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Hunting until there's nothing left?

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The word hunting evokes many differing emotions from both its supporters and animal welfare campaigners. For years, these feelings have merged to create complicated, difficult and uncompromising stances on either side of the spectrum. When asking friends what they thought about the word in a general sense, I heard phrases like “awful,” “disturbing” and “upsetting.”

At one point during a Facebook discussion concerning [Melissa Bachman](#) last week, I read evocative comments on both sides, from: “I’d like to see you up against some of these animals with no weapons; that might be quite entertaining.” to “. . .if Bachman didn’t kill it someone else would. I’d rather let her pay the money and do it well.”

However, the word hunting encapsulates a number of activities, legal, illegal and verging on the illegal. It’s a complicated word; there are no black and white or definable lines. It is important to know the variety of practices which surround the word, otherwise emotive jargon will win against sensible solutions, as I found out last week.



Let’s begin with illegal hunting. This is hunting animals, either for food, or [trophy hunts](#), that are seriously endangered and on the brink of extinction. Take a critically endangered species such as the black rhino, for example. Illegal poachers have continued to [hunt](#) them because of the financial incentives, as traditional Chinese medicine uses the horn in its ingredients. There are fewer than 3, 610 black rhinos in the wild, according to the [Rhino Resource Centre](#), so if hunting continues then the black rhino will vanish for good.

The Daily Telegraph recently reported that people attempting to prevent these poachers are coming up with increasingly clever ways of tracking them down. For instance, they now have [drones](#) which will detect poachers night and day, and proceed to summon armed backup to their locations. This technology will

potentially help thousands of species living on the brink.

Other ways of protecting endangered species are by enforcing international law, for instance with a [moratorium](#). The [International Whaling Commission](#), formed in 1946, adopted one in 1986, when the numbers of commonly hunted species like the [Antarctic minke whale](#) and [common minke whale](#), were being killed in unsustainable numbers. Now, despite the hunting freeze, some countries – specifically Norway, Iceland, Japan, South Korea and Russia – still continue hunting to this day. Despite this, the freeze on whale hunting has helped many whale species to painstakingly recover.

Another form of hunting which is deeply controversial is the practice of hunting an animal in an enclosed,



fenced-off area, called [canned hunting](#). These wild animals have been taken at birth to be hand-reared by humans, before being sent to their death at a young age. Many have claimed this to be trophy hunting for cowards, due largely to two reasons. Firstly, the animal is enclosed and has no chance of escaping, and suffers being shot multiple times before it is actually killed. Secondly, the animal has been hand-reared, so up until that point, humans have only ever fed and cared for it meaning that some animals have been known to go directly towards the hunters in the hope of food.

The legality of canned hunting is subject to much debate. For instance, in 2007 South Africa's government effectively [banned](#) the practice, with a spokesperson for South Africa's forestry department saying: "We need a clean hunting industry, free from unacceptable behaviour which could damage the country's image." However, lion breeders lobbied and challenged this ban, meaning that the decision was [overruled](#) by a high court judge in 2011.



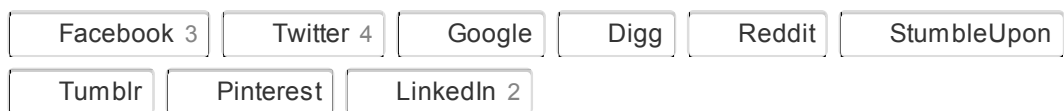
Presently, South Africa has 160 lion farms. In these farms, cubs as young as one hour old are taken away from their mothers by "[blowing a loud horn to scare the adult lions away](#)", are then hand-reared and subsequently shot as young adults by wealthy trophy hunters, usually from Europe or North America. Canned hunting advocates argue that hunting lions bred in captivity will protect their wild counterparts. Yet research shows the opposite; in the past 20 years the lion population has decreased shockingly by as much as [80%](#). Rhinos, zebras and many other wild animals are being reared in this way and treated like mere commodities. Hopefully, canned hunting's days are numbered, please [sign here](#) to do your bit to make certain that this will not happen for much longer.

In some circumstances, hunting is necessary for conservation purposes. For instance, in Norway, due to farmers killing wolves over centuries to protect their livelihood, wolves were eradicated. This resultant lack of wolves meant that the Norwegian deer population soared, seeing ruined grasslands and damaged habitats for smaller mammals. Therefore, once a year, a small number of people are allowed to shoot a quota of deer. This is heavily monitored and, whilst regrettable (and our fault in the first place) it has to be done in small numbers to ensure a balanced ecosystem.



Problematically, the way that we have hunted over the centuries is leading to the extinction of some species and the suffering of others. Apart from the rare times when hunting is for conservation purposes, the act is increasingly becoming either something which wealthy people do to gain an ego boost, or a desperate act from people who hunt wild game in war torn [areas](#). The Democratic Republic of the Congo has seen a severe decrease in the number of bush monkeys due to the ongoing civil war. Though the latter issue will be difficult to resolve quickly, the former could be banned, as nearly happened in South Africa. Illegal poaching is being tackled, but there is still a lot of critical work that needs to be done.

By being clear about differing hunting practices, and about the detrimental effects that many of these have on increasingly endangered species, people reading this are one step closer to preventing it. Yet I do wonder sometimes when we will realise that our claims on this earth and the other animals on it are farcical; and I worry that we will only realise this when too many beautiful species that are vital to a balanced ecosystem are lost once and for all.



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