



Captive Lion Breeding Industry

From Cradle to Grave
by Dr Louise de Waal

Background

- Lions classed as Vulnerable on IUCN Red List of Threatened species
- 43% continental decline 1993-2014
- Estimated 20,000 lions remain in about 8% of their historic range
- South Africa's wild and managed lion population is about 3,000
- Captive population: official number 8,000 – estimated 12,000+



Lion Breeding Industry

2009: >3,000 lions

2015: 6,000 lions in 200+ facilities,
mainly NW and Free State

2019: 7,979 lions in 366 facilities

2020 and beyond: Could reach
15,000-20,000 predators



Captive Big Cats

- Not only 8,000-12,000 lions
- 800 – 1,000 Cheetahs
- 500 – 1,000 Tigers
- Ligers
- Leopards
- Caracals
- Serval
- Jaguars
- Pumas





Exploitation in Tourism

- Cub petting
- Walking with lions
- Near mature lions as photo props
- Voluntourism

Fraudulent marketing messaging

- Advertising and film industry

Rewilding of captive bred lions

Fact: Captive bred lions are ill-equipped to survive in wild areas.

Fact: Human imprinted lions lose their fear of humans

Fact: Many captive lions are inbred and genetically comprised

Fact: No need to rewild captive bred lions, as SA's lion population is stable

Hunting Trophies Export

- 1999-2018: **11,674** lion trophies exported by SA
- 80% from captive bred population
- Top importing country: USA

Data from CITES Trade Database



Conservation Benefits

February 2016 - African Lion Working Group issued a statement:

“Captive-bred lion hunting, which is defined by ALWG as the sport hunting of lions that are captive bred and reared expressly for sport hunting and/or sport hunting of lions that occur in fenced enclosures and are not self-sustaining, does not provide any demonstrated positive benefit to wild lion conservation efforts and therefore cannot be claimed to be conservation”.



Lion Bone Trade

- **Since 2008** - 6,000+ lion skeletons with weight of approx. 70 tonnes exported from SA to Southeast Asia
- **Since 2017** - DEA/DEFF sets a legal annual export quota of 800 lion skeletons from captive population
- Setting of quota lacks scientific basis and is driven solely by supply and demand
- Bone trade perceived to be “by-product” of trophy hunting



Traditional Chinese Medicine

- Lion bones are replacing tiger bones in TCM fortified wine, medicines, tonics and aphrodisiacs.
- No credible evidence for the efficacy of the vast majority of these remedies.
- Lion bones also carved into jewelry.

Legitimation of these products stimulates the demand for wild and captive lion bones and thus parallel illegal trade.



Conservation Criticism

In 2016, the **IUCN World Conservation Congress** issued a Motion (No. 009) urging Government of South Africa to:

“Terminate the practice of breeding lions in captivity for the purpose of 'canned shooting' through a structured, time-bound process.”

and to

“Restrict captive breeding of lions to registered zoos or registered facilities, whose documented mandate is as a recognised, registered conservation project.”



IUCN
World
Conservation
Congress
Hawai'i 2016



DEA Response to IUCN

Lion breeding facilities would not be closed down, inferring that they fell within the Government's commitment to sustainable use of biodiversity.

Animal Welfare

IUCN motion:

“...develop norms and standards for the management of captive-bred lions in South Africa that address welfare, biodiversity and utilisation aspects...”

