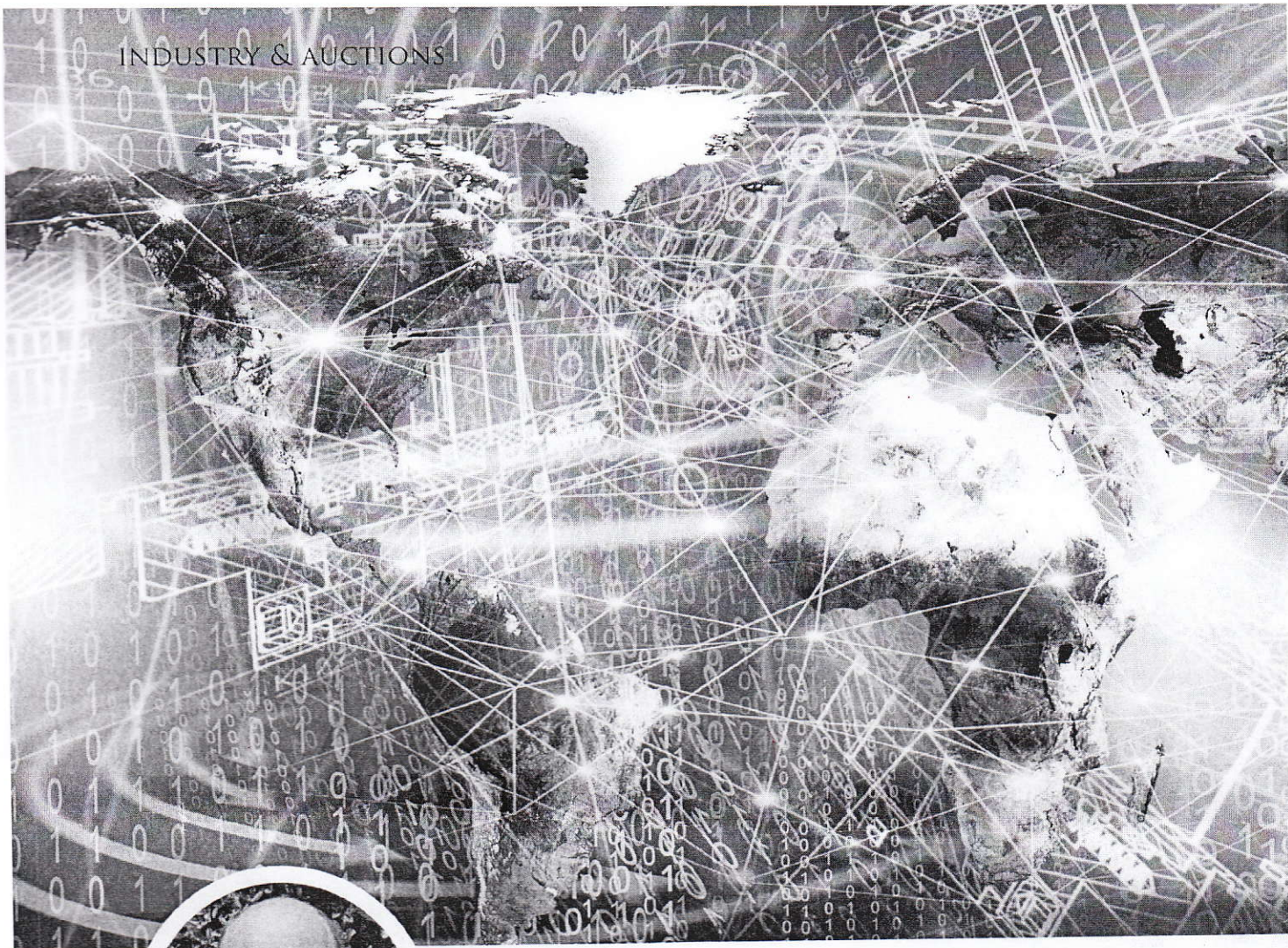


INDUSTRY & AUCTIONS



MICHAEL T. SAS ROLFES

The Power of KNOWLEDGE

by Michael T. Sas Rolfes

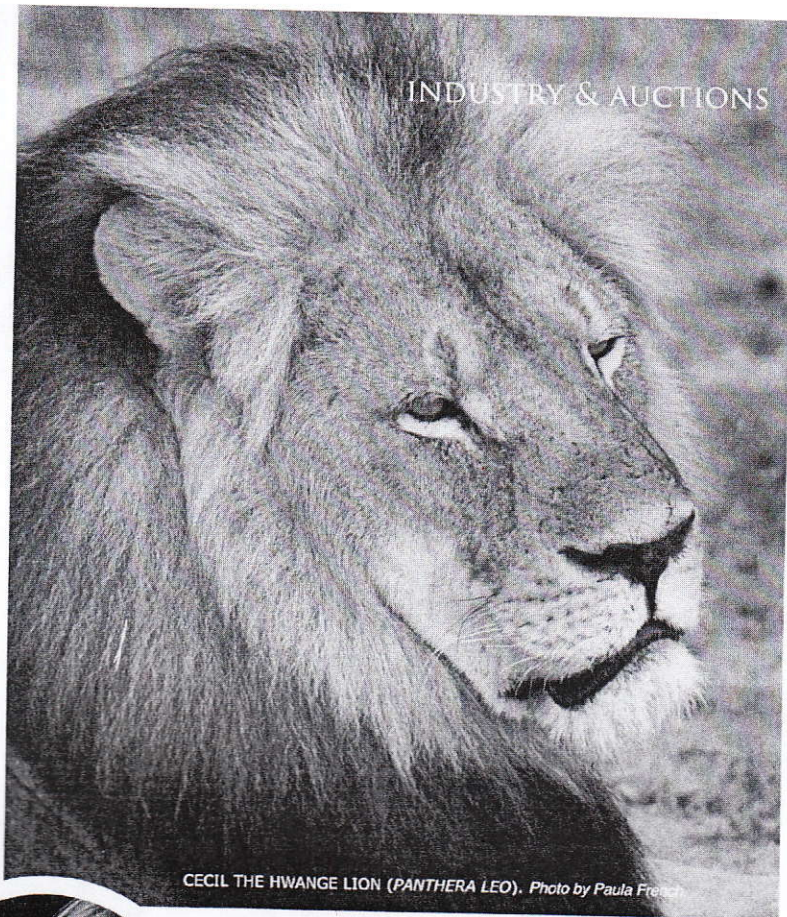
Knowledge is power' is a famous and often repeated quote, and for good reason. In this age of rapidly developing information technology, specific knowledge is spreading swiftly and often unevenly, resulting in significant and sometimes rapid shifts in power. One need look no further than the recent political upheavals in the Middle East, the so-called Arab Spring, in which social-media communication played a vital role.

Closer to home, improvements and shifts in knowledge have significant implications for the southern African wildlife industry, both positive and potentially threatening.

In the last two months, Cecil the lion has represented a newsworthy flashpoint for the spread of knowledge about wildlife-management practices in southern Africa. I was in the USA at the time the Cecil story broke and was impressed by how almost every layperson I spoke to soon knew about Cecil, no matter

how remotely interested in either Africa or wildlife they were. But what exactly did they know? And what are the implications of this widened knowledge that American dentists travel to Africa and pay large amounts of money to shoot lions? In another article, Professor Brian Child delves more deeply into the Cecil issue, but some points are worth noting here.

Knowledge can be shaped by the way in which information is presented: so-called framing.



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CECIL THE HWANGE LION (*PANTHERA LEO*). Photo by Paula French



Framing refers to the way an issue is contextualised and can strongly influence the way in which facts are understood. In the US, anti-hunting and animal rights groups were quick to frame the Cecil issue in ways that suit their agenda. For example, Ingrid Newkirk, founder and President of PETA, People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals, framed Cecil's killing as a murder and called for the hunter, Walter Palmer, to be hanged.

