

## REVIEWS – COMPTES RENDUS

**Hunters***David Chancellor* 

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At the beginning of the previous century, hunting safaris became a fashionable pursuit among members of the affluent classes, particularly in Britain and the USA. Although this type of hunting also occurred in West Africa, it was more popular in southern and especially eastern Africa which had greater numbers of large game. Moreover, the completion of the Ugandan railway in 1901 provided easier access to the interior highlands of British East Africa (now Kenya) where there was an abundance of large game such as elephants, lions, rhinoceros and buffalo. It was in Kenya then, that the tourist trophy hunting industry proper began. Wealthy European and American visitors paid settler farmers to guide them on hunting safaris in the country. And soon after the Kenya example the tourist hunting industry would developed elsewhere in Africa.

The British colonial government quickly turned big-game hunting into a source of revenue, charging the tourists and hunters licensing fees for permission to kill game animals. In 1909, a UKP 50 hunting license in British East Africa entitled its purchaser to kill 2 buffaloes, 2 hippos, 1 eland, 22 zebras, 6 oryxes, 4 waterbucks, 1 greater kudu, 4 lesser kudus, 10 topis, 26 hartebeests, 229 other antelope, 84 colobus monkeys and unlimited numbers of lions and leopards, because these last two, which killed livestock, were classified as 'vermin'. The white hunter served these paying customers as guide, teacher, and protector.

Currently, South Africa has the largest hunting industry. Other well-developed hunting industries can be found in Zimbabwe, Botswana and Namibia, and to a lesser extent Zambia, Mozambique and Swaziland.

'White hunter' is a term formerly used to denote a professional big-game hunter of European or North America background who plied his trade in Africa. The activity still exists in the African countries which still permit big-game hunting, but the 'white hunter' is now known as the 'professional hunter'. The southern African hunting industry has grown in recent years due partly to a major increase in game ranching at the expense of traditional livestock farming, which has been particularly hard hit by both periods of drought and economic recession.

Wildlife is now concentrated in new and strange habitats. Where once wild animals were free to move, boundaries have now been declared with walls and fences. Population densities rise, habitats diminish, and the land itself begins to die. Where once man killed only to survive, he now engages in the sport to acquire the trophy – the game is killing the game. From a long term project documenting man's commodification of wildlife, *Hunters* explores the complex relationship that exists between man and animal, the hunter and the hunted, as both struggle to adapt to our changing environments.

*Hunter* is a collection of pictures of the world of tourist trophy hunting taken by a photographer, who is based in South Africa. On his initial interest in photographing *Hunters* he says: "For many years I've been interested in the increasing overpopulation of man and how that clashes with wildlife".

*Hunters* examines the actual hunts as well as the end result, where hunters return to their homes loaded down with their "trophies." He also examines local African communities who benefit from the large amounts of money hunters pay to go on hunts. Chancellor's images bring to life a controversial topic that has divided hunters, conservationists, and animal-rights activists. He does not making any judgments about any of the groups involved and hopes his images will speak for themselves and allow for a better understanding of the process from all sides.

To gain access to the hunters, Chancellor needed the help of individuals who accompanied mostly Americans and Eastern Europeans on hunts around Africa. Chancellor only joined hunters who were there legally. During the time he was working, for example, he followed leopard hunting with dogs in Namibia because it was one of the few places in which this type of hunting was legal.

Chancellor quickly discovered while trailing the hunters that he needed to be present throughout the hunt in order to create the most accurate and emotional images.

"You need to be there the second after they've done what they're going to do because that is the moment they will react to an animal after a kill," Chancellor said.

One of the most remarkable aspects of *Hunters* is seeing that emotion not only from men but also from women and children who he documented either adding to their large collection or taking down their first-ever trophy kill. One of the biggest differences between genders, Chancellor noticed, was how deeply emotional women seemed to feel towards the animals they killed. "When they approach a kill, most guys hi-five or have a cigar," Chancellor said. "Women will almost without exception sit by the animal, touch the animal. Some say a prayer. Some cry. Some walk with their head in their hands." Capturing these moments were essential for Chancellor, but they still only told one part of the story.

