunting when they are financially able to go. Unfortunately, it is impossible to predict exactly what countries will be available in thirty, twenty, or even ten years from now. But I can give a brief rundown on the African scene today, and some thoughts on what the future might hold.

Core Hunting Countries

In terms of numbers of operators and numbers of safaris, today's safari industry centers around South Africa, Zimbabwe, and Namibia. In my view the countries of Botswana, Tanzania, and Zambia are also of critical importance because they form the backbone of the traditional general-bag safari. Each has a selection of highly desirable plains species, including two or more of the Big Five on the normal safari. In terms of numbers of safaris, the countries of Cameroon, Central African Republic, and Ethiopia are not significant. Even so, I consider all three essential "core" hunting countries because, among many desirable trophies, each holds important species that are of primary importance to serious African hunters: bongo and Lord Derby eland in Cameroon and C.A.R.; mountain nyala in Ethiopia. So, with apologies to those who don't agree with

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my list, here's a brief rundown on my concept of today's core hunting countries.

Botswana

Botswana offers prime general-bag hunting, with some of Africa's best lion hunting, good leopard, plenty of buffalo, and one of the last opportunities to hunt elephant as part of a general-bag safari rather than as a specialized pursuit. There is a good selection of plains game, including good sable, greater kudu, sitatunga, and red lechwe. The safari industry here is generally hampered by very limited game quotas. (*Read: When booking Botswana safaris, be very specific about desired game.*) Most hunting today is in the Okavango region and the Chobe region. Significant game management on private lands is just getting off the ground.

Cameroon

This is a land of two types of safaris: specialized forest hunting for bongo and other forest game in the south, and savanna hunting for Lord Derby eland, roan, and a goodly selection of other species in the north. There are relatively few outfitters, with most hunting concentrating on bongo. However, elephant hunting is open, and there are both lion and buffalo in most northern concessions. There is much meat poaching in the hinterlands, which is a great, ongoing concern. The politics (and the politics of hunting) are shaky throughout Central and West Africa, so the future is uncertain; but Cameroon offers excellent hunting.

Central African Republic

The same can be said for C.A.R. as for Cameroon, except that C.A.R. is far better for Lord Derby eland, while Cameroon is better for western roan. Incursions of organized meat



In terms of numbers of safaris, neither Cameroon nor C.A.R. can touch the southern countries. Even so, both are extremely important because they offer the best hunting for several important species. PH Jacques Lemaux and Joe Bishop pose with a wonderful Lord Derby eland taken in northeastern C.A.R.

poachers from Sudan have severely reduced the game along C.A.R.'s eastern border. However, C.A.R. is a very large country with a small human population, and although the safari industry is not large, the government appears committed to maintaining a sport-hunting industry.

Ethiopia

This huge country has tremendous potential and an extremely extensive game list. However, a handful of licensed professional hunters host a very small number of safaris annually. The only country where mountain nyala may be found, Ethiopia also offers superb hunting for a wide variety of species in the Omo Valley



Ethiopia is best known as the only place to hunt mountain nyala, and for this reason the author considers her a “core country.” Unfortunately, many overlook the fact that Ethiopia also holds wonderful general-bag hunting. This fine beisa oryx was taken in the Danakil.

to the south and Danakil to the north. Hunting has been on-again, off-again for many years, but a newly instituted program of exclusive concessions and game quotas suggests government commitment to a hunting program. There is a bright future, but only if Ethiopia can sell her safaris on the world market.

Namibia

Often overlooked by Americans but a favorite among Europeans, Namibian hunting is stable and well organized and offers some of Africa’s most beautiful scenery. Hunting is also very economical. This country offers Africa’s best gemsbok, good kudu, and a good selection of other plains game. There

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is limited elephant hunting in the north. Leopard hunting is difficult but is generally increasing.

South Africa

In this country, Africa's largest safari industry currently hosts the largest number of safaris. Hunting is well-organized, exceptionally productive, and generally economical—all primarily because most hunting is conducted on well-managed private lands. There is a huge selection of plains game, including numerous indigenous rarities such as vaal rhebok, nyala, blesbok, bontebok, black wildebeest, and more. South Africa also offers *limited* hunting for the entire Big Five. Lion, buffalo, and elephant are generally hunted along the Kruger Park corridor. Due to increased protection and economic value, leopard are increasing in many areas. White rhino are usually found in small herds on private lands. The safari industry is huge and economically critical to South Africa, but rising crime and South Africa's current move toward stringent gun control pose serious concerns for the industry's future.