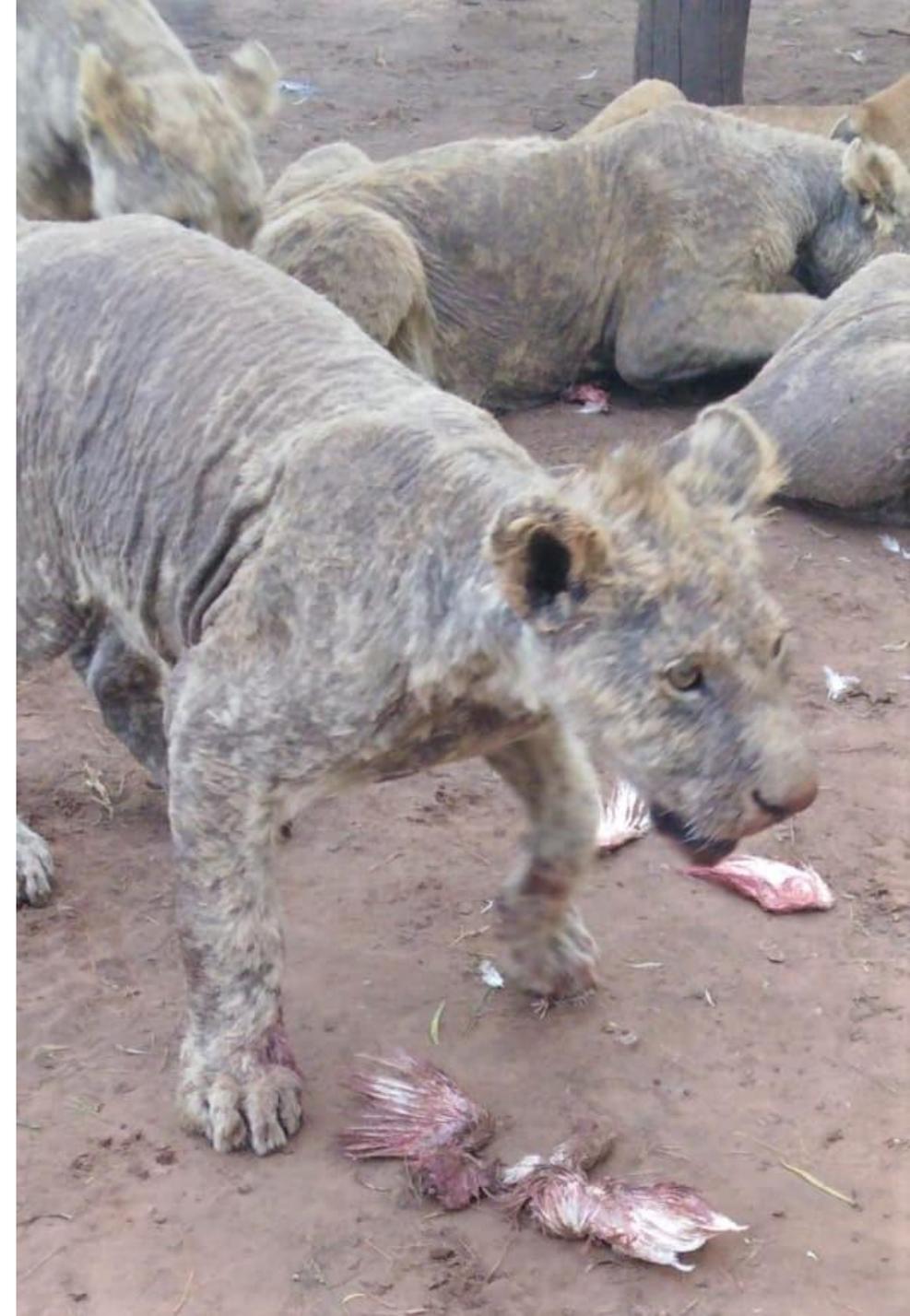
National Biodiversity Plan:

“...by 2019 all permit holders have to comply with minimum standards or be closed down permanently.”

DEFF: no mandate

DARDLR: no welfare norms and standards

Existing and outdated legislation does not deal with welfare of wild animals in captivity.





NSPCA vs DEA & SAPA

On the 6th August 2019, Judge Kollapen ruled that the setting of the lion bone quota in 2017 & 2018 is *“unlawful and constitutionally invalid”*.

“Even if they [lions] are ultimately bred for trophy hunting and for commercial purposes, their suffering, the conditions under which they are kept and the like remain a matter of public concern and are inextricably linked to how we instil respect for animals and the environment of which lions in captivity are an integral part of.”

He further stated that *“...then it is inconceivable that the State Respondents could have ignored welfare considerations of lions in captivity in setting the annual export quota.”*





Animal Welfare Concerns

- Lack of basic needs, such as water, food, shelter & medical care
- Inbreeding
- Slaughterhouses
- Tourism facilities
 - Removing cubs within days of birth
 - Handling cubs up to 8-10 hrs per day
 - Sedating subadults on walks
 - Training wildlife like circus animals
 - Substandard enclosures



Human Welfare

Significant risk to human health and safety by zoonosis including:

- *Mycobacterium tuberculosis*
- Parasite transmission
- Possible exposure to lethal immobilising compounds
- Lack of health & safety precautions

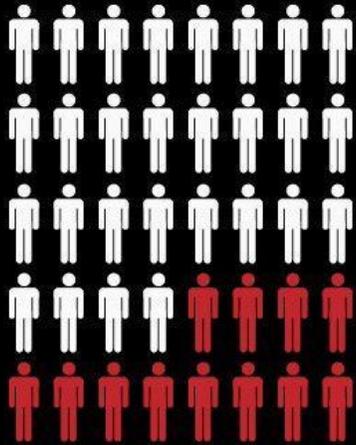
Safety Issues

Significant risk to workers and visitors' safety through physical interactions with habituated lions and other carnivores.

Reported incidents 2006-18:

- 40 victims
- 70% injured and 30% fatal
- 60% involved lions

INCIDENTS WITH HUMANS DUE TO PREDATOR INTERACTION



40 Victims in South Africa with twenty-eight injured and twelve killed. * Since 2006

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Twenty incidents involved captive lions.



Fourteen of the incidents involved captive cheetahs.



One incident involved a captive tiger.



Global Tourism Industry

Global trends of responsible tourism are showing that tourists and the industry are moving away from exploitative wildlife interactions

- **ABTA** (UK) and **ANVR** (Netherlands) have turned their backs on captive wildlife interactions due to animal welfare concerns.
- Global social movement also witnessed on platforms such as **TripAdvisor**, **Instagram**, **Airbnb** and **Expedia**.

Tourism in SA

SATSA launched industry wide guidelines on captive animal interaction.

With a “line in the sand” approach, classifying a set of attractions and activities involving captive wildlife as unacceptable and to be avoided.



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170+ logos representing nearly 3,000 tourism members globally, who took the Blood Lions “Born to Live Wild” pledge to stop supporting captive breeding, exploitation and senseless killing of predators

Global Outcry

The global awareness of lack of ethics in the captive lion breeding industry is growing.

- Many global campaigns and marches focusing on stopping captive lion breeding
- Millions of people signed online petitions
- 40+ major international airlines have since August 2015 refused the cargo of lion trophies
- Countries like Australia, France, Netherlands and USA have implemented bans on the import of lion trophies



Dispute among Hunters Associations

- PHASA passed a motion supporting captive-bred lion hunting, reversing its previous position leading to split in organisation (Nov 2017)
- *“The DSC does not support the practice of captive bred lion hunting”* (Jan 2018)
- *“SCI opposes the hunting of African lions bred in captivity”* (Feb 2018)



BIG 5 QUESTIONS

ABOUT CAPTIVE WILDLIFE

Q1: ARE ALL CAPTIVE WILDLIFE FACILITIES BAD ?

ANSWER: NO - MANY MODERN CAPTIVE FACILITIES ARE CENTERS OF EXCELLENCE WHEN IT COMES TO RESEARCH AND EDUCATION. CRITICALLY ENDANGERED SPECIES HAVE BEEN SAVED FROM EXTINCTION DUE TO THE TIRELESS EFFORTS OF DEDICATED RESEARCHERS AT THESE CENTERS. MANY DISADVANTAGED PEOPLE WILL ENJOY THEIR ONLY CONTACT WITH ANIMALS THROUGH A CAPTIVE FACILITY.

Q2: DOES CAPTIVE WILDLIFE HAVE ANY CONSERVATION VALUE ?

ANSWER: YES - CAPTIVE WILDLIFE CAN HAVE HUGE CONSERVATION VALUE. BREEDING, RESEARCH AND EDUCATION HAVE CONTRIBUTED SIGNIFICANTLY TO THE POOL OF UNDERSTANDING AND KNOWLEDGE OF SPECIES THAT EQUIPS CONSERVATIONISTS TO DO THEIR IMPORTANT WORK.

Q3: IS TOUCHING AN ANIMAL HARMFUL ?

