

IS IT TIME TO STAND UP FOR ALL OF AFRICA'S LIONS?

THE WORLD LEAPT INTO A FRENZY OF OUTRAGE WHEN CECIL WAS KILLED BY AN AMERICAN DENTIST, BUT TROPHY HUNTING MAY NOT BE THE REAL PROBLEM, SAYS JAMES FAIR.



There may now be fewer than 20,000 lions in Africa. Some experts say that the species does not have a future outside of protected areas such as the Maasai Mara.

315
THE QUOTA FOR HUNTING LIONS IMPOSED BY TANZANIA IN 2012 – DOWN FROM 520 IN 2008/2009.



These Maasai herders keep their cattle in lion-proof corrals at night to reduce predation.

Wolfgang Kaehler/LightRocket/Getty

It's a very patronising view that people in underdeveloped countries will always be wandering around with a stick slapping a cow on its back, and not have a system of real land ownership as we do."

Packer and his colleagues have calculated that to raise a single lion to the age of six costs \$960,000 in terms of habitat conservation. The fees generated from trophy hunting, or tourism such as safaris, do not begin to cover that cost, and the only answer is for the developed West to start paying, he claims.

"Right now, foreign agencies put \$1bn a year into Tanzania,

IN BAD YEARS, THERE CAN BE 140 REPORTED LION ATTACKS IN TANZANIA, AND THE MAJORITY ARE FATAL"

but none of it goes to nature reserves," he says. "Of course the need for humanitarian aid is going to grow, but it's not even on people's radars that

these reserves are important for the planet both in terms of biodiversity and also for economic growth."

Adam Roberts, CEO of the Born Free Foundation, says that his organisation is supporting the Rare Cats and Canids Act being considered by the US House of Representatives, which would provide funding of up to \$5m a year to support conservation for wild cats and dogs.

"There's a real impetus for action right now," says Roberts. "The US government is also considering a petition that Born Free and others put forward to list the lion under the Endangered Species Act. This would make it difficult, if not impossible, for Americans to go trophy hunting for lions in Africa: they would not be able to bring trophies back."

But Born Free's opposition to trophy hunting puts it at odds with many conservationists. Lion numbers in Namibia, for example, buck the general downward trend across the rest of the continent, and according to Tammy Hoth-Hanssen, director of the AfriCat Foundation, this is partly down to the conservancy model that gives local people a stake in how land is used and which allows the 'consumptive'

A few years ago Dr Craig Packer, one of the world's leading lion conservationists, was asked to investigate an outbreak of man-eating lions in the south of Tanzania by the government. "We interviewed 500 victims, either relatives of people who'd been killed or survivors, to try and work out what was happening," explains Packer. "At some point the head of a European conservation organisation said, 'I wish

you wouldn't do this research.' He was worried that his donors would stop giving money when they realised that lions were horrible animals that killed people. There's your problem."

Packer, who runs the University of Minnesota's Lion Research Center, has been studying the species for more than 30 years, and he understands the impact that Africa's apex predators can wreak on human populations that have to live alongside them. And the problem, he says, is

that amid the outcry over the killing of Cecil the lion and the calls for trophy hunting to be banned, this is rarely if ever taken into account.

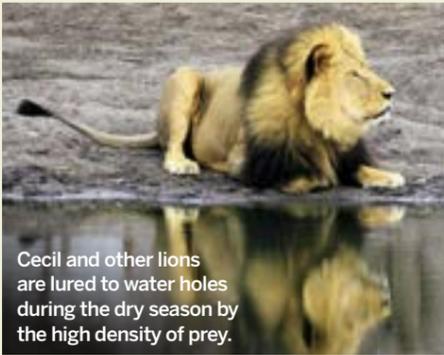
LIVING WITH LIONS
Lions not only eat cattle, sheep and goats, prompting retaliatory killings, they also kill the people who herd them. In bad years, there can be 140 reported attacks in Tanzania (and unreported cases may double that), and the majority of lion attacks are fatal.

"Some cases are particularly horrifying," Packer wrote in an article for the magazine *Natural History* in 2009. "Lions dig through thatched roofs and drag elderly people out of bed... they pluck children from the breasts of their nursing mothers or the arms of their grandmothers."

And it's only going to get worse, he points out. "The population of Africa is set to quadruple by the end of the century and that will massively intensify the pressure on land.

