

Editorial

1909 – 2009: A Century in the African Bush, from Roosevelt to Obama

"*The most noteworthy collection of big animals that has ever come out of Africa.*" Those are the words of the 26th President of the United States of America, describing the outcome of his killing spree, which was executed on the African continent in 1909 right after leaving the white house and seeing to it that his preferred successor, William Howard Taft was inaugurated as the 27th U.S. President. Roosevelt and his entourage of more than 200 servants and guides killed or trapped more than 11,000 animals, including at least 500 "big game" animals – white rhinos, elephants, and lions (Figure 1). One hundred years later, Mr. Barack Hussein Obama, whose father was born in the same blood-soaked safari fields, is inaugurated as the 44th U.S. President. The environmental history of the African continent is remarkable for its unrelenting gravity and resilience. Roosevelt traveled to Mombasa, then part of British East Empire at a time when large portions of the continent was dominated by foreign governments, or otherwise undifferentiated (Figure 2). His safari party traveled widely in Eastern Africa, and many of the collections are now banked in the American Museum of Natural History and the Smithsonian Institution¹.

It is probably safe to predict that when he leaves the White House, President Obama will not go on a safari hunting spree. There are now national and international laws against such actions, to protect biological diversity and prevent the extinction of species that are now admired by many people all over the world. Yet, the American demand for natural resources has major impact on environmental quality at the global level, and Obama's decisions will certainly play a role in the trajectory toward sustainability or chaos. The economic crises currently facing the world does not bode well for environmental stewardship, but Obama has an unprecedented opportunity to convince that world that environmental conservation is not just about dollars. Improvements in the livelihood and wellbeing of populations, disease prevention, and the uncountable psychological health benefits of nature experience are the cogent reasons to re-invigorate protective environmental policies at the international level. The world is watching Obama's performance and his strategies for peace and economic prosperity. We are watching his team's action to promote environmental science and technology, to invest in "green" products and processes, to protect the most vulnerable populations wherever they reside on the planet. Obama's role will be mostly inspirational. The hard work will be done by people like you and me who conduct scientific research daily, who share the results of our works, and strive to translate those results into meaningful environmental improvements that support human lives.

As we begin this New Year in January 2009, may *Janus*, the Roman god of beginnings and endings, and of the past and the future, open new doors of "green" opportunities as we close the doors to the environmental atrocities of the past.

¹ "On Safari With Theodore Roosevelt, 1909," EyeWitness to History. www.eyewitnesstohistory.com (1997).

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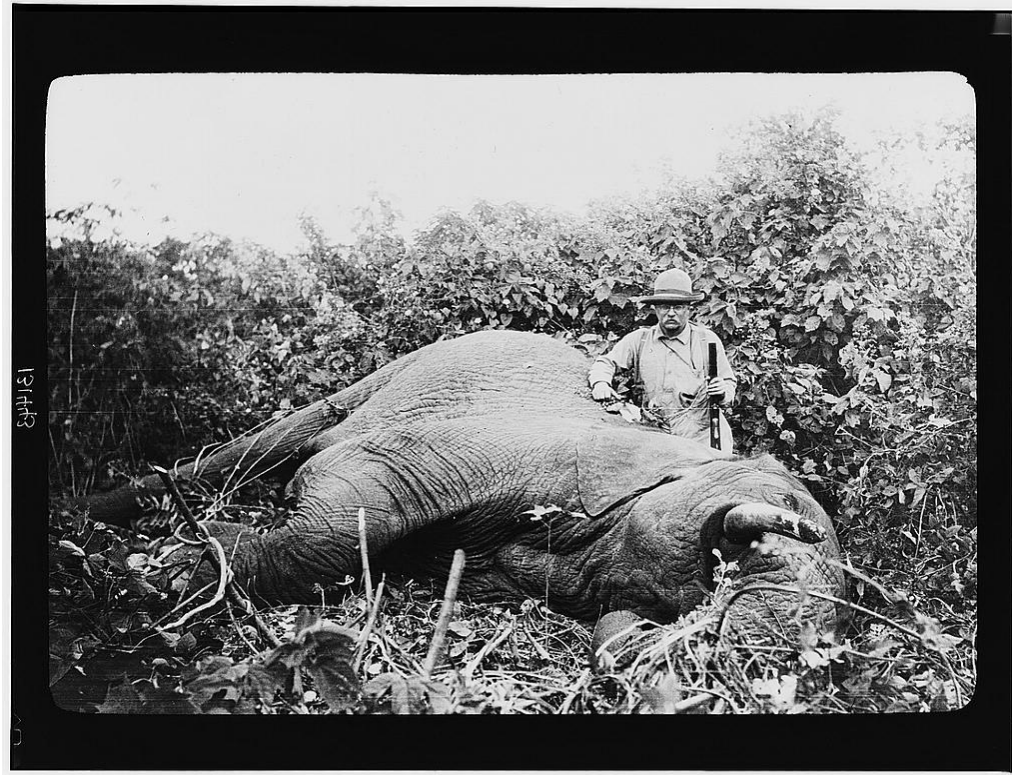


Figure 1. (A) Theodore Roosevelt posing with an African Elephant that he shot to death in Eastern Africa during his safari of 1909. Van Altena, Edward, photographer. Repository: U.S. Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division Washington, D.C. 20540 USA. Digital ID: (b&w film copy neg.) cph 3c31443 <http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.pnp/cph.3c31443> CARD #: 2002709191. (B) Theodore and Kermit Roosevelt posing with a felled African “big game”. From Roosevelt. T. (1910) *African Game Trails: An account of the African wanderings of an American hunter-naturalist*. London: John Murray.

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Figure 2. Map of Africa in 1909. Courtesy The Private Collection of Roy Winkelman.
<http://etc.usf.edu/Maps/pages/2500/2527/2527.htm>

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