FACTSHEET: How much does hunting contribute to African economies?

The hunting of a black rhino in Namibia, the illegal killing of a lion in Zimbabwe and a controversial “driven hunt” in South Africa’s Limpopo province have ignited a fractious debate about trophy hunting and its role in conservation.

Various claims have been made in recent months about the economic benefits of trophy hunting. In Africa, “big game hunting is big business” worth an estimated US$200 million annually, according to some reports.

But data on the economic significance and conservation benefits of hunting is limited and further polarises debate. It pits animal rights activists and proponents of a protectionist approach to wildlife conservation...
against hunters and conservationists who argue that “sustainable use” of wildlife through hunting is key to conservation strategies.

This factsheet provides an overview of data sources and studies.

**The US$200 million question**

Numerous recent news articles have stated that trophy hunting generates revenues of US$200 million on the African continent.

The original source of the figure is a 2006 article published in the academic journal, Biological Conservation. To date, it is the only published sub-Saharan African estimate of trophy-hunting revenue.

The authors set out to review available data on hunting in sub-Saharan Africa and “obtained updated statistics from national hunting associations and regulatory authorities”. They focussed on a dozen countries with “significant hunting industries”, among them South Africa, Zimbabwe, Zambia and Namibia, plus Botswana, Mozambique and Tanzania.

South Africa had the largest hunting industry “in terms of numbers of operators, visiting hunters, animals shot and revenues generated”. But as a proportion of GDP, the paper found trophy hunting was most significant in Botswana, comprising 0.13% of GDP, followed by Tanzania at 0.11% and Namibia at 0.08%.

(Note: A ban on commercial hunting in Botswana came into effect in January 2014)

The Biological Conservation paper has drawn criticism from some organisations opposed to hunting. The African Lion Coalition – a lobby group consisting of the International Fund for Animal Welfare (Ifaw), Humane Society International (Hsi) and the Born Free Foundation – commissioned an Australian think-tank, Economists at Large, to produce a study evaluating the “US$200 million question”.

Published in February 2013, the report argued the “US$200 million estimate should be used with caution” and claimed the paper was based on “weak sources and methodology”. Its primary criticism appears to have been that the authors relied on “published and unpublished literature”, much of which Economists at Large researchers were unable access publicly or find online.

**How much does SA earn from trophy hunting?**

South Africa’s Department of Environmental Affairs estimates trophy hunting generated close to R807 million in 2012 and just over R1 billion in 2013. (Note: Figures for 2014 have yet to be published)

The figures are based on “species fees” paid by hunters to game farmers and landowners to hunt a trophy animal, and daily rates charged by hunting outfitters to “cover expenses related to food and accommodation”. Most hunting in South Africa takes place on private game farms.

The R1 billion generated in 2013 comprised of species fees of R757 million and daily rates of R314 million, with 44,000 species hunted for trophies in that year.

The department’s figures do not take into account “indirect income generated through taxidermy and trophy shipping fees, non-hunting companions or tourism-related activities during the hunting safari”, department spokesman Albi Modise told Africa Check.

Neither does it include information on hunting permits for species that are not listed as “threatened or protected”, as these fees are charged at provincial level and also vary from province to province, he added.

**Small survey showed R400 million more in 2012**

A study conducted by North West University’s Tourism Research in Economic Environments and Society (TREES) unit estimated that hunting generated around R1.26 billion in both direct and indirect income in 2012. The research was carried out at the behest of the Professional Hunters’ Association of South Africa.

Researchers took into account average spending on licenses, permits, hunting gear and ammunition, as well as air fares, food, clothing, trophy handling and shipping costs, plus additional tours and travel costs.

This “average spend” was derived from a web-based survey hosted on the Professional Hunter’s Association website which produced 147 “usable questionnaires”. Interviews were also conducted with hunting operators.

One of the authors of the report, Professor Melville Saayman, told Africa Check that while the sample size was small, he did not believe results would differ greatly if more hunters filed in questionnaires.

“It is always difficult to do this kind of research. Trophy hunters are spread across the world. A greater sample would be nice but with most of the research we have done, generally once you get 100 plus [questionnaires], you get a trend.”

Saayman said TREES did “not have an agenda to promote hunting”.

“Obviously some people will say that they think we are biased. But, as a university and research entity we need to be objective. We give our feedback whether people like it or not. My passion is economic analysis and we need to understand what the value is of the industry and who benefits from it.”

**How does it compare to regular tourism?**
Trophy hunting accounts for a fraction of the R323 billion that tourism contributed to South Africa’s GDP in 2013. About 8,500 trophy hunters visit South Africa each year, compared to around 9.5 million tourists.

The 2006 Biological Conservation paper estimated “a minimum of 18,500” hunters participated in hunts annually in sub-Saharan Africa (generating revenue of around US$201 million), compared to World Bank estimates of around 33.8 million visitors in 2012, earning the region US$536 billion.

Saayman says that while the numbers of hunters and the contribution to GDP is small, trophy hunters “tend to spend far more than an average tourist and in areas where tourists usually would not go”.

In a 2014 paper, he and two co-authors investigated the economic impact of hunting in South Africa’s Limpopo, Northern Cape and Free State provinces. “The research found 17,806 (Limpopo), 9,072 (Northern Cape) and 4,558 (Free State) jobs may depend on hunting, in addition to those of people permanently employed on game farms,” Saayman said.

A resource economist who worked across Southern Africa and established a national environmental economics programme in Namibia, Dr Jon Barnes, wrote in 2001: “Consumptive wildlife uses [such as hunting] are relatively unimportant in terms of economic contribution, but they are the only use values possible in the less well-endowed two-thirds of the wildlife estate.”

Similarly, Dr John Hanks, a zoologist and former chief executive of WWF South Africa, argues that “where there are high wildlife densities and scenically attractive landscapes, there is greater potential for photographic tourism than for trophy hunting.

“However, in those areas where large mammals are few and scattered and the scenery is mundane, photographic safaris will not be viable. Here the better land-use option for biodiversity conservation can often be trophy hunting rather than domestic livestock and shifting agriculture. More significantly for resident communities, they have an incentive to protect the large mammals that would otherwise be seen as a threat to their livelihoods.”

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