

# Ivan Carter: Hunter and Conservation Fighter

Ivan Carter is no stranger to DSC members. Formerly appearing on DSC's "Tracks Across Africa," Ivan has now tackled a new project. "Carter's W.A.R. – Wild Animal Response." In this show, he takes a hard, honest look at the state of wildlife, especially wildlife poaching, in his homeland. Born in Zimbabwe, Carter has 25 years of experience as an African guide and professional hunter and has been carrying HEYM rifles for much of that time in the bush.

When did you first go hunting and how has that transitioned to what you do today?

I grew up hunting birds and vermin on my grandfather's farm (by vermin I mean jackals, baboons and the like). My very first big game hunt was a hunt that I won as a 9 year old where we were taken by Richard Bedford on a tsessebe hunt – it was an amazing experience. He insisted we hunt on foot. It was a true lesson in hunting and being outdoors and pitting ones wits against an animal on a level playing field.

That experience led me to pursue a career in big game hunting that, after a time, saw me licensed in several African countries and hunting well over 200 days a year for a couple of decades.

Almost everywhere I went, the wildlife was under great pressure from poaching human populations exploding, and I realized that the general public was largely oblivious to the threats to our wildlife. Concurrently, anti-hunting sentiment was rapidly growing. I decided to be one of those who told these stories and thus "Carter's WAR – Wild Animal Response" was born – a TV series that endeavors to educate and entertain about conservation at the same time.



This series, "PH Spotlight" is sponsored by Heym USA, [www.heymsusa.com](http://www.heymsusa.com).



*Carter and son Trail*

## What are the biggest issues facing African big game?

The greatest issue facing African wildlife is simple – the enormous pressure placed on wildlife reserves by the human element. In Africa, a huge proportion of the population growth is below the breadline (poverty line), and as I always say, "Appreciating the simple beauty of wildlife is a concept that can only be understood by someone with a full belly." The claim that anti-hunters commonly cite – that hunters are the cause for the demise of certain species – is 100% inaccurate. It's the poaching epidemic that is in turn, feeding the population, that is to blame.

## What role do you feel hunters most effectively play in conservation?

Hunters play an enormous role – the very fact that they will pay to pursue game means that in turn their money flows into many corners of conservation – everything from the engaging and equipping of anti-poaching teams, benefits to local communities, employment of staff in areas with no other employment opportunities – the list goes on and on. As long as it's within a sustainable offtake, hunters truly are a great solution and land use in many parts of Africa.

## What could hunters be doing better to elevate their public image?

Hunters are notoriously good at posting just "glory" pictures of their trophies, without taking the time to explain what really is happening in an area or within a species. This, as we have seen all too well, elicits a very negative emotional response from the antis. Hunters need to make the effort to talk about the benefits to conservations on social media.

## On your show, there is always a conflict – is there really that much conflict in Africa?

Sadly yes. Rhino horn has become the most valuable commodity in Africa – ivory is at an all-time high and wildlife as a whole is often the cheapest source of protein available. Giraffes have become extinct in seven countries in the last decade, and over 1,000 baby chimps are traded on the exotic pet market every single year out of Congo.

## What was the toughest/scariest moment filming in the last couple of seasons?

I think without doubt the scariest moment was one time when I was approaching lions at dusk in imitation of what a Masai would have to do to poison them. Two huge lionesses charged at me stopping just a few feet away – I did not have my double rifle with me. I have to say I wish I had.

We also had a very close incident with a black rhino – an old bull that was quite peacefully going about his business when the wind changed and he charged. I was with Karen Holmes of the Zululand Rhino reserve. There was only room for one of us in the small tree within reach. I ended up dodging the tree with the rhino right there. He only backed down when I hit him on the side of the face with my hat.

## What have you learned as you film your show?

First of all, the importance of support is key to the effectiveness of a conservationist on the front line. DSC has been very generous with several of the projects I am involved in. Secondly, I had no idea just how deep some of these issues run – the African continent is an incredible place, with the bush, the deserts and forest and all of it abundant with amazing wildlife. If we want it to be here for our kids, we have to act now!







It is well-known that your favorite dangerous game species is the elephant. Can you say why?

The elephant is the only animal that will tolerate you being close and indicate what it is thinking. An elephant will lead you on a walk second to none – they will captivate you and fascinate you. Yes indeed, elephants have a very special place in my heart and I have been extremely fortunate in being able to spend a lot of time around them over the years.

What’s the best advice you received as you were growing up and doing PH apprenticeship? Who are your mentors and heroes?

The very best advice I ever received as a young PH was, “It’s not your safari.” Just starting out, I would do things in a way that I knew would succeed, often too fast or too aggressively for my client who was often twice my age. This was their experience – not mine. My job was to do my best to give him the experience he wanted .

I guided myself once on an elk hunt. I wish that had happened earlier in my career as I was totally out of my depth, knowing nothing. All of a sudden I realized I was asking the same questions that I had rolled my eyes at. I was acting the same way and had the same concerns – yes indeed the day you start hunting for your client it all gets better!

Your favorite celebratory food and drink after a successful hunt?

Oh my, when we get back to civilization after an expedition, there is usually ice cream involved – something hard to find in the middle of nowhere and probably the only think we all miss.

What do you do on holiday?

I love to do things with my family. As a result of spending most of my life away from home, family time becomes a very important thing. I don’t really mind what we do, but getting away to somewhere remote with my family is paradise for me!

Does your family go with you on your hunts or TV adventures?

I am very fortunate to have been able to get my wife, Ashleigh, and our kids, Trail and Brooke, to Africa several times. They are often on the front line with me during the less dangerous filming. They have seen lions darted and collared, have walked with rhinos, seen a rhino capture and moved as well as several other events. I do hope they grow up with the same passion for wildlife and the outdoors as me.

If you knew you had just 10 days left on the planet, what would you do with that time?

Easy – take my family, head out to one of my favorite parks and spend as much time with them close to big game. 