To complete the cycle, Chancellor wanted to photograph the trophy rooms of the more seasoned hunters and spent time in Dallas with members of the Dallas Safari Club. "I found myself documenting these guys who say they've hunted for 25 years and want to hunt a leopard or lion, and I photographed them ... but at best what I'll produce from that hunt is an individual with a lion ... the only way (to complete the book) was to go back to where he actually has all of his trophies and produce a portrait that would complete the

task, to show his entire career in one portrait,” Chancellor said. He worked with the most decorated members of the Dallas Safari Club – the recipients of the “Outstanding Hunting Achievement Award.” Their achievements are based on both quantity and quality of animals killed both by animal groupings – such as the big five (elephant, cape buffalo, rhino, lion, and leopard) – and also by animal species. “Harvesting is how they refer to hunting” Chancellor said. “They’ve already gone for the big five, and now they want every spiral horned antelope ... and they spend a considerable amount of time and money going after that.” However, he also mentions the benefits that hunting brings to the people of the locality: “The flip side of the trophy rooms in Dallas – but in some ways essentially the same side of the same coin – are the African communities who benefit by taking the meat from the killed animals as well as a large percentage of the high fees the hunters pay to go on the hunts”. (Most of the last paragraphs’ contents taken from: [http://www.slate.com/blogs/behold/2013/03/22/david\\_chancellor\\_hunters\\_takes\\_a\\_closer\\_look\\_at\\_the\\_many\\_sides\\_of\\_tourist.html](http://www.slate.com/blogs/behold/2013/03/22/david_chancellor_hunters_takes_a_closer_look_at_the_many_sides_of_tourist.html)).

*Hunters* is an arresting exploration of tourist trophy hunting in southern Africa. It is not difficult to appreciate the beauty of the pictures and their settings. But it is difficult to agree with the book’s thematic. Primarily relying on portraiture, both in the field and in the hunters’ homes and trophy rooms, Chancellor delves into a controversial and lucrative subculture. Despite the fact that his camera never shies away from blood, the gore is at a notable minimum. Instead, the tension that fills each frame is drawn from his subjects – the foreign hunters, their families, the local guides and the very land to which they have come seeking their prey. One can see the pride, the glee, the almost orgiastic facial expressions resulting from the kill. This is the hunter feeling her/himself to be on top of the world, at the apex of creation. S/he decides. S/he kills. A show of supremacy over nature. Most pictures speak for themselves. Even though Chancellor does not take a position (it seems he never hunted himself), it should be clear from the images that there is little pride to be taken from killing these animals. Trophy hunting is a small-scale massacre. Every animal killed is a decrease in its population. Full stop. I know there are people who argue that hunting, and trophy hunting more specifically, helps to control wildlife, that it helps to maintain much-needed and often precarious equilibria. Chancellor seems to think that trophy hunting would appear to be a more sustainable and environmentally friendly way of wildlife control than ‘mere’ hunting for fun. Populations are monitored and local communities survive on the income they earn from tracking, and accompanying the white hunters. But at the end of the day hunting is and remains a brutal, inhumane activity. While the pictures do convey the brutality to some degree, they also express an aesthetic that is scenic and beautiful.

The book is full of pictures. It ends with a text written by George Orwell, Shooting an elephant. Chancellor here shows how local communities receive aid from the hunts. This elephant story documents CAMPFIRE (Community Areas Management Programme for Indigenous Resources). Under the CAMPFIRE program, at least half of the revenue derived from leasing trophy hunting concessions to foreign hunters goes to the local communities for rural development and environmental conservation. The meat from

such hunts is given back to the local community. The hunter will leave with skins and ivory. We see a trophied elephant which is cut into little pieces and distributed amongst the locals. The pictures in this part of the book are rather red with blood, and illustrate the bushmeat principle in a rather peculiar way.

Overall, this is a controversial book, but one that says much without recourse to large amounts of text. We can indeed conclude that sometimes the pictures speak for themselves.

*Patrick Van Damme*

*Laboratory of Tropical and Subtropical Agriculture and Ethnobotany, Ghent University*