ANSWER: NO - STUDIES HAVE SHOWN THAT GREAT PSYCHOLOGICAL AND EMOTIONAL BENEFIT IS DERIVED FROM CONTACT WITH ANIMALS. CERTAIN SPECIES THRIVE ON PROPER HUMAN CONTACT IN CAPTIVITY.

Q4: IS TAKING PICTURES OR SELFIES WITH ANIMALS DISRESPECTFUL ?

ANSWER: NO - THE PEOPLE AND THINGS WE MOST TREASURE WE COMMIT TO MEMORY THROUGH PHOTOGRAPHS. PICTURES REMIND US OF HOW VALUABLE AN EXPERIENCE WAS. THE BIRTH OF A CHILD, A WEDDING, A GRADUATION. A PICTURE OF A PRECIOUS MOMENTS SPENT WITH AN ANIMAL IS NOT DISRESPECTFUL BUT SHOULD BE ENCOURAGED.

Q5: DOES CUB PETTING LEAD TO CANNED HUNTING ?

ANSWER: NO - ALL OVER THE WORLD, GOOD FACILITIES OFFERING ANIMAL INTERACTION HAVE PROVEN THAT THE LONG-TERM WELFARE OF THEIR ANIMALS IS OF PRIME CONCERN. CANNED HUNTING IS AN ILLEGAL ACTIVITY WHICH SHOULD BE REPORTED TO THE AUTHORITIES.

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Why interaction between people and captive lions are beneficial

THE BACKGROUND

There exists a preconception that lion interaction with people is unethical and harmful to lions in captivity, a perception that is driven by extreme animal activists. The vast majority of animal activists are fair and sensible, and their efforts and concerns for animal welfare should be greatly admired. However, these extreme animal activists punch well above their weight; they are so intensely concerned about animal welfare that they tend to forget the unintended consequences that may have a very serious impact on the welfare of local people.

Large donations are often raised by these animal activists to fund their campaigns and with their influence in the media they encourage the general public to avoid destinations that offer lion interaction. However, no meaningful evidence is ever provided to support their arguments and fallacious reasoning.

THE FACTS

We will explain and prove why these harmful and inflammatory accusations about lion interaction are completely untrue. Our cubs are looked after by their caretakers where a strong bond is formed between them. The cubs are comfortable and relaxed as they are used to strange people from a young age - with very few exceptions. If the cubs didn't seek the company of people, they would immediately show signs of aggression or irritation and we would not be able to work with them as they simply will not co-operate.

POSITIVE PROOF

Evidence of this is the many positive reviews with extremely few complaints from the many thousands of tourists

participating in interaction at our park. In fact, we have been awarded the TRIPADVISOR CERTIFICATE OF EXCELLENCE FOR 7 YEARS and have been included in their HALL OF FAME.

We have been told by independent tour operators that we are the most popular tourist facility in Gauteng and the thousands of people reading this article who have already visited the Lion & Safari Park would be able to verify that our cubs are complacent and at ease. Wouldn't all the tens of thousands of visitors have noticed that the cubs were unhappy?

Our cubs are healthier and bigger in size when they become adults compared to the lions in the wild, they also live almost twice as long.

THE LIFE CYCLE OF OUR LIONS

After the cubs are too old for interaction, which is only in their first 12 months of age, this housing activity with visitors provides stimulation and enrichment to the lions and their enjoyment is evident as they eagerly jump into the vehicles to go on their walks. Lion walks are done under strict guidelines to ensure that it is done safely with these qualified and experienced guides always present, furthermore, no persons under the age of 18 or any person weighing less than 50kg are allowed on this activity.

After 12 months of age we keep all our lions in big enclosures on our property and they die of natural causes, some lions on our property are now over 20

years old (see picture of Thando). We pledge that none of our lions are ever sold to hunters. The detailed records that we keep on all our lions are open for inspection to any authorities, organisations or public that wish to see them. All our cubs are micro-chipped so that their movements can be monitored throughout their lives and physically inspected. Many of our male lions have been vasectomised to control breeding.

It is interesting to compare our cubs with the lives of cubs in the wild.

CUBS IN THE WILD:

- Only approximately 1 in every 4 cubs in the wild live to become adults, cubs are often killed by other predators like hyenas, leopards, jackals and new pride males.
- Cubs in the wild often do not have enough food as their pride does not always bring sufficient kills.
- Cubs in the wild are very vulnerable to diseases and injuries.