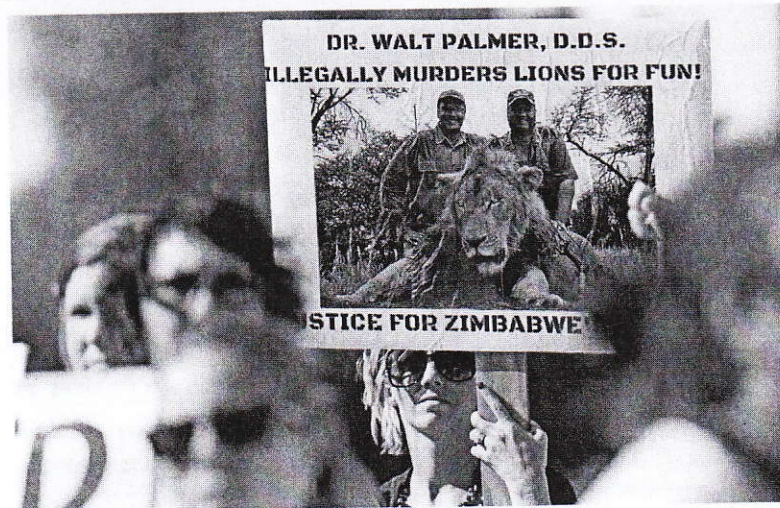
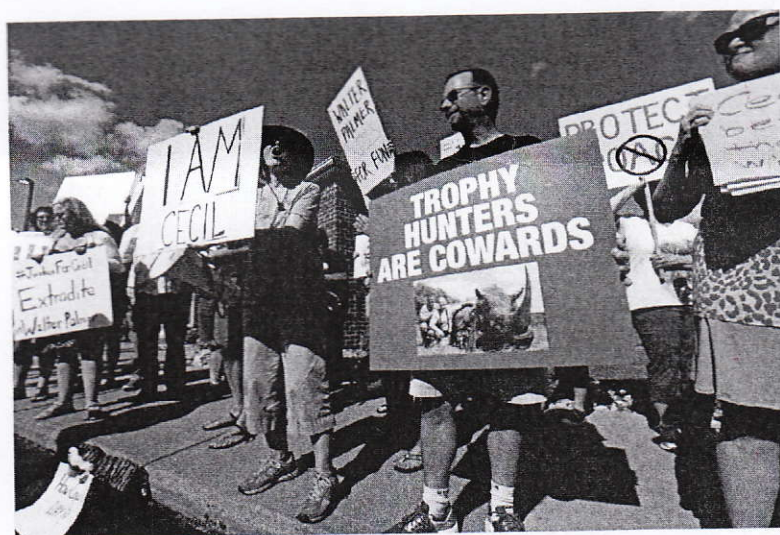
The notion that sport hunters are murderers is one that animal rights groups are keen to cultivate and spread, and it seems that these groups are gaining traction, with serious potential consequences for the hunting industry: public opinion appears to be increasingly turning

« INGRID NEWKIRK.
Photo by David
Shankbone.

THE PETA
ORGANISATION
HAS OFFICIALLY
BEEN TAKING PRE-
ORDERS FOR ITS
CHEEKY LIMITED-
EDITION COSTUME
'CECIL'S REVENGE'.



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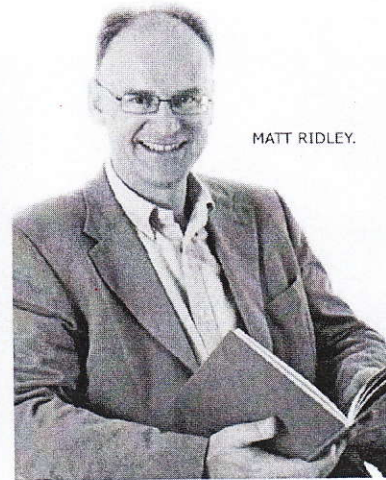
against trophy hunting of what are perceived to be both endangered African species and sentient beings. Whereas in the past hunters felt confident that governments would not support international hunting bans, they perhaps failed to anticipate that activist groups can use public opinion as a lever to constrain the industry in other ways: for example, by persuading commercial airline and shipping companies to stop transporting trophies.

Significantly, the Cecil incident was itself a classic example of deficient knowledge management. Cecil was a known lion: he had a name and a radio collar, so that his movement and whereabouts could be monitored and known. He was a tourist icon. In theory, at least, both the professional hunter Theo Bronkhorst and the landowner Honest Ndlovu could have known about Cecil and avoided killing him.

In a well-integrated wildlife management system, it is certainly possible for lion researchers to share information with all relevant industry participants and

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LANDOWNER HONEST NDLOVU AND HUNTING OUTFITTER THEO BRONKHORST.



MATT RIDLEY.

neighbouring landowners so as to ensure that hunters avoid strategically important or especially valued animals. All it would take is some communication and cooperation. Indeed, if sport hunting of iconic species is to have any future in southern Africa, it seems that improved communication and cooperation will be essential.

What is the best way to ensure the effective flow of information and spread of knowledge? In one of the most influential academic articles ever written, *The Use of Knowledge in Society*, Nobel Prize-winning economist Friedrich von Hayek argues convincingly that knowledge is by nature widely dispersed and often context-specific. Problems of economic co-ordination, he argues, are best solved through the market and the price system. Central planning typically fails because it is unable to sufficiently account for all the variation and specificity so as to lead to efficient, effective and sustainable practices. This is the main argument against excessive centralisation of authority and over-regulation, a theme further explored

The Use of Knowledge in Society



"The peculiar character of the problem of a rational economic order is determined precisely by the fact that the knowledge of the circumstances of which we must make use never exists in concentrated or integrated form but solely as the dispersed bits of incomplete and frequently contradictory knowledge which all the separate individuals possess."

--Friedrich von Hayek, 1948

in a new book, *The Evolution of Everything*, by the esteemed science author Matt Ridley. Using multiple examples, Ridley argues that the world is essentially a 'bottom-up' place and that 'top-downery' is the source of most of the world's problems.

What are the implications of these insights for the wildlife industry? Consistent with these arguments, it is clear that market reforms, such as recognising devolved ownership of wild lands and wildlife (through, for example, the Theft of Game Act in South Africa) and the removal of excessive agricultural regulations from the Apartheid era, played a vital role in stimulating South Africa's modern wildlife

economy. Enabling diverse private landowners to experiment with a range of approaches has resulted in remarkable innovations in game breeding and wildlife management. And Wildlife Ranching South Africa (WRSA) evolved as a bottom-up initiative to represent this industry.

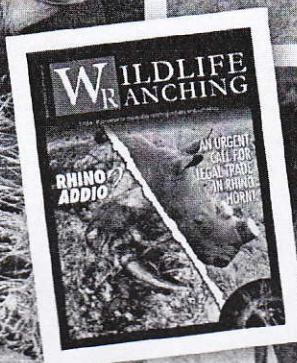
The challenge for the industry is to continue to build upon this knowledge and ensure that information is disseminated in a constructive way, especially to policy makers and regulators at home and abroad, so as to ensure that regulation enables industry development and does not stifle it. In South Africa, experience with the TOPS Regulations provides a significant case in point.



SLAUGHTERED WHITE RHINOCEROS OR SQUARE-LIPPED RHINOCEROS (*CERATOTHERIUM SIMUM*).



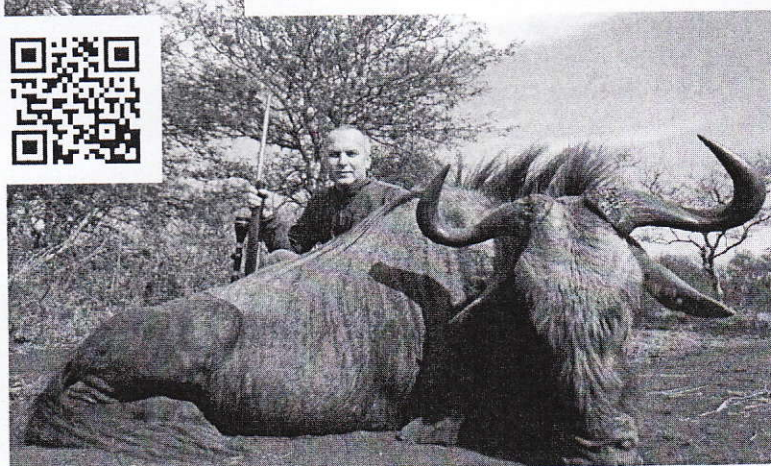
LION (*PANTHERA LEO*).



GOLDEN WILDEBEESTS, ALSO CALLED GNUS, ARE A GENUS OF ANTELOPES, *CONNOCHAETES*.

A GOLDEN GNU PROFESSIONALLY AND ETHICALLY HUNTED BY NESTOR SHUFRYCH FROM UKRAINE. SCAN THE QR CODE OR VISIT <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QmA-w8Q2Bu4> TO WATCH A VIDEO WHERE PROFESSOR PEET VAN DER MERWE EXPLAINS THE ECONOMIC EFFECTS THAT BANNING TROPHY HUNTING COULD HAVE ON SOUTH AFRICA.

Photo courtesy Thormanien & Cochran Safaris:
<http://africatrophyhunting.com>



When South Africa hosts the CITES Conference of Parties in Johannesburg in late September 2016, we can expect our wildlife industry practices to be placed in the international media spotlight. Activist groups concerned with animal rights, animal welfare, wildlife preservation and social justice will be asking challenging questions, especially in relation to contentious issues such as South Africa's policy approach to rhino poaching, the commercial captive breeding of lions, colour-variant breeding, controversial hunting

practices and the extent to which the industry benefits a broad spectrum of South African people.