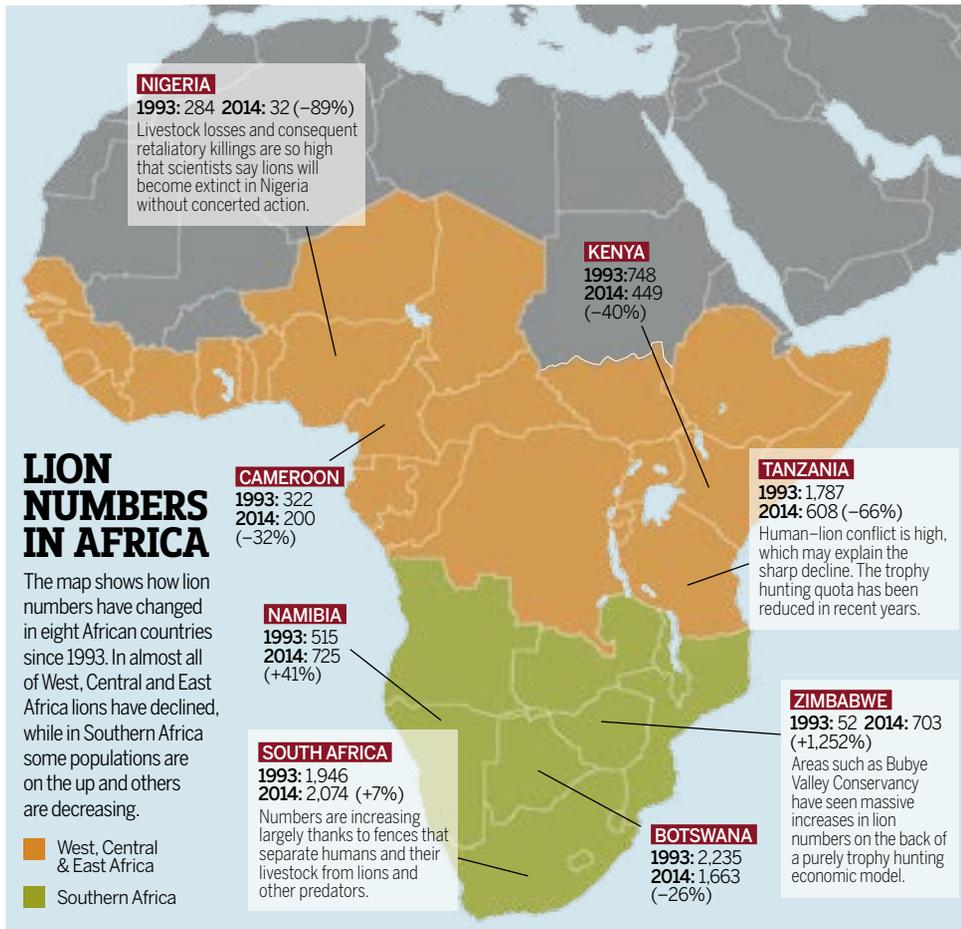
WHAT CECIL TAUGHT US

Cecil was a 13-year-old male and one of a number of lions fitted with a GPS collar by scientists from Oxford University's Wildlife Conservation Research Unit. Data from the collars reveals the lions' movements in and around Hwange NP in Zimbabwe over prolonged periods of time. This information has led to a greater understanding of how, during the dry season, lion groups configure their territories around water holes that become herbivore (and therefore prey) hotspots.



Cecil and other lions are lured to water holes during the dry season by the high density of prey.

Cecil: Brent Stapelkamp



utilisation of lions. But it will only work, she warns, if it is strictly regulated.

“Trophy hunting does not start with a foreigner landing in your country and going out into the bush,” she says. “It starts with quotas. Ministries have to do proper game censuses and then set proper quotas, and in that lies the dilemma. Are they realistic? Are they set too high?”

Wildlife populations are doing well in Namibia at present. The number of lions (see map, above) has increased by more than 40 per cent over two decades, and Hoth-Hanssen thinks that the country can cope with lions without the need for the sort of impenetrable fences and barriers that are used in South Africa.

“The better protected livestock is, the more tolerant people are of lions,” she says. “Where we work with local communities, they understand what to do – don’t walk around at night, and protect your animals: build fires, bring

them into corrals in the afternoon and only let them out when the day starts to warm up.”

FENCING AFRICA

Indeed, it could be argued the real argument among conservationists is not about the pros or cons of

trophy hunting, but about the use of fences to separate lions and people. Craig Packer has calculated that it is possible to maintain lions at 80 per cent of their potential density at a cost of \$500 per km² within a fenced reserve compared with \$2,000



The use of GPS technology allows scientists to study the lives of lions in detail, leading to a better understanding of the threats that they face.

TROPHY HUNTING STARTS WITH MINISTRIES DOING PROPER CENSUSES THEN SETTING PROPER QUOTAS”

per km² (and at only 50 per cent of their potential population) in an unfenced one. “There is no lion crisis in South Africa,” he says, “because everything is fenced. There are more lions and wildlife there than 100 years ago.”

Almost certainly, no one solution will work across the lion’s African range states. Namibia, says Hoth-Hanssen, can get away without fences because its human population is relatively low. Equally, some areas of Africa get considerable numbers of tourists who want to go on safaris to see wildlife, while others get almost none.

Take the Buby Valley Conservancy in Zimbabwe, which exists purely as a hunting conservancy. It could never attract ecotourists in the numbers it would need to survive, said its general manager Blondie Leatham in the recent BBC Radio 4 documentary *Big Game Theory*. Its lion population has soared from just 9 in 1993 to 330 today, a rise of more than 3,500 per cent. “If trophy hunting were banned, then it would have to revert to cattle ranching,” Leatham said, “and the lions would have to go.”

Is this what the developed world wants? For that matter, is this what Zimbabwe wants? The demise of Cecil the lion has highlighted that the future of his species will not depend on something as simplistic as whether trophy hunting continues or not. As ever, the truth is far more complex. 🐾

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Radio 4’s *Big Game Theory*: <http://bbc.in/1NOHFLY>