CUBS IN OUR CARE:

- Our cubs have nearly a 100% survival rate.
- Our cubs are always well fed, nutritional supplements are added to ensure good health, proof of this is that our cubs are physically larger of the same age as cubs in the wild.
- If our cubs show any signs of sickness they are immediately treated by a vet.

THE EFFECTS OF CUB PETTING

If the extreme activists succeed in their efforts to convince visitors to avoid the

Lion & Safari Park, it might have to close down with the following consequences:

- All 200 employees will lose their jobs and their families will be impacted by the loss of income.
- Well over 20 000 school children who visit the park every year as part of an educational visit will miss out on the opportunity to see a variety of predators and other wild animals. Our professional guides educate them on these tours which is most definitely stimulating their interest in animals and they will learn why protecting our animals is very important and how they can contribute to conservation in the future.
- Many local independent tour operators, many of whom are small businesses, may have to terminate business operations if we are removed from their itineraries.
- About 120 lions would have to be euthanised as there are no other options to relocate them.
- Many thousands of visitors will no longer be able to enjoy these joyful and wonderful experiences and will not be educated. Many of our visitors say they have enjoyed once in a lifetime experience.
- The government would lose taxes and foreign exchange.

These guys are our family, we have a very strong emotional connection. You can see these guys want to be with me," he said. "For someone to say, 'hey, you can't do that anymore', that's like someone saying to you, 'hey, I'm taking your children away.' This is my life."

Last year the SA Tourism Services Association (Satsa) issued new guidelines condemning the common practice of breeding big game in captivity for the entertainment of tourists.

The move answered a call from animal welfare activists who argue the trivial amusement of one species is inflicting untold cruelty on others. "It is unethical for these animals to be in proximity to humans," Kim Powers, chair of Satsa's animal interaction committee, said in Cape Town. "It is extremely stressful to be touched by humans and have them walking with them on the side."

Satsa is calling on animal breeders to end all entertainment involving performing animals and wind up all up-close or tactile interactions with big game, including activities such as walking with predators and riding on elephants - which have drawn hundreds of thousands of tourists over the years.

The guidelines are non-binding and the department of tourism, while welcoming Satsa, has no plans to ban animal interactions, a significant

AT THE LION & SAFARI PARK WE HAVE WORKED VERY HARD TO ACHIEVE OUR GOALS. WE ARE VERY PROUD OF WHAT WE HAVE DONE. WE HAVE CREATED A FACILITY THAT PRODUCE HAPPY VISITORS, HAPPY STAFF AND HAPPY ANIMALS - WHAT IS UNETHICAL ABOUT THAT?



NATIONAL Animal activists lobby for curbs on wildlife tourism

• Walking with predators and riding on elephants attract hundreds of thousands of tourists

Tim Cox



A cheetah strides up to animal trainer Shador Laremy and lets him stroke its fur as he throws chunks of meat to the rest of the coalition at the Johannesburg Lion & Safari park.

Third-generation Laremy, 25 years old, has been training wild animals to be docile around tourists for the past 13 years and said he would be devastated if he had to stop because of growing ethical concerns over tourist-animal interaction.

"These guys are our family, we have a very strong emotional connection. You can see these guys want to be with me," he said. "For someone to say, 'hey, you can't do that anymore', that's like someone saying to you, 'hey, I'm taking your children away.' This is my life."

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Wildlife

prope Miss World contestants play with a lion cub at a resort in 2018. Young cubs, destined for interaction with humans, are often separated from their mothers. (Sasky Timel James Oatway

Push back from interaction industry

Damage to Brand SA

Sisa Ntshona (CEO - SA Tourism) said there is a growing concern *“internationally that we are seeing damaging our reputation...is a perception of our stance on animal interactions and canned hunting that might be potentially putting tourists off”*.

Ross Harvey (2018) - *South Africa’s tourism brand value could potentially be negatively affected by as much as **ZAR 54 billion loss in revenue over the next decade**, if the captive lion breeding industry is allowed to continue and if the assumptions behind the quantification hold in practice.*