Tanzania

This huge country hosts numerous safari operators. It is perhaps the most traditional general-bag safari country, aided by government-mandated twenty-one-day minimums for most important antelope species. The game list varies dramatically by region. The northern region (Masailand) hosts East African species; the central and western regions (Rungwa and westward) hold southern species such as sable and roan; and the southeast, with the great Selous Reserve, offers excellent (and improving) elephant hunting and a good selection of other game. Virtually all areas offer buffalo, lion, and leopard in varying densities. The Tanzanian government has been embarrassed by some shenanigans by unscrupulous outfitters,



South Africa is blessed with a wealth of species and subspecies that cannot be found or hunted anywhere else. To my mind, one of her top prizes is the elusive little vaal rhebok, one of Africa's few genuine mountain species.



With most safaris limited in both duration and objectives, the true “general-bag” safari is a rarity today. This was a week's bag from Zambia's Mulobezi area in 1996—an incredible run of luck for a modern safari.

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but the economic impact of hunting is important enough that the future should be secure, if not for all outfitters in all areas.

Zambia

Zambia is a superb general-bag country, with excellent lion and leopard hunting (though not in all concessions), good buffalo, and a fine selection of common antelope and local rarities. Africa's best sable, good southern roan, Kafue and black lechwe, and fine sitatunga are among the highlights, but the game list and quality of hunting do vary significantly from one area to another. The safari industry is small, and Zambia's outfitters come and go, but on the whole Zambia, open for hunting continuously since independence in 1964, appears committed to remaining a hunting country.

Zimbabwe

Zimbabwe holds Africa's second-largest safari industry, next to South Africa. It offers essentially two different safaris in one country: in the interior, exceptional plains-game hunting on large, well-developed private lands; on the borders, traditional hunting for buffalo, elephant, and lion. Leopard are endemic throughout Zimbabwe, but lion hunting is generally poor (with some significant exceptions). Zimbabwe offers some of the best and most economical hunting for buffalo, elephant, and leopard; it also offers superb hunting for a wide variety of plains game, including Africa's best greater kudu. The safari industry is extremely stable and of great economic importance to Zimbabwe.

Other Opportunities

The nine countries listed above are not the only countries currently open to hunting. Depending on the species sought, they may not even be the best, although in my opinion they



There are still many fine buffalo areas in Africa, but Zimbabwe offers the simplest and most economical buffalo hunting on today's market. Swarovski's Jim Morey took this bull in Russ Broom's area on a short hunt in 1999.

are the most important and most visible. Scattered across the continent, numerous other countries are also open, generally for limited species or in limited areas. These come and go as the political winds change, but several are worthy of mention.

Congo is now open and offers superb forest hunting. It has wonderful potential for bongo and is perhaps the best area for dwarf buffalo and forest sitatunga. In the Red Sea Hills of northern Sudan, Angelo Dacey continues to offer Nubian ibex hunting and other game. The security situation varies and the wildlife has been heavily poached, but continued hunting in the north offers hope that hunting will someday resume in southern Sudan. After decades of civil war, Chad is now reopened on a limited basis. The great general-bag hunting along the Aouk River may never return, but veteran PH Alain Lefol has uncovered pockets of western greater kudu and native-range aoudad, among other species. Mozambique has been reopened since the late 1980s,

with several outfitters now offering good hunting for buffalo and some hunting for lion, leopard, and a smattering of plains game. Mozambique's game is definitely increasing, and the potential is superb. Unfortunately, her wildlife was so badly ravaged during the long bush war that it will take many more years before she can be the safari country she was in the early 1970s.

Quite a lot of hunting is scattered here and there in the great bulge of West Africa, but the status of hunting in these countries seems to be in flux. Burkina Faso has a small but stable hunting program for western roan and other species. Neighboring Benin has had some on-and-off hunting for similar species, and the same potential exists in Mali and Togo. Senegal has long been open for limited species. Popular among French hunters, Senegal is another good place for economical western roan. Down in the forest zone, Liberia is reopening and should offer excellent hunting for a wide variety of forest duikers, important to serious trophy collectors.

Not Much Hope

Humans being basically optimistic creatures, and also of a nostalgic bent, it has long been in fashion to speculate about the wonderful hunting that would be available if we could just get one or another of the "old countries" reopened. I used to follow that line of thinking, but I've seen too much of Africa to believe in hidden hot spots awaiting discovery. The only place where African wildlife remains plentiful is where that wildlife has been protected. And the Third World reality is that wildlife has been protected only in the places where it has economic viability. In ravaged countries like Uganda and Somalia, there is virtually no hope for wildlife, whether hunted or not. Kenya has excellent wildlife in her national parks, but little else remains except on some large private lands. There has been speculation that Kenya would reopen since the very day she closed, but I don't think it much matters anymore. Some years ago Malawi was opened very

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briefly, and she has some pockets of excellent nyala and a little of this and that, including some elephant, but, in reality, she has neither the variety nor the density for a genuine safari industry.

Maybe Again Someday . . .

