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LION TROPHIES COMING INTO U.K. HAVE DOUBLED SINCE CECIL'S DEATH

**Sir Ranulph Fiennes blames government's broken promise to ban lion trophy imports**

The number of lion trophies brought back to the U.K. by hunters has DOUBLED since the killing of Cecil, an investigation has found.

The Campaign to Ban Trophy Hunting said many of the animals were killed at controversial South African "lion factory farms" that breed them in enclosures for "cut-price trophies".

A report by the group says around 50 lions could have been saved if government promises in 2015 to ban lion trophy imports had been acted upon.

It added that lion numbers were now falling sharply, and that trophy hunting could be driving populations to extinction.

Eduardo Gonçalves of the Campaign to Ban Trophy Hunting said:

"Dozens of 'Cecils' could have been saved if the government had acted when it said it would. People will be incredulous to learn that the number of lion trophies coming into the country has actually gone up since he was killed.

"The lion 'factory farms' where many British trophy hunters go are so controversial that even hunting organisations condemn them".

Legendary explorer Sir Ranulph Fiennes – a supporter of the Campaign to Ban Trophy Hunting – added:

"Lions are being killed in large numbers by a so-called 'sport' that has absolutely nothing sporting about it whatsoever. Lions now face the spectre of being wiped off the face of the Earth simply because some people enjoy killing living creatures, while governments like ours are too weak to stand up to their lobbyists.

"Lion factory farming and canned trophy hunting is the most shameful variety of an utterly despicable industry that is making millions from killing endangered animals".

Around 80% of the more than 100 lion trophies brought back to the U.K. over the past decade originated from South Africa, where there are now an estimated 200 "lion factory farms" holding over 8,000 lions – three times South Africa's wild lion population.

Cubs are controversially taken from their mothers shortly after birth in order to force lionesses to breed again. The cubs are used in lucrative "petting" and "lion walking" experiences for tourists before being moved into enclosures to be shot by hunters.

The cost of hunting a “factory-farmed lion” ranges from \$5,000 – \$25,000, compared to \$60,000 – \$120,000 for a wild lion.

Over half of the lion trophies coming into the U.K. over the past decade have arrived since 2015 – the year Cecil was infamously killed by American dentist Walter Palmer in Zimbabwe. The U.K. government promised to consider banning lion trophy imports that year following the uproar that ensued.

However no action was taken, and 59 trophies have been brought in since then – more than double the number imported in the 3 year period immediately before Cecil’s death, which saw 27 lion trophies arrive.

Lions have become increasingly popular with British hunters in recent years. In 2007, just 4 lion trophies were brought home by hunters. Last year, