



CASH BEFORE CONSERVATION: NEW REPORT SHINES A SPOTLIGHT ON THE SOUTH AFRICAN CAPTIVE LION INDUSTRY

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The Endangered Wildlife Trust (EWT), champion of conservation in Africa, has been calling for radical change in the captive African Lion industry in South Africa since before 2009. Our key concerns include: the welfare of the animals; the safety of visitors; a lack of transparency by the facilities; and the potential impacts on wild Lion populations (EWT [Position Statement](#)). Today, our concerns are echoed in new report entitled *Cash Before Conservation: An Overview of the Breeding of Lions for Hunting and Bone Trade*, published by the Born Free Foundation ([report](#)).

The report finds that:

- Trade in captive Lion parts has been linked to the trafficking of other wildlife products with prominent Lion breeders being linked to rhino poaching syndicates. The most of these is Thai national Chumlong Lemtongtai, who worked for one of the largest international wildlife smuggling syndicates, The Xaysavang Company, and who was found guilty of permit fraud related to the pseudo-hunting of rhinos. The Xaysavang Company has been linked to rhino horn and ivory smuggling.
- The captive Lion industry has received support from key members of national and provincial government, including the current Minister of Environmental Affairs when she fulfilled various senior roles in the North West Province government – the hub of captive Lion hunting. Under her leadership, the captive Lion industry grew in the province and was promoted as an acceptable form of wildlife utilisation.
- There is an increasing resistance to captive Lion hunting in the formal hunting industry, with international and national hunting organisations taking stands against the practice. When the Professional Hunters' Association of South Africa (PHASA) decided to support captive hunting in November 2017, the association was ousted from the larger hunting industry with sponsors withdrawing and the Operators and Professional Hunting Associations of Africa (OPHAA), the Namibia Professional Hunting Association, the Boone and Crocket Club in the U.S.A, and the Nordic Hunting Club all severing ties with PHASA. Despite this, the industry continues to promote itself and receive government support.
- There is an association between Lion breeding and the emerging trade in donkey skins to Asia. Donkeys are often used to feed captive Lions and their skins are now being exported to

Asia for use in skin care products. Government officials in the North West Province are promoting the trade to create jobs while other African countries are working to shut down the trade and welfare organisations express concern around the wellbeing of the donkeys.

South Africa has approximately 8,000 Lions in captivity that are kept for various commercial purposes including: cub petting, “walking-with” initiatives, photographic tourism, and for hunting and their bones. Between 2003 and 2013, nearly 7,500 lion trophies left the country, the vast majority of which were from canned hunts. More recently, captive Lions have been used to supply the demand for Lion bones in Asia. In early 2017, the South African government announced a quota of 800 Lion skeletons that will be allowed for export. The EWT recognises the critical importance of unlocking opportunities for job creation and poverty alleviation in South Africa and we believe that the wildlife economy has great potential to do this. We do, however, remain concerned that the principles of ecological sustainability have been obscured by the increasing commodification of our wildlife resources. We are further concerned about the links between legal Lion bone trade and notorious smuggling syndicates.

The South African captive Lion industry has been under the international spotlight and many reputable conservation and hunting organisations have distanced themselves from the industry and its practices. South Africa has a world-class conservation reputation and the captive breeding of Lions for hunting and their bones is detracting from this.

We call on the South African government to act urgently to put an end to this practice, to protect South Africa’s reputation and Lions. We also call on our government to stop legitimising a practice that is merely intensive breeding of animals for commercial gain and has no positive impact on conservation.

These facilities need to be closed down to protect the staff and visitors who are frequently injured – and even killed – through interactions with Lions that have lost their fear of humans. Just last month a lady was killed by a captive Lion outside Johannesburg. We call on members of the public not to visit captive operations and to find ways of enjoying and appreciating Lions where they belong – in the wild.

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