

Presentation in front of EU Parliament in Brussels, 19 February 2020

I consider it a huge honour to be able to address you here today to say a few words on the *Erongo Verzeichnis for African game animals*.

By way of introduction I wish to explain that the *Erongo Verzeichnis* is an initiative by a group of conservationists, most of whom happen to be hunters, who since the year 2010 in bi-annual workshops have formulated a philosophy, which strives to enhance and give new incentives for trophy hunting to truly live up to its claim of being an important and effective tool of nature conservation.

The result of this endeavors is the book I wish to introduce here today. Our concern is the protection of intact natural habitats.

During the last month that I have travelled in Europe and the USA, not a single day has passed on which climate change and the worldwide environmental crisis has not featured prominently in the news.

It seems that nature is ill.

Very seriously ill.

Now if we ourselves would be seriously ill, we would see the best and most experienced doctor available to us. For such doctor it is necessary to understand how the human body works, as to be able to start an efficient cure and not only treat some symptoms.

I'm not a doctor and do not wish to move onto thin ice by entering into some medical detail, but to just give an example of what I mean: if we feel weak and tired and our fingers numb due to insufficient blood circulation as a result of a heart valve defect – which would be a serious illness – we certainly would not try to heal the problem by treating our numb fingers with some ointment. An expert doctor would identify our heart problems and attend to this in depth.

Just as a human body functions on intricate and complex mechanisms and processes, nature is an extremely intricate and complex system.

If we want to heal our ill environment, we need real understanding of the complex principles and laws it is based on.

I feel that this is often missing. Perhaps hunters, due to their exposure to the life and death realities in nature, at times have a better understanding of natural correlations than some other conservation groups.

The demise of the grey partridge as a species in central Europe is not a result of too many foxes, nor of human hunters shooting a few. The decline of partridges is a symptom of a general underlying environmental problem: The loss of and destruction of intact habitat due to intensified agriculture, industrialization and other manmade factors.

To give another example: According to recent studies only 8 to 13% of the habitat the African lion occupied in historic times south of the Sahara remain today, due to habitat loss because of cattle ranching or human settlement.

Loss of intact natural habitats is the “heart problem” of our sick environment, of seriously ill nature. The fact that destruction of habitat is the greatest real conservation concern makes it prudent to place the protection of intact habitat as the top conservation priority.

It is an undisputed fact that – at least theoretically – hunting via the concept of sustainable utilisation of natural resources contributes to the protection of habitats.

Still especially hunting is faced by major opposition today. Most of the criticism is based on a wrong understanding of nature by nature detached modern societies and subsequent attempts to treat the serious illness of nature – the heart problem of our environment – by rubbing some ointment on our numb fingers.

As far as wildlife conservation is concerned, attempts to forbid hunting is just as senseless as thinking ointment on the fingers will

heal heart problems – in fact it is directly contradicting real conservation efforts.

The Erongo Verzeichnis philosophy is based on the understanding that humans are part of nature and that there is no moral or factual argument against hunting – provided that it is sustainable and exercised ethically and in circumspection. Please allow me to elaborate a bit on the principles and laws of nature and human's role in nature.

All natural environments revolve around food chains and natural cycles, on the system of 'eat and be eaten'. Moreover, one of the fundamental laws of nature is "the law of hunter and hunted". Every plant, every insect, every bird is in severe competition for a place in the sun, for the right to live, to feed, to mate, to propagate, to reproduce.

That is the very principle of life. That is the very principle of nature.

You might be aware that we had a very serious draught in Namibia last year, which, however, was broken by recent good rains. A draught, like a severe winter in the northern hemisphere, has its important role in nature. It brings hardship and death, but it also strengthens the survival abilities of the entire system. And it makes room for rejuvenation.

The long awaited recent rains in Namibia have brought about a phase of growth and rejuvenation and all rejuvenation on earth rests on the principle of birth and growth and death.

After thunderstorms swifts shoot through the air at terrific speed with excited screams to capture and kill insects, ducks and other water-fowl frolic in rivers and pans to kill amongst the overabundance of tadpoles, yellow-billed kites gather in hundreds to hunt swarming termites, and jackals, cheetahs and leopards take their toll on newly-

born springbok fawns, while the swifts and the ducks and even the jackals in turn are chased by falcons, eagles and leopards.

Birth and death is everywhere and life as such is in exuberant spirits. And if we lean back for a moment and let the scenario as such have its effect on us, the huge, gathering thunderheads, the unleashed thunderstorms slowly moving across the sweeping immensity of Namibia's vast open landscapes, the exuberant growth of plant-life in a frantic fight for a place in the sun, and the interactions of the animals, of hundreds of circling kites amidst myriad of swarming termites, the migrating herds of springbok, we will realise that all this is of breath-taking beauty, that nature functions in marvellous harmony.

Although certain aspects of this chain may appear cruel, this principle is the very foundation on which the harmonic interaction of life on earth rests.

I have elaborated on this in quite some detail as to point out that killing is an absolute normal thing in a natural system.

And let us not forget that man as a hunter-gatherer also was part of this magnificent natural world, before he turned to nature-destroying developments and technologies.

According to scientists the key in the process of becoming human and the development of culture with our early ancestors took place, when *homo erectus*, the first early human who walked exclusively upright, changed over from an exclusive plant diet to a mixed diet with a high proportion of meat. The greatest change during the transformation from animal to human took place in the central organ, the brain. The enlargement of the brain-volume resulted in an increase of the energy expenditure, and the source of this energy – was meat.

