

'Blood lions' sheds a harsh light on the canned hunting industry

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6 Aug 2015

Since the first public documentation in 2004, [canned lion hunting](#) has, in recent times, become more controversial and the film [Blood Lions](#) further stimulates that debate.



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Blood Lions is a sensationalised yet comprehensive true story of the canned lion hunting industry in [South Africa](#). By definition, the term "canned hunting" is not considered as [hunting](#), which is defined as the "chase or search for something (game, wild animals) for the purpose of catching or killing." Another definition is "the act of conducting a search for something". By all definitions hunting involves a search. There is none involved in canned hunting. [Sport hunters](#) of free-roaming animals have condemned the activity of canned hunting as slander.

Blood Lions not only clearly demonstrates that canned lion hunting is unjustifiable in terms of [ethics](#) but also [conservation](#). The conditions under which the animals are kept are not reflective of their natural habitat nor do they conform to [zoo](#) or [camp](#) standards of enclosure size or quality. And little is known about what happens to lions bred in captivity that are not suitable for hunting.

Hunting for conservation?

Canned lion hunters justify the practice by arguing that for every canned lion hunted a wild lion has been saved. *Blood Lions* reveals otherwise. The film also clarifies that canned hunting makes a limited contribution to the conservation of the species or genetics.

The revenue generated returns to the owner and is plugged back into the owner's business. Operating costs include the cost of building and maintaining the camps as well as [purchasing](#) and [feeding](#) the lions. Each lion can eat approximately [US\\$16,000](#) worth of meat per year in the wild. However, captive bred lions tend to be fed more to [fast-track growth](#), which pushes the feeding cost higher. Setting up a lion camp depends on the fencing material used, the camp design, water provision, electrifying components and installation.

[Standard regulations](#) stipulate that four lions can be kept in a 2 000m² electrified camp. As confirmed in *Blood Lions* the cost of a lion can be quickly recouped by being put up for auction to a large market of enthused 'hunters' and the [lion bone trade](#). Although the profitable returns from the hunt make the activity economically justifiable, this only applies to the owner.

The size of the land where the hunting takes place is small and often does not meet the requirements or standards of captive lion facilities. This means that canned lion hunting gives the land owner high returns on a small piece of land.

More lions in captivity

According to the International Union for Conservation of [Nature](#) and Endangered Wildlife [Trust](#), there are more lions in captivity in South Africa than in the wild - approximately 7 000 in captivity and 3 500 in the wild.

Captive raised lions are raised for [petting](#) and handling by tourists and volunteers who desire a close encounter with charismatic wildlife. *Blood Lions* explains how this type of tourism feeds into canned hunting.

Hand-raised lions are notoriously difficult to rehabilitate into the wild - not only behaviourally but also because of limited available land in which to relocate them. Large predators such as lions require large expanses of free roaming land and ample food resources. Although [small reserves](#) can sustain lions, this requires management and financial resources.

Although the future of captive lions may seem bleak, there are opportunities to 'rescue' a handful. [Lion sanctuaries](#) have become a popular means of adopting captive bred lions. However, like those in captivity, the maintenance cost of these lions is high. On their own lion sanctuaries generate very little revenue or enough profit to be considered a sustainable option.

Furthermore, lion sanctuaries require intensive individual action to be driven forward and there is limited monetary incentive. Unless new [release strategies](#) are developed, lion sanctuaries and release programs have limited sustainability.

Profit verses ethics

Canned hunting and sport hunting differ in their ethics, execution and overall contributions. Canned hunting primarily focuses on the return of investment and profit from the raising of the animal. Although canned hunting does create employment, trophy hunting contributes to conservation efforts as well.

Thinking outside the box towards alternative land uses and business endeavours has become a necessity. Everyone has equal rights to make a living - but at what cost? The revealing nature of *Blood Lions* gets the viewer thinking about the negative use of [natural resources](#).

Although there is a legitimate push and drive to have it banned and abolished, history and human nature has proven that canned lion hunting is likely to continue - unwanted but too profitable to exclude as a business opportunity and as the fulfilment of an addiction.

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