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# THE CONTROVERSY AROUND THE CONSERVATION VALUE OF CAPTIVE-BRED LIONS

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# THE PROBLEM

- The conservation value of captive-bred lions is seriously questioned by most conservation minded people [IUCN's ill-informed resolution in Hawai last week]
- Reasons are vague and ambiguous: range from alleged genetic contamination to captive-bred lions' alleged inability to hunt and to adapt to conditions in the wild
- Many myths about captive bred lions
- Myths inspired by a lack of knowledge, but also carefully cultivated by animal rights activists
- Question: Should we take it seriously? Why not just breed and hunt lions and forget about conservation? [Dr Dry: IUCN and CITES are only concerned with "animals in the wild"]

# AIMS

**SAPA is convinced that no hunting or game breeding operation can be sustainable or justify itself unless it makes a substantive contribution to conservation**

- 1. Indicate why the captive lion industry take the issue seriously**
- 2. Identify the kind of conservation contribution the industry can make and is indeed making towards the survival and enhancement of wild African lion populations.**



# OVERVIEW

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1. The broader picture
2. Contours of the SA captive lion industry
3. Hunting of ranch lions in SA
4. The conservation commitment of the industry
5. The lion enhancement plan
6. Management mechanisms
7. Ensuring compliance

# THE AFRICAN LION: BROADER PICTURE

- Lions in Central and Western Africa are in dire straits (endangered)
- Lions in East Africa are a bit better off, but its population status may change dramatically due to human encroachment, depletion of prey animals, etc.
- In Southern Africa, especially in South Africa, the African lion is far better off than its brothers and sisters elsewhere in Africa (Threatened)
- Lion populations in Namibia, Zimbabwe, Botswana and South Africa are enjoying well managed protection and their numbers are stable or increasing
- All lion populations in South Africa are fenced, except in Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park - main reason for their positive conservation status

# BROADER PICTURE (cont)

- The overall picture of the African lion's long term future, especially in Western and Central Africa, is indeed bleak.
- Population projections: by 2050 (35 years from now) lions will become extinct in most of Africa except in areas where they are managed properly – and shielded from the main driving forces of their decline
- There will be no place for wild lions to exist except inside the bigger (fenced?) national parks; and/or on private lion ranches where they are used in a sustainable manner to finance their own survival
- Whether you like captive-bred lions or not - that is the truth of the matter. Intelligent people, therefore, are going to have to get used to this idea and make allowances for it.
- Whish I could be contradicted on this view!

# CONTOURS OF THE SA CAPTIVE LION INDUSTRY

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- Originated in 2005/6 as part of the South African wildlife ranching model.
- Landowners started to keep and breed lions for hunting, security and tourist reasons
- Before regulation: undisciplined/unethical operators (Cook report on “canned lion hunting”)
- Establishment of the SA Predator Association in 2009
- Aim: Developing the lion business into a responsible and sustainable industry in line with the principle of sustainable use

# HUNTING OF RANCH LIONS IN SOUTH AFRICA

- Yes, we hunt captive-bred lions in SA and we sell their bones to the Chinese and Vietnamese because it is a valuable by-product. That is what sustainable use is all about
- Everything is done under CITES permits under the scrutiny of the national and provincial Environmental Affairs departments
- The 600 odd lions we hunt annually provides a handsome return on the investment of the lion farmers, but also pays for the lodging of the lions not hunted and enables the industry to make valuable contributions to the wellbeing of wild lions – as the SU principle requires
- The animal rights activists that are targeting the captive lion industry have persuaded the public as well as ignorant conservation minded people to believe that all hunting of captive-bred lions is “canned hunting”. That is not true! In fact, it is malicious propaganda.



# HUNTING OF RANCH LIONS IN SOUTH AFRICA (cont)

- Captive-bred lions are hunted in exactly the same manner as buffalo, rhino, sable, roan, etc – in confined areas in the walk-and-stalk mode. That is how 80% of hunting in South Africa is done
- Our TOPS Regulations explicitly prohibits what can be described as “canned hunting practices”
- Only in the case of lion the size of the confined area is prescribed, namely at least 1 000 ha (2 000 ha) – larger than many “exempted” hunting farms in South Africa.
- It has the potential, if positioned strategically and managed responsibly, to make a serious contribution to South Africa’s green economy and to the enhancement of the African lion
- Thus the hunting of captive lions, for the foreseeable future, is likely to remain part of the South African hunting industry.

