



Breeding cruelty

How tourism is killing Africa's lions



Introduction

Cecil the lion's 40-hour death at the hands of a \$50,000 fee-paying tourist hunter has caused unprecedented global public outrage^{1,2}. Illegally lured from Zimbabwe's Hwange National Park, Cecil was brutally killed by bow, arrow and rifle, beheaded and skinned. His death has shown the vulnerability of Africa's wildlife to brutal cruelty through tourism³.

But Cecil is just one instance of suffering among many. Thousands more lions are being threatened by unethical tourism practices throughout Africa right now.

African lions are not only hunted like Cecil. They are also bred for commercial purposes - to be used in lion parks to fuel tourist demand for photo props⁴ and for lion walking. Yet most tourists are unaware of how their lion park visits may be threatening the very existence of these charismatic wild animals and are severely affecting their welfare⁴.

This report exposes the unacceptable suffering caused, using this aspect of lion tourism in South Africa as an example.

Our evidence is clear. Lions must be kept in the wild and protected from unethical tourism now before it's too late to save them.



Fatal attractions

Within South Africa there are around 150 captive holding facilities - breeding lions purely for commercial use⁵ - that hold approximately 5,800 captive-bred lions in the country overall. The number of captive-bred lions in South Africa is believed to have doubled since 2005⁵.

Today, there are more captive than wild lions in South Africa. Only 32% of the country's wild lion population lives in free-roaming wildlife reserves⁵.

Many of the captive holding facilities also act as lion parks or supply lion cubs to them. Lion parks are attractions where tourists are offered 'once in a lifetime' close encounters with wild lions in captivity⁴.

These experiences typically involve cubs being used as photo props for tourist selfies and young adult lions being taken on lion walks to generate a profit⁴. They have a severe and negative impact on lion welfare and are of no direct conservation benefit⁶.



Commercial cruelty

Although captive born, the cubs and young adult lions used in lion park tourist attractions are wild animals that still retain their natural instincts and behaviours⁴. And no amount of training or 'taming' can take these away from them.

Cubs are prematurely separated from their mothers usually within a month after birth. In the wild cubs are not weaned until they are around 8 months old¹².

At just a few weeks old they are presented to lion park visitors. One cub was witnessed being exposed to tourists at only a week old⁴. This results in them being constantly

viewed and handled by hundreds of people throughout each day⁴. And because tourists are not animal handling experts, cubs are subjected to unnecessary stress and injury. Investigators even witnessed tourists being instructed to hit lion cubs, if they display aggressive and unwelcome behaviour.

All too often, lion park cubs are also kept in unsuitable enclosures and fed an unnatural diet that falls short of meeting even their basic welfare needs⁴. Because these conditions and constant interactions with tourists can cause chronic stress⁴ making them more susceptible to disease¹⁴.



Commercial concern

We are gravely concerned about the fate of lion park lions when they become adults and are too dangerous to have direct contact with tourists anymore.

Unlike responsible captive conservation programmes, commercial lion parks do not help to boost wild population numbers. Conservationists have stated that these lions can never be safely released into the wild⁴.

Instead, their adult lions are either euthanized, kept in increasingly crowded captive conditions, or may be sold to zoos, lion farms or even to private collectors for profit⁴.

Lion park owners insist that unlike 'lion farms' their commercial operations do not supply captive bred lions for 'Canned' or 'Put and Take' lion hunting⁴. This is where the animal is hunted in a confined area, from which they cannot escape.

However, lion park owners have told our investigators that they have little control over what happens to lions after they have been sold⁴. Consequently, the young lions featuring in a tourist's holiday photographs may become the same animals shot by a hunter when they become an adult⁴.

Ethical tourism

When carried out ethically, tourism can bring in vital income for local communities, national economies and can help to protect wild animals like lions⁷.

South Africa has a network of 400 national parks and other protected areas. Many have wild lions that tourists can observe in their natural habitat⁸. Rather than visiting lion parks and adding to the suffering they involve, ethical wildlife tourists should pay to see lions in these protected areas instead.

For anyone who loves lions, our message is simple. Do not visit any tourist attractions that allow visitors to have direct contact with any lion cubs, young adults or breed lions for commercial purposes. If you love lions, see them in the wild.



Move the world for wildlife

Together we can transform the lion tourist industry. The public outrage over the death of Cecil shows how strongly people worldwide want to protect wild animals.

This reinforces independent polling revealing that 48% of people worldwide take part in wild animal entertainment activities because they love animals⁹. They are unaware of the suffering and cruelty behind the scenes and would prefer to see wild animals in the wild.

We are revealing the wider abuses beyond the brutal killing of Cecil and asking people to join our movement to transform the lion tourist industry and end the suffering of wild animals for entertainment.

We want tour operators to be fully accountable for where they send their customers. Over 20 tour operators, including TUI Nederland, Intrepid Travel, Apollo, Albatros Travel and World Expeditions have stopped offering elephant rides or shows to their customers. We are calling on all operators to make the tourism industry part of the solution to keep wild animals wild.

In Africa we will be working with the African Union to provide guidance to countries for wild animal protection. Initially this will be through the development of a Pan-African Animal Welfare Strategy, drawing on the agreements made in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Take action now

These changes need to be made quickly to protect Africa's wild lion populations.

Together with our passionate and committed supporters across the world, we must persuade the tourism industry and governments to act urgently to protect our wildlife.

Please **join the movement** and put an end to the spread of wildlife attractions across the world. Show your support to keep lions, and all wild animals in the wild, where they belong.

About African lions

Remaining wild lion populations are estimated to be fewer than

20,000

animals across

26

countries¹⁰

Lions are the most social big cat. They hunt together, defend joint territories and raise cubs in nursery groups^{11, 12}.



They are considered vulnerable to extinction as these populations have declined by around

42%

over the last

21

years¹⁰

Although they live in large groups of up to 40 individuals, lionesses know their own cubs. They are very protective and are known to fight to the death to protect them¹³.



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