

Report back on Conservation-Lab by Paul Stones and Stewart Dorrington

2018-05-15

Dear Members,

Conservation-Lab is a two day invite only conference sponsored by “Beyond Luxury Media” whose aim is to bring together the sharpest minds in conservation, travel, technology, philanthropy, governments and communities to gather intelligent insights that lead to informed decisions and more effective actions.

Participants have included names such as Richard Leakey, Saba Hamilton Douglas, Derek and Beverley Joubert. This year’s line-up was impressive too with more well-known figures from the Mantis Collection, African Parks, Endangered Wildlife Trust, Wilderness Foundation, Wildlands, Wildlife Conservation Trust, Great Plains Conservation, Newsweek, Kenya Wildlife Trust, And Beyond, United Nations Conservation, numerous large travel agencies, governments and media.



For the first time ever, professional hunters were invited to participate. Beyond Luxury invited Paul Stones and Stewart Dorrington to a debate against Ian Michler and Colin Bell with the goal of bridging the gap between the anti and pro hunting groups, for the betterment of our wildlife. The moderator was Andrew Muir from Wilderness Foundation (Ian Players project).

We each had ten minutes to present our case, first was Ian Michler, then Paul, then Colin Bell and lastly Stewart after which there were questions from the floor. There were no questions that we could not answer, or which compromised our position on hunting.



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The debate allowed us to address an influential group of people as to the enormous contribution trophy hunting can and does make to conservation, that it is a vital tool in management, how it can benefit communities, how it protects marginal land where tourism isn't possible etc. There was opportunity to distinguish between trophy hunting (which we do) and poaching, bush meat trade, unregulated local hunting, corruption and bad management. We also exposed many problems related to the tourism industry, such as negative environmental impact, the dependence on donor funding in many instances, habituation of wild animal and other unsustainable tourism practices.

We certainly created a positive impression and afterwards were congratulated by organisers, pro hunting and even many anti hunters came to wish us well and most want to continue with the engagement.

We continued in the afternoon with an hour side session attended by approximately fifty delegates (four other workshops running simultaneously) where we further unpacked what CPHC-SA stands for and questioned some statements made by our opponents. Concessions were made by them for hunting on private land and on areas not suitable for tourism where it is beneficial for the environment. That was a great step forward for us too. After the afternoon session Derek Joubert wished us good luck with our new association and we had open and friendly discussions with him too.

Paul and I made a great team as he has much experience outside South Africa while I am well informed and experienced within SA. We won many people over and the feedback has been extremely positive. The overriding view was that there is a place for ethical trophy hunting and we have been invited by many of those present to continue to engage, even some unlikely ones. By Monday morning Paul had 3 calls from foreign journalists, I have been invited to engage with a director of IFAW in Europe who was not even present at the event. There also might be an opportunity from TUSK to present to the National Geographical Society in London.

What is also clear is that we have a huge job to do to repair the reputational damage that has been done to the industry and with CPHC-SA breaking away on its own we have been recognised as trying to make a difference in the right direction and many are willing to work with us to raise the bar in professional hunting. We also need to attend more of these types of events and perhaps now we will be invited to some as there was a great interest in what we had to say. It is a conversation that the trophy hunting industry must have with those that oppose us as so much of their opinions come from misinformation and lack of understanding.

Yours sincerely,

CPHC-SA