Hunting is an age-old human activity, only hunting has enabled the survival of the human species, there is nothing strange or perverted about somebody being a hunter, as some nowadays often want to have it. We have to realise that such an important aspect of the human evolution is deeply embedded in the human instincts. It is

important to note that hunting as such, contrary to what anti-hunters try to make believe, is not a perverted inclination, but under natural circumstances rather a totally normal occupation.

There is a deep satisfaction in leading an original life, in living off the land. This might become apparent in the satisfaction a planter feels in looking over his plantation and eventually harvesting his crop. There is a deep satisfaction for a fisherman, not only in pulling a fish from the river, but even more to enjoy the peace of a quiet stream. There is intense satisfaction for a hunter to be out in the wilderness and be part of the ancient rhythm of nature.

These emotions are difficult to explain, but let me just say that if you really have hunted, if you have been part of nature and hunted, when you stand next to a beautiful kudu bull you have just slain, emotions will be released from your innermost which tell you: Yes, it is okay to hunt. Life and death and hunting are part of nature.

Is this feeling unjust? With all due respect, who is entitled to decide that man should not be part of natural settings, not be allowed to take wild fruit or mushrooms from the land? Should not be allowed to catch a fish or bag a wild animal?

No part of the natural cycle is “good” or “bad”. The zebra is not “good” because it eats grass, nor is the lion „bad“ because it eats meat.

Do we want nature?

May we even dare to think that humanity can detach itself from nature?

Is nature as such bad? Or is it only man who is bad if he leads a natural life? Is man good if he has turned his back on nature?

The average off-take by trophy hunting varies between 0.6% and 2% of a population. The killing trophy hunters bring about only pre-empt manifold other forms of death in nature, it has no negative effect on the natural system or balance.

Ideally those specimens past their prime are targeted, specimens which have fulfilled their reproductive role; old animals with charismatic, worn trophies – that after all is the essence of trophy hunting. The Erongo Verzeichnis has developed an age-related trophy measuring system, which aims to create incentives to allow well-endowed specimens to grow old and fulfil their natural role within the population. This age-related trophy measuring system is one of the four pillars or principles of the Erongo Verzeichnis philosophy.

As elaborated above, the protection of intact habitats, no matter whether they are rainforest, savanna or desert habitats – they all are vegetation zones where nature still breathes healthy – should be the most important conservation concern, not only for reasons to fight climate change, but because without suitable habitats there is no wildlife.

To put it very simple: Hunters certainly do not contribute to the large-scale “killing” of natural environments; rather the contrary.

Because of the value wildlife receives via the concept of sustainable use, nature conservation as a form of land use is possible, which contributes to habitat protection – the top conservation priority in our time.

However, financial advantages often lead to manipulation and exploitation. We from the Erongo Verzeichnis feel that there is urgent need for a certification of hunting areas according to ecological criteria.

I want to emphasize – not a certification of hunting outfitters. Humans are just corruptible. A certification of hunting areas according to their ecological state. This can easily be verified and inspected.

The four principles of the philosophy of the Erongo Verzeichnis are as follows:

- Wild animals should only be pursued in their original natural distribution range
- Wild animals should be hunted under free range conditions; there should be an ecosystem or landscape approach
- Large predators should be present to exercise their natural role within an intact spectrum of species; they are natural regulators in any ecosystem
- Trophy measurement should be age related, as to ensure genetic sustainability

By way of conclusion let me say that we hunters believe that it is the most basic right of wild animals is to lead a natural life in a natural environment according to the laws of nature and that man is part of the natural system. The destruction of natural habitats by modern man is the biggest threat to this basic animal right.

While we do not deny that there are many unacceptable practices, trophy hunting as such is often misunderstood. If exercised under the criteria elaborated on above and strictly regulated, trophy hunting is the most selective and sparing form of hunting.

Not regulated trophy hunting has brought about the decline or even extinction of species like the adax, the scimitar horned oryx or the Arabian oryx, but meat hunting.

The fact that the hunter loves and admires the animal has its outcrop in the fact that the hunter keeps trophies. The entire being of the wild animal in some way reflect beautifully in the horns or the skin of the animals. Even non-hunting nature lovers hang the horns of a stag over their garage door. The horns of kudu or sable, or even the skin of a lion, adorn many a tourist lodge. They add a flair of the wilderness into human dwellings. Is this wrong? Let us remain tolerant and practical. Must these unquestionably beautiful natural artefacts rot in the wild because some people lead an ideological campaigns against an ancient natural human doing? Where do we start and

where do we stop? May we display minerals or pieces of dead wood in our homes?

We should be thoroughly alarmed and concerned about the debate that presently takes place in the UK. Our sick environment can not afford the loss of any more intact natural habitats.

The trophy hunter is the dedicated high-end tourist willing to travel to remote regions and hunt under adverse conditions and is even prepared to return empty handed. This kind of low-impact high-output client is indispensable for true wilderness conservation.

Conscientious, sustainable hunting is the very school of life. This statement may come as a total surprise to anti-hunters, but anybody really interested in the motives, into "right or wrong" of hunting, has to deeply think on this.

The Erongo Verzeichnis book deals with manifold aspects in this regard. It is an attempt to portray what real hunting is all about and to create incentives to bring trophy hunting to its full right as an effective conservation tool.

Unfortunately it is only available in German at the moment, but will be available in English soon.

Thank you for listening.

