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What if trophy hunters didn't kill their trophies?

In their recent article, Batavia et al. (2018) suggest that trophy hunting and taking animal parts is morally wrong, but also note that the practice is generally accepted by conservationists as a source of revenue for local communities and conservation efforts. I agree with their suggestions and applaud them for bringing this conservation conundrum into question, particularly in an era when western regulations seem poised to allow more access to trophy imports. But what viable alternatives exist? Scientists and conservationists are continuously competing for limited funding to study even the most charismatic species. Indeed, half of the 10 most charismatic species are susceptible to trophy hunters globally, despite exhibiting drastic declines (Courchamp et al., 2018). Conservation issues at this scale require innovative tools and partnerships to resolve them, so I pose the question: what if trophy hunters didn't kill their trophies?

If the motivating factor behind trophy hunting is truly the sport of the hunt and conquest, then there is an opportunity for scientists to work directly with trophy hunters to shoot and sedate individual animals as part of their research (*sensu* Earthwatch Institute expeditions). Trophy hunters would still enjoy complete hunting and safari experiences, culminating in the long endured chase with a loud gunshot and the animal they've been tracking goes down. The hunter poses with their trophy, touches it, feels it's heart beating, and for that moment the trophy is all theirs, without the stigma of growing global communities set on ending the practice altogether.

Next, the hunter assists as scientists fasten a GPS radiotag to their trophy and administer sedative reversal drugs. They sit and watch as the glorious beast that they just hunted comes to life and returns to the wild. That animal will beam up its location to a satellite and from that point forward the hunter has their eye in the sky on their trophy and watches that animal live out its life in the wild. Furthermore, there are alternative options for trophy hunters to immortalize their formidable beasts: 3D-printing of casts or replicas, clay molds of paws, etc.

Meanwhile the trophy animal gets a second chance, providing continuous data to scientists to better understand endangered species throughout their life cycles (Kays, Crofoot,

Jetz, & Wikelski, 2015). Their radiotags will provide up-to-date tracking information, which could make them easier to track by guards and scientists to deter poachers by speeding up responses to kill sites. These practices could also reduce human-wildlife conflicts by using proximity detectors or geofencing (Wall, Wittemyer, Klinkenberg, & Douglas-Hamilton, 2014). Since the hunts would be sustainable and less cost-prohibitive, these activities could be opened to much broader communities, whether trophy hunters or citizen scientists.

This concept benefits trophy hunters, scientists, local communities, and wildlife. The idea is admittedly nascent and requires further research into human dimensions, ethics, and potential unforeseen consequences. Yet, I propose it for discussion in the conservation literature, and to prompt international communities, national, and local governments involved in decision-making to set the foundation and infrastructure for a trophy-free "hunting" system.

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