# COMMITMENT TO CONSERVATION

- Quite a number of endangered game species worldwide are bred in captivity for consumptive use: red deer, crocodiles, ostriches, the vicuña in Latin America, etc.
- Interesting example: American bison - still on the IUCN's endangered species list, but extensively "used" in the American restaurant industry.
- Ironically, it is only of the lion that it is required to prove its conservation value before it can be allowed in the respected company of the wildlife and hunting industry.
- Currently, a popular perception is that captive-bred lions have no conservation value.
- SAPA, however, is of a different opinion

# COMMITMENT TO CONSERVATION (CONT)

- The captive lion population in SA can and is indeed making a real and substantive contribution to the well being of the wild lion populations
- AGM2011, only two years after its establishment, the SAPA resolved to start working on a lion conservation project
- The USFWS did provide a powerful stimulus, but we started on the project long before that
- Since then SAPA has developed a comprehensive lion enhancement plan, based on the IUCN's principle of sustainable use

# ENHANCEMENT PLAN

SAPA's Enhancement Plan contains six components:

- 1. Population Enhancement*
- 2. Range enhancement*
- 3. Genetic enhancement*
- 4. Re-establishing lions in the wild*
- 5. Financial enhancement*
- 6. Community enhancement*



# POPULATION ENHANCEMENT

- The captive lion population as well as the hunting of captive bred lions have absolutely no negative effect whatsoever on wild lion populations, whether in South Africa or elsewhere in Africa
- On the contrary, the hunting of ranch lions indirectly enhances the wild populations
- From a species survival perspective the South African captive lion population is an important sub-population – making up between 21% to 31% of the total *Panthera leo melanochaita* population.
- According to Lindsay et al (2012 ) more and more lion hunters prefer to hunt ranch lions for financial reasons but also because they realise that it reduces the pressure on wild lions

# ***RANGE ENHANCEMENT***

- Not all lions in captivity are kept in small camps. An estimated 30% of captive-bred lions are kept on large tracts of land on private game ranches / reserves (extended wildlife systems)
- The captive lion population, including those in extended wildlife systems, is **distributed across the face of South Africa**, extending the range of the African lion significantly – one of the basic objectives of lion conservation.
- The captive population includes a significant number of lions that can actually be defined as “free roaming”, e.g. new category in Free State regulations

# GENETIC ENHANCEMENT

- Compulsory DNA profiling of all captive bred lions has begun and a significant number (1 000) have already been micro-chipped and DNA profiled.
- A **National Lion Register** (data base) is under construction, containing all captive-bred lions' ID, DNA profile, owner and pedigree. All transfers of ownership are recorded. Origin and current location of all lions can be determined.
- Research on the **genetic diversity** of the captive lion population in comparison with wild lion populations in the African sub-region is currently being conducted on behalf of SAPA by Dr Paul Lubout in conjunction with Prof Frikkie Naser (UF), Prof Pim van Hoven (Univ of Wageningen) and Dr Ben Greyling (Agricultural Research Council)
- Also involved in the **genetic improvement of managed lion populations** in the African sub-region through the provision of replacement males with indisputable genetic integrity

# RE-ESTABLISHING LIONS IN THE WILD

- Two successful experiments (one in the Zimbabwe and one in Zambia) South African captive bred lions were used in both instances.
- Capacity to re-establish lions in locations anywhere in Africa where they have become extinct or genetic enhancement is needed.
- **Genetic contamination needs no longer be feared.** SAPA's genetic database makes it possible to re-establish lions in the wild on a scientifically sound basis.
- First attempt (in 2015) to re-establish captive bred lions in the wild (Dinokeng Game Reserve north of Pretoria) failed because of prejudice
- Currently working on a project to re-establish nucleus prides in newly established game reserves in Limpopo and Eastern Cape.
- Kassima National Park in Angola?



# FINANCIAL ENHANCEMENT

- In 2013 SAPA initiated a Conservation Fund dedicated to financial support for lion research and conservation projects.
- The Fund is financed through levies on various lion breeding and hunting activities and requires substantive financial sacrifices from all members of the Association.
- The Fund currently shows a balance of just over R1 million. The objective is to bring it to the R5 million mark before the end of 2018
- The first project supported by the Fund was the provision of GPS collars for lion and hyena in a research project by the Zimbabwean Parks Board in the Zambezi valley.
- Next funds will be made available for the reestablishment of lions projects referred to in paragraph 4 above when it comes to the point of implementation
- The Fund is governed not by SAPA but by an independent Board, consisting of representatives of role players in the wildlife industry. The funding priorities of SAPA's Conservation Fund will be determined by the Board.