Many overseas organisations completely reject the principle of sustainable use of wildlife and favour pure preservation. Others only support sustainable use in the context of meaningful social transformation (that is, if the principal

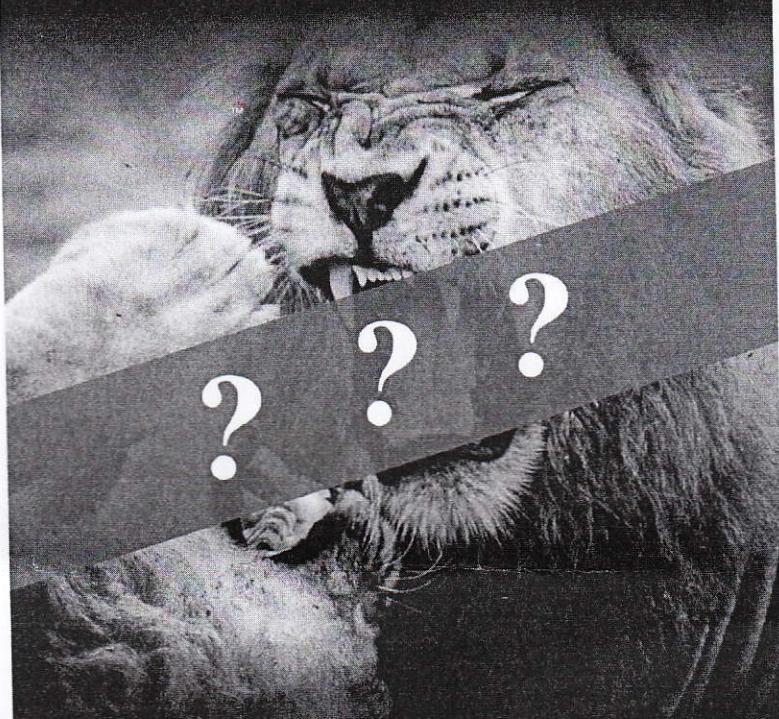
beneficiaries are previously disadvantaged rural communities living alongside wildlife) and if certain environmental management and animal welfare standards are maintained. At the time of the CITES CoP, South Africa will have a unique opportunity to demonstrate its track record with credible supporting evidence – or risk failing to win crucial

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**WEDNESDAY, 7 OCTOBER
 AT 22:00 AND 23:00 MSNBC**

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international support, with potentially severe longer-term policy consequences. Both public opinion and inappropriate policies have the potential to affect import and export aspects of the wildlife industry in various ways, whether impacting on trophy hunters and other tourists, or on the ability to trade internationally in live animals, meat and

other products. Is the industry adequately prepared to put its best foot forward? If we fail to convince the world that South Africa's wildlife industry is not only sustainable, equitable and ethical, but also essential to both the environmental and economic wellbeing of our country, we risk the imposition of further top-down restrictions. The damage

already caused by onerous restrictions on rhino ownership and trade should be self-evident. Further restrictions affecting other species would most likely worsen the situation. We can already expect a CITES Appendix I up-listing proposal for the African lion, and the recent release of the film *Blood Lions*, an exposé of South Africa's captive-lion breeding industry, may serve to further influence public opinion (and that of international policy makers) against this country. The industry cannot afford to be complacent.

So what could wildlife industry participants do to improve knowledge and understanding of the industry? To some extent, information already exists about the numbers of animals within certain species, their genetics and their economic values as reflected by auction price records. However, there seems to be room for improvement in this data, especially as census techniques are improved and DNA testing technology becomes increasingly accessible. Individual landowners and breeders are most likely already accumulating information to improve their own performance, but where possible they should also do so with a view to sharing such information more widely, especially as related to the socio-economic benefits of their operations, numbers and genetics of important species, the conditions under which such species are managed, and the extent to which their stocks can be considered as 'wild' versus captive or farmed. The issue of intensification in wildlife management is one of significant concern to conservationists and animal welfare organisations alike, and likely to become an increasing policy focus, with possible major regulatory implications. Aside from ensuring that certain animal health

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and welfare standards are maintained, we need to gain a better understanding of the extent to which wildlife ranchers are contributing to the stated conservation goals of the IUCN and to what extent they are operating within the realm of agriculture, potentially falling outside of those goals. And given that many international (and even local) observers feel that wildlife should be treated as a public, not private, resource, wildlife ranchers would be advised to demonstrate the broader

public benefits of their operations, if not to conservation, then at least as contributing to economic development that is of particular benefit to the previously disadvantaged.

Good monitoring and sound record keeping are a first step towards establishing standards of best practice for the wildlife industry. These standards can form the basis for future forms of certification that can win support from international trading partners. Such a proactive, bottom-up, market- and

industry-driven approach based on sound, fact-based knowledge is far more likely to benefit the industry than the imposition of further national and international regulations.

Wildlife industry participants **should not only** acquire as much further useful knowledge as possible, but also share and disseminate it widely and present it strategically in order to reframe the way in which the industry is increasingly perceived by the public and regulators that they influence.