Having said that I don't believe in fairy tales, I cannot bring myself to give up hope altogether that certain areas will come back. Angola now holds the record for Africa's longest-running bush war, and the destruction must be almost total. She is a huge country, however, and maybe the war has bypassed pockets somewhere. The recent discovery of a small population of giant sable does give hope. I personally have seen what poachers from Sudan have done to eastern C.A.R., and this suggests there must be very little wildlife remaining on the Sudanese side of the border. Even so, the country is so huge and the wildlife resources were formerly so vast that surely something must remain. I doubt there is much, but perhaps somewhere in the depths of the great Sudd there are still Nile lechwe, and in the transition forest the bongo will be the very last to succumb to poachers.

Without question there is great potential in Zaire, not necessarily because of any game management but simply because the forest is still so huge in this giant country. She has been open in recent years, offering wonderful bongo hunting that closed due to purely political considerations. And now that elephant poaching has been greatly reduced, it is almost certain that somewhere in Zaire's forests lurk some of the continent's greatest remaining tuskiers.

The potential for desert hunting remains a subject for speculation. Despite the rumors, it is almost certain that both scimitar-horned oryx and addax are extinct or nearly so, and even if any remain, they certainly will not be hunted for sport. However, there are viable populations of Nubian ibex, aoudad, and gazelle scattered across North Africa. Egypt still has a

moratorium on hunting. She has quite good potential for Nubian ibex and gazelle. Indeed, Nubian ibex extend through the Sinai Peninsula and into Israel, so there is much potential for hunting if peaceful times ever come. Morocco has done a good job rebuilding her herds of aoudad, and fully a decade ago it seemed certain a hunting program would open. It never happened, but the aoudad are still there, so hope remains.

No, I don't believe in fairy tales, and I am certain that Hemingway's green hills are gone forever, not simply awaiting rediscovery. But Africa is such a vast and complex continent that it defies generalizations. At this writing at least fifteen countries are officially open to hunting—as many as there have been at any time in the last hundred years. By the time you read these lines the list may have changed slightly, and it will change still more with the passage of years. But there is fine hunting now, and great hope for the future.

The Modern Professional Hunter

Sadly, he has become as much a businessman as a hunter, a truck driver as much a tracker, and a charmer as much as a man of action. Perhaps this is unavoidable, for the modern safari is big business. To be successful the PH must sell his safaris and charm his clients, and also be astute enough as a businessman to show a profit at year's end. That said, I am increasingly concerned about the genuine qualifications of many PHs in the field today. Some countries, like Zimbabwe, require formal apprenticeship and a passing grade on both written and practical exams. At the other extreme, there are still countries where an unqualified outsider can bribe his or her way into a professional hunter's license.

The current trend, almost continent-wide, is to increasingly restrict issuance of licenses to local citizens, or to simply deny work permits to outsiders. This is not altogether a bad thing, because it

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prevents unqualified folks from buying their way in. On the other hand, it's not altogether a good thing, because local hunters may not always be properly qualified, and extremely competent PHs from elsewhere in Africa may not be able to ply their trade.

I believe very strongly in properly qualified professional hunters. Not only does a good professional hunter enhance the African experience, but you literally place your life in your PH's hands. You want those hands to be qualified and competent.

My personal bias has always been in favor of African-born PHs. Mind you, some Americans and Europeans have done extremely well; just being born in Nairobi or Johannesburg is not a qualification! How do you know if you have a good PH? First, remember that most outfitters use multiple PHs. Never book a safari without knowing who the professional hunter will be, and never accept the booking without checking references on that PH. You are always within your rights to ask to see a



The biggest threat to African hunting today is shrinking habitat due to rapidly increasing human populations. More and more habitat is being lost to grazing and subsistence farming, and few areas remain that have no villages.

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professional hunter's license, but even today the licensing system is "squishy" enough in many countries that it may not tell you what you need to know. More important, your PH should belong to the local professional hunter's association and to the International Professional Hunters Association (IPHA). The latter membership requires the recommendation of several clients, so the most promising beginner in the world may not have it. Those who are members should be OK.

How Safe are Safaris?

I can't tell you and won't attempt to. Most hunting areas are safer than your own backyard, and most African cities are, at worst, only slightly less safe than any large American city. Having been in some areas that were purported to be dangerous, my opinion is that our press tends to sensationalize the negative. On the other hand, hunting is supposed to be fun, and only an idiot would knowingly take a safari into a war zone. What competent and ethical professional hunter would take his client into an unsafe area? Read the newspapers, pay attention to State Department warnings, and listen to your own instincts, but book your PH based on references and reputation, and trust him. You're trusting a lot of dollars to him, and you may be trusting your life to his coolness with dangerous game. Trust him to choice of hunting area as well. If things get dicey in a given area, he is far more likely to offer a switch to Plan B than to return a deposit that is most likely long since spent; but he does not, under any circumstances, want his clients to be in an unnecessarily dangerous situation. That just ain't the way the modern safari industry works!

