

THEME 8: NATURE

Reading 1 Examining the African Hunting Debate

When a famous Zimbabwean lion was hunted and killed by a foreign tourist, people on social media were furious. This resulted in an airline ban of the transportation of trophies killed by tourists and people repeatedly asking travelers to avoid countries that allow this kind of trophy hunting. Trophy hunting describes legal hunting where people pay to do it. It is permitted in countries including Namibia, South Africa, Tanzania and Zambia. While many people are disgusted by this, what they don't often realize is that stopping this kind of hunting might actually do more harm than good.

Let's look at Namibia for example. The local Minister of Environment and Tourism, Pohamba Shefeta, said that if airlines stopped transporting wildlife trophies, this would prevent the Namibians from protecting wildlife in their country. This is because the money that people pay to trophy hunt is used to stop illegal hunting, which is a much bigger problem than legal hunting. This suggests that trophy hunting can have a positive impact on the protection of wildlife, in theory at least.

Namibia is often described as trophy hunting's biggest success story. It is indeed true that hunting played an important role in increasing the number of wild animals after wars in the 1970s and 80s negatively affected herd sizes. Today there are still eighty animal protection organizations in Namibia that rely completely on money from legal hunting. As Namibian journalist John Gobler says, farmers look after their animals better if they sell them to hunters. Namibia is currently experiencing a lack of rain which means some farmers may not have enough food for their animals. If they can't earn money from their animals because hunting is stopped, farmers may decide to let them die. If hunting is stopped altogether, farmers will let the whole herd die.

In Botswana, hunting large animals is now illegal for everyone and they have not suffered from the problems that John Gobler suggests above. However, there is a big difference between Botswana and Namibia – in Botswana there are no fences between people's land, which means animals are able to move around freely. If farmers stop feeding them, they just go somewhere else to find food. In Namibia there are fences, so the same thing will not happen there. Botswana's ban on hunting is not without its problems, however. Large, wild animals are regularly killed when human life, food crops or farm animals are put in danger. In fact, this kind of animal death is considered to be a bigger killer than controlled hunting.

Interesting, in a recent article, Botswanan villagers said they would protect local wildlife better if they could earn money from it through hunting. However, this opinion goes against the results of a large study carried out by Economists at Large. They concluded that in nine African countries that allow trophy hunting, the "sport" accounted for just 1.8 percent of total tourism revenue, while, more importantly, only 3 percent of the money actually reached the communities where hunting occurs.

So what does all of this tell us? It tells us that whatever we might think about the hunters, hunting can have a positive effect – both for wildlife and for African people – when and where it is properly and ethically managed. However, too often the opposite occurs and the industry suffers from bad

management and bad ethics. It also tells us that trophy hunting is far more complex than both those who love it and those who hate it often realize. So while the hunting industry might need some serious changes, it's perhaps not time to stop it completely when African wildlife organizations have no other way of making money. It is interesting to look at Zambia in this regard. Before hunting was stopped in 2013, 60 percent of the Zambian Wildlife Authority's (ZAWA) revenue came from legal hunting. Today, ZAWA has very little money and has had to receive some from the Zambian government more than once.

So what can we do? Apart from supporting Africa's national parks and wildlife areas as photographic tourists, there are no easy answers or quick solutions. But if we first try to understand the issue, it is a step in the right direction. And while this situation might make us angry, remember that shouting at our computer doesn't really help anyone.

(Source: Expert IELTS 6 Coursebook p.99)

Reading 2 How Does Nature Impact Our Wellbeing?

Research reveals that environments can increase or reduce our stress, which in turn impacts our bodies. What you are seeing, hearing, experiencing at any moment is changing not only your mood, but how your nervous, endocrine, and immune systems are working.

The stress of an unpleasant environment can cause you to feel anxious, or sad, or helpless. This in turn elevates your blood pressure, heart rate, and muscle tension and suppresses your immune system. A pleasing environment reverses that.

And regardless of age or culture, humans find nature pleasing. In one study cited in the book *Healing Gardens*, researchers found that more than two-thirds of people choose a natural setting to retreat to when stressed.

Nature heals

Being in nature, or even viewing scenes of nature, reduces anger, fear, and stress and increases pleasant feelings. Exposure to nature not only makes you feel better emotionally, it contributes to your physical wellbeing, reducing blood pressure, heart rate, muscle tension, and the production of stress hormones. It may even reduce mortality, according to scientists such as public health researchers Stamatakis and Mitchell.

Research done in hospitals, offices, and schools has found that even a simple plant in a room can have a significant impact on stress and anxiety.

Nature soothes

In addition, nature helps us cope with pain. Because we are genetically programmed to find trees, plants, water, and other nature elements engrossing, we are absorbed by nature scenes and distracted from our pain and discomfort. This is nicely demonstrated in a now classic study of patients who underwent gallbladder surgery; half had a view of trees and half had a view of a



wall. According to the physician who conducted the study, Robert Ulrich, the patients with the view of trees tolerated pain better, appeared to nurses to have fewer negative effects, and spent less time in a hospital. More recent studies have shown similar results with scenes from nature and plants in hospital rooms.

Nature restores

One of the most intriguing areas of current research is the impact of nature on general wellbeing. In one study in *Mind*, 95% of those interviewed said their mood improved after spending time outside, changing from depressed, stressed, and anxious to more calm and balanced. Other studies by Ulrich, Kim, and Cervinka show that time in nature or scenes of nature are associated with a positive mood, and psychological wellbeing, meaningfulness, and vitality.

Furthermore, time in nature or viewing nature scenes increases our ability to pay attention. Because humans find nature inherently interesting, we can naturally focus on what we are experiencing out in nature. This also provides a respite for our overactive minds, refreshing us for new tasks.

In another interesting area, Andrea Taylor's research on children with ADHD shows that time spent in nature increases their attention span later.

Nature connects

According to a series of field studies conducted by Kuo and Coley at the Human-Environment Research Lab, time spent in nature connects us to each other and the larger world. Another study at the University of Illinois suggests that residents in Chicago public housing who had trees and green space around their building reported knowing more people, having stronger feelings of unity with neighbors, being more concerned with helping and supporting each other, and having stronger feelings of belonging than tenants in buildings without trees. In addition to this greater sense of community, they had a reduced risk of street crime, lower levels of violence and aggression between domestic partners, and a better capacity to cope with life's demands, especially the stresses of living in poverty.

This experience of connection may be explained by studies that used fMRI to measure brain activity.

When participants viewed nature scenes, the parts of the brain associated with empathy and love lit up, but when they viewed urban scenes, the parts of the brain associated with fear and anxiety were activated. It appears as though nature inspires feelings that connect us to each other and our environment.

(Source: <https://www.takingcharge.csh.umn.edu/how-does-nature-impact-our-wellbeing>)