The Ivory Control Tower

“CITIES Control Tower, this is Flight African Wildlife approaching…”

Is it in our DNA, a lack of self-discipline? And let me kick off by saying I am the founder of this club – too little focus, too easily distracted. And what’s the outcome? A less-than-ideal result.

As I turn 50 this December, I have vowed that things will change for me, and discipline is one of them. This is a bit of a preamble to what I feel the hunting industry is lacking. In Joburg we’ve just hosted the CITIES meeting, that time when 180-odd countries meet, listen to input and advice, and then vote on how to manage species they are unlikely ever to see, let alone have the opportunity to own themselves.

Rather like a blind person being offered the position as Aircraft Traffic Controller and then being given the job. Pretty daunting for the pilots. But, “Hey, trust us, we know better,” say the controllers, and the pilots are supposed to believe them.

Jofie Lamprecht was interviewed by Sky News on an elephant hunt in early September and given a proper grilling (as one can expect) with the usual heartstrings being pulled by a clearly biased journalist. But he stood firm and delivered what I think is the finest rebuttal to everything thrown his way. That interview was all this hunting industry needs to get the message across. Simple, raw, emotive and factual. It covered everything, from the value of game for locals, to the harvesting of old bulls and the need to govern one’s own destiny, from the need and ability for photo and consumptive tourism to work together, right through to the indisputable facts of how a country like Kenya is a window into Africa’s future without hunting. A frightening window.

If every hunter took that video and said to five non-hunters, “Just watch this and listen to the facts,” that alone would be a huge campaign. But no! Instead, we get duped by agencies and PR specialists who know nothing about hunting yet offer to render a service to this industry. We hire fancy photographers, and commission video productions, create multi-million-dollar advertising campaigns trying to get a message across to an audience that will never believe what they see. Why? Because authors have their own agendas – and our agenda is not what people choose to support.

National Geographic is the master of creating their own agenda, and people love lapping up what they deliver. It is easy to do so. For hunters, it’s like a pimp trying to tell us that prostitution is just fine and has a role in society, with all the economic, employment and good statistics at his disposal. Whether we think there is a role for this or not, if the message is delivered by the pimp himself (or paid for by the pimp), it is highly unlikely anyone will believe it.

I have often said, from the first time I attended the NAPHA AGM (Namibian Professional Hunting Association), that Namibia has the potential to be the number one destination in Africa. And you can see why. Their government, National Tourism Board, National Airline – one hunting association to speak of – all unite and march to that deeply engrained German step. It is pretty effective and encouraging to see.

But why do we wait? Every week, every professional, every hunter has a duty to spread the word. If you feel that this industry is worth saving, don’t sit back and take the soft, ‘ashamed-of-your-interest’ approach, usually for fear of social upheaval or a potential customer backlash. I have an AHG sticker on my laptop, and I love opening it up in a coffee shop to work.

It saddens me when I see all those double standards out there. I know (because they read this magazine) that with the power and influence of our readers, the corporations that they run, or own, if they all just stood up and took a stand and did not worry about losing a Toyota car sale, or selling their next Coca-Cola, or closing that Microsoft deal, if would be pretty darn effective. Imagine if the DSC or SCI’s membership could do the same?

“Control Tower… this is African Wildlife Approaching… can you see me?”

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Shipping Trophies?
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