



# SPORTS AFIELD

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## CLIPPING CONSERVATION'S WINGS

*Recent airline embargoes on the transport of hunting trophies do nothing to stop illegal trade in wildlife.*



*South African Airways was among several international airlines refusing to carry legally taken hunting trophies; however, just before we went to press, the airline reversed its stance in response to pressure from hunting groups and the Professional Hunter's Association of South Africa.*

Over the last three months, several of the world's international air carriers have introduced either total or partial bans on the transport of hunting trophies, whether or not they have been legally obtained. The issue emerged in April, when a consignment of illegal ivory onboard a

South African Airways (SAA) flight was intercepted while in transit in Australia; the package had been declared as "machinery spare parts." Shortly after this incident, SAA announced that it would no longer carry hunting trophies, regardless of whether or not the shipment was legal. [Editor's note: Under pressure from hunting groups, SAA announced just before we went to press that it was lifting the ban.]

This announcement was followed on May 15 by the world's largest international air carrier, Emirates Airlines, joining the ban on hunting trophies, stating, "The decision is meant as a step to eliminate illegal trade and transportation of hunting trophies worldwide and save wildlife heritage."

The other carriers that followed suit, including the important international carrier Lufthansa, have made similar claims as to the reasoning behind their embargo decisions. By doing so these airlines have not only acted unreasonably with respect to the movement of legally procured animal trophies, they have also introduced further confusion to the debate over poaching, illegal wildlife trafficking, wildlife crime, and hunting.

These decisions appear to ignore the fact that enabling legal wildlife trade is a longstanding international agreement supported, monitored, and enforced through specific and effective treaties. One very good example is the Convention on Inter-

national Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES). This is a multilateral treaty with 181 signature nations. CITES was formally established in 1975 to protect endangered plants and animals, ensuring international trade in specimens of these animals and plants does not threaten the survival of such species in the wild. Note that CITES supports regulated trophy hunting, even of endangered species under highly specific circumstances, as a tool for wildlife conservation and explicitly recognizes the benefits that are derived directly from this activity. So too does the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN), the world's largest and oldest global environmental organization.

So why, given these international endorsements by expert groups, have these airlines established embargoes on legally obtained hunting trophies? Do they really believe, as their statements suggest, that by stopping the transport of hunting trophies they will somehow help stop international poaching and wildlife crime? And, if so, are they being manipulated by anti-hunting groups who deliberately confuse the issue in their minds, or have they somehow made these connections themselves and decided that the best way to absolutely avoid being an inadvertent party to wildlife crime is to shut down all trans-shipment of animal parts, including hunting trophies? It may well be some of both. Either way, the mechanism that underlies this problem is misinformation, either passively received or slyly delivered. I believe we can accept that these airlines have to some extent confused hunting with poaching and along the way have come to associate hunting with wildlife crime and illegal trafficking. In this, they are certainly not alone.

Both globally and domestically, there is confusion among the general public regarding the distinction between poaching

### About DSC

An independent organization since 1982, DSC has become an international leader in conserving wildlife and wilderness lands, educating youth and the general public, and promoting and protecting the rights and interests of hunters worldwide. Get involved at [www.biggame.org](http://www.biggame.org).

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and hunting, and little wonder—the words are commonly used interchangeably or in a manner that makes drawing a distinction difficult. For example, if you Google “What’s the difference between poaching and hunting,” the initial results are pretty worrisome. The top result is an article that begins with the headline “Poaching . . . Hunting . . . There’s No Difference.” The second Google result leads directly to a site that proclaims the difference between poaching and hunting lies with the “absence of permission.” Even dictionary definitions are not much help. The generally accepted literary definition of hunting is “to pursue and kill a wild animal for sport and/or food,” while the general definition for poaching is “to hunt illegally.” So poaching is hunting, too . . . one just does it illegally?


Buried in these oversimplifications is a clear message that conveys hunters and poachers as being involved in the same activity, only one party is more polite or legal than the other. It does absolutely nothing to emphasize the hallmarks of true hunting—the fair chase, the honoring of the beast, the motivation to observe nature, and the deliberate limiting of technology that so clearly distinguishes this activity from the brutal, mercenary, indiscriminate slaughter


that poaching represents. So who will draw this distinction for the airlines that embargo shipment of hunting trophies or for anyone genuinely concerned with wildlife crime?

It is up to the hunting community to clarify the gulf of difference between what we do and what they do. We must find a way to educate the public, and also help the international community understand the conservation benefits hunting provides. We must also recognize that our own community is not without fault here. We have problems within the hunting community that can blur the lines between legal hunting and poaching, at least for the uninformed segments of society. Therefore, we must work to expunge from the hunting community the excesses and violations that inevitably occur in this and all human endeavors. We must also become far more prudent with our messaging, recognizing that this often contributes to the confusion in the public mind.

Hunting is not poaching, and trophy hunting is not wildlife crime. The airlines in question, with their hunting trophy bans and embargoes, are now, inadvertently or otherwise, adding significantly to a debate that is already muddled and confused. This would not matter so much if all that was




at stake were our feelings, or even our reputations, as hunters. Unfortunately, what is truly at stake is what matters most—the conservation and the continued existence of the wildlife that so enriches our world and our lives. Surely it is our job to work with the airlines and help clarify the many complex issues related to poaching, wildlife crime, and legal hunting. After all, they are not the experts in this; we are. So why not seize on this opportunity to not only reverse this decision but to broaden the airlines’ view and participation in real conservation efforts and also help them to improve their own genuine efforts to confront and eliminate wildlife trafficking. After all, they really do have a vested interest here. No airline wants to transport illegally taken wildlife.

Trophy hunting is not a panacea for all conservation, but it has clearly succeeded in numerous instances and made contributions in circumstances where few other options for funding conservation and enforcement programs exist. Unfortunately, the airline hunting trophy embargoes are adding one more obstacle to conservation efforts in a world where we desperately need more and not fewer conservation approaches that truly work. The embargoes may have been intended to secure wildlife conservation, but the simple truth is they have further impaired its flight. 



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