

NAPHA Conservationist of the Year Award

In late November I was honored to receive the Conservationist of the Year Award from the Namibian Professional Hunters Association. This is a very coveted honor awarded to Ministers, Directors of Wildlife and the very top scientists such as Minister Hanno Rumpf, Dr. Malan Lindique, etc. I am only the second non-Namibian to receive it. The other was Chris Weaver, the Director the 80-conservancy LIFE plus project of WWF. The presentation follows to share the credit with all those many that have supported the efforts in Namibia and for the historical perspective it provides.

Award Presentation:

"John has been serving Namibia since 1989 when our elephant were listed on Appendix 1 of CITES. His efforts began first as President of the Louisiana Chapter of SCI, then as Chairman of both the Governmental and Conservation Committees of SCI and President of SCI, and for the past ten years as Chairman of Conservation Force.

"He filed and won the lawsuit that established the U.S. importation of Namibia's elephant trophies. Second, he also led the effort that defeated the petition filed by 32 anti-hunting organizations to list Namibia's elephant as "endangered" to stop U.S. trophy imports. Third, he began the Elephant Guideline Initiative that recruited worldwide comments successively opposing the Proposed Elephant Trophy Import Guidelines of the USF&WS which forced their abandonment. Those successes were recognized as an "uncommon total victory" by the federal district court in Washington, D.C. (Today our elephant have been downlisted and it is largely acknowledged they should never have been listed.)

"At the request of Minister Niko Bessinger, he began the Black-faced Impala and Cheetah Initiatives to import those trophies into the USA. Both continue to this day and John serves on both the Predator and Black-faced Impala Committees of NAPHA.

"John prepared, filed and processed Namibia's Petition to downlist the cheetah. Though the petition was ultimately denied, the denial recognized Namibia's achievements, defined exactly what more had to be done and invited a refilling. He helped devise Namibia's National Cheetah Management Strategy, the cheetah Enhancement Fund, and helped fund many on-the-ground cheetah projects. He has done the same with the black-faced impala and its Enhancement Fund and National Management Plan.

"For over a decade John has been filing and appealing over one-hundred trophy U.S. import permits for both cheetah and black-faced impala as a free public service. He has taken them through every level of appeal. Today, import of both species rests with the Director of the USF&WS after exhaustion of all administrative proceedings – all done as a free public service by John.

"John drafted and successfully spearheaded the adoption of what were coined the "Namibian Resolutions" of CITES. Those are the Quota Resolution and the Non-detriment Resolution exempting hunting trophies from the trade ban applicable to all other Appendix 1 species. Those are the two primary hunting resolutions of CITES.

John has been among the leaders of the sustainable use movement from its inception. He attended the first IUCN meeting on sustainable use in Caracas in 1992 through the recent meetings on sustainable hunting in Geneva, Brussels, UK, Port Elizabeth and around the world. He is the President of the Sustainable Use Commission of the intergovernmental CIC in Budapest and serves on CIC's Executive Counsel. He serves on the Sustainable Use Committees of both the Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies and The Wildlife Society.

After the elephant fights John began the Enhancement Initiative to both amend the U.S. Endangered Species Act and also to reform the way it is administered so that hunting can be used as a tool to save "endangered" listed game species. He established the right to import into the U.S. horn from "endangered" listed black rhino removed from live rhino in darting safaris. The Enhancement Initiative is the cause of the USF&WS recently adopting regulations governing the tagging of imported black rhino trophies and may ultimately lead to the U.S. importation of those trophies as envisioned from the inception of the Initiative. John truly has the long view.

"In another success, John began the Namibian Crocodile Initiative, filed the test permits and persuaded and assisted the downlisting of Namibia's Crocodile for importation in to the U.S.

"John is an outdoor writer as well as an attorney and has done a great deal to raise Namibia's profile as a major hunting destination. He has written hundreds of articles concerning Namibia. During his SCI leadership he established Namibia's Hunting Symposium during the SCI Convention that has become an annual event and was primarily responsible for Namibia being given the Conservation Country of the Year Award.

Today John is also the Governmental Affairs Representative of Dallas Safari Club. Together they are providing important and substantial financial support to the LIFE plus Conservancy Project of Namibia. They also began the effort to save its US AID funding that is under direct attack by animal rights groups lobbying in U.S. Congress to stop US AID from being used as a "tool for wildlife conservation".

"This year John handled all the seizures of Namibia's leopard trophies when the USF&WS stopped accepting the type of tags that Namibia has long used. They were no longer considered "self-locking" because they were made of three separate parts rather than one part. In some cases he had to file Petitions for Remission, but all services were successful and were performed as a free public service to Namibia and the individual hunters. He strategically used those seizures to help establish a new regulation in the U.S. that governmental permitting and tagging mistakes of Appendix 1 species are correctable for the first time.

"John presently serves on two NAPHA Committees, four IUCN Specialist Groups, three committees of The Wildlife Society, five committees of the Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies, ten boards of directors, represents 125 organizations and foundations including eight outfitters and/or P.H. associations and much more.

"Elephant, cheetah, black-faced impala, leopard, crocodile, rhino, sustainable use, CITES, ESA, conservancies, CBNRM...in all, 18 years of serving Namibia. He is a true champion to Namibia."