

Hunting is a cherished tradition in Wyoming as much as it is in Texas. “I like to be out in nature,” hunters tell me. That’s well and good. My sons like to hunt Pronghorn on my own and adjoining public lands. I’ve developed taste for the “care” packages they leave me. However, competitiveness can get the better of any hunter. When it does, it spirals ever onward.

While visiting Texas I wondered about the eight-foot-high fences that surround certain ranches. The fencing looks sturdy enough to contain a rhino. What do the ranchers enclose in these properties?

Herds of elk, for one thing, plus red deer, white-tailed deer, and any other deer populations whose males may grow big antlers. They are bred for ever more impressive racks with “wildlife feed,” an oxymoron if ever there was one: By definition, wildlife survives on its own. Feed names like “AntlerMax” and “Record Rack” are tip-offs. These elk and deer are bred to satisfy trophy hunters’ displays. They regularly appear at spots at which they are fed. It makes a walk in the park of shooting a trophy buck. No self-respecting hunter would call it hunting when the animal is raised and contained in a fenced enclosure—yet there is the drive to compete, to outdo even oneself.

There’s more. Increasingly imported are exotic wildlife species like gemsbok oryx that bear huge scimitar horns, warthogs sought for their tusks, gazelles, kudus, and many other African species. For such ranching to succeed, it’s good to be a member of the Exotic Wildlife Association, an organization that pledges to “strengthen the market” for the “alternative livestock industry.” Its headquarters are in Ingram, Texas, and the “exotic wildlife” ranchers who advertise in its lavishly illustrated 65-page newsletter cum brochure are without exception based in Texas. While the association professes to promote “conservation through commerce,” marketing exotics via hunting is obviously the big idea.

Justifications abound. The Fall 2017 EWA publication contains a veterinarian’s article on the deteriorating living conditions in Africa, which Patrick Condy knows first-hand from his years in Zimbabwe and South Africa. Africa’s human population is set to double to 2.5 billion by 2050, he writes, even as grain harvests keep shrinking. Elephants are down to 450,000 when they numbered over a million just a decade ago; rhino herds are diminishing apace. Africa’s numberless people of working age, he observes, have fewer job prospects than anywhere else in the world, escalating the “bushmeat” industry now in full swing all over Africa. The enlightened American goal? To preserve “a treasured African heritage against the tide of population growth” and attendant “globalized resource-exploitation.”

Western protectionism doesn’t cut it. Dr. Condy rants against CITES and other animal-rights NGOs seeking to stem the tide of illegal trade in endangered species. The dirt poor, rural subsistence dwellers desperate for food will side with the trophy poachers. Western

governments should adopt regulations for the importation of ivory and rhino horns and legalize “sensible exploitation” of wildlife. Condy concludes with an argument against policies that inhibit “the regulated use of wild assets for commercial purposes.” African hoofstock species existing on Texas wildlife centers and game ranches are granted a living “away from the dangers of Africa and safe in Texas.”

True to its devotion to hunting, EWA also endorses safari hunts in Africa. “Making an Adventure of Supporting Our Industry,” is an article penned by a member who with his wife went on a “Hunting Safari in Africa” on the game ranch of Derek and Steff Corns. “Meat and trophy care was first-class,” notes the man, who presented pictures of the kudu, oryx, and warthog he hunted. Suppressors are “completely legal in SA” he enthused. Meals were delicious and beautifully presented, he noted, with repeated reference to the Bombay gin he picked up in town before heading out. Inasmuch as he and his wife were accorded “the finest hospitality and professional assistance,” the member, himself a rancher of exotics, urged others to imitate his quest.

If that’s not the very African resource-exploitation EWA grumbles about, I don’t know what is. On another matter, is it just Texas tall-talk to cite statistics claiming the industry in 2007 was \$1.3 billion strong and created 14,300 jobs? A decade later, it boasted one million exotics of about 135 species on Texas ranches.

Can Wyoming be far behind? We may not (yet) have an “alternative livestock” industry but we do have driven hunters. I personally know a male hunter (single) who has accumulated several freezers full of game meat, with no family to consume it. In fowl hunting, reaching the daily limit is all. He and his buddies will use only the breasts of the ducks and geese that the decoys lure in. Once stripped of breast meat, the carcasses—six per day per hunter—are left to be scavenged by eagle and coyote. Generous? Not when you consider the bullets embedded in the carcasses, the lead of which poisons the scavengers. It’s hardly a cut above slaughtering exotics.