# *COMMUNITY ENHANCEMENT*

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- The lion industry creates and maintains employment for approximately 500 people and thus indirectly provide a livelihood for more than 2 500 people (5 dependents per employee)
- The lion industry also understands its responsibility towards the local communities that are closely related to the industry.
- “Adopt” a number of schools in areas where employees’ children are mostly accommodated and to support those schools on a regular basis with foodstuffs and sporting equipment
- One such school in the Lephalale District (Limpopo Province) is currently assisted by SAPA members in the area under the leadership of Tienie and Ananja Bamberger
- At Vorsterhoop in the far western corner of the Northwest Province, a SAPA accredited lion farm, is providing warm and balanced meals to fifty children from the nearby village once a week

# MANAGEMENT MECHANISMS

The Enhancement Plan set out above will not happen without some serious managerial interventions. SAPA Board created certain management mechanisms to facilitate the implementation of and compliance with the plan.

- *Norms and Standards*
- *Accreditation*
- *Tag system*

Objective: Tight control of  
Lion hunting and breeding  
to ensure compliance



# ***NORMS AND STANDARDS***

- To stamp out all forms of rogue conduct (e.g. remaining “canned” hunting practices) and to create common standards across the industry SAPA has developed a set of **Norms and Standards for hunting Ranch Lions in South Africa.**
- These norms and standards are aimed at ensuring authentic African hunting experiences to our clients in accordance with internationally recognised hunting practices
- **Norms and standards for keeping and breeding lions** are to be published soon by DAFF and are aimed at what Ross Hyland referred to as “**animal welfare protocols**”

# ***ACCREDITATION***

- To facilitate and encourage compliance with Norms and Standards SAPA has introduced a system of **accreditation**
- Accreditation is awarded only after a stringent evaluation done by an Independent Assessment Committee
- Accredited lion hunting ranches are audited annually
- Accreditation: world class lion hunting destination - 10 accredited farms
- Accreditation also to be rolled out to keeping and breeding facilities – where most of the problems in the industry occur

# TAG SYSTEM

- Accreditation is further enhanced by a system of “tags”.
- Every lion trophy hunted on an accredited ranch has to be fitted with a indestructible plastic tag, displaying the words *ZA Ranch Lion* and the serial number of the tag.
- The tag is supported by a tag book in which all relevant information about the hunt is recorded.
- The tag system enables anyone to trace the origin of a lion trophy as well as to contact every person that was part of the hunt.
- Creates traceability and it guarantees the integrity of the hunt and the trophy
- Every tag makes a contribution of **R10 000** to the SAPA Conservation Fund

# HOW ARE WE TO ENFORCE COMPLIANCE?

1. Not all operators are SAPA members
2. Even SAPA members do not necessarily cooperate/comply
3. Absolutely vital: SA Government sanction
  - Recognising SAPA's accreditation and tag system
  - Issue trophy hunting and trophy export permits only for lions hunted on accredited farms
4. Aim: creating a **"legal trading environment"** (Ross)
5. What is still to be tackled: a **national register of legalised lion farmers and traders**

# CONCLUSION

1. Although the lion industry's conservation role is still in its infancy, it has the will and the capacity to make a real difference with regard to the enhancement of the African lion.
2. Unfortunately, the industry is still judged by perceptions associated with the propagandistic slogan "canned hunting", while the industry has **decisively moved away from all canned hunting practices** long ago.
3. There are individuals and organizations (like Blood Lions, Wildland and LionAid) that want the 7 000 captive lion to be "disposed of" by 2020 and the industry to be closed down.
4. Influenced IUCN to adopt a resolution urging the SA government to close down the captive lion industry



# CONCLUSION (cont)

5. If they succeed the lion will surely pop up elsewhere, e. g. in Texas, where it will be bred and hunted as an exotic species
6. It is ironic that they don't realise that once the industry is dead, they still have done nothing for the lion in the wild.
7. SAPA's response
  - Pro-active social media programme (myths about captive lion industry)
  - Engaging Animal right NGO's (Woolworth campaign – Dr Andrew Venter)
  - Zaayman: National debate on captive-bred/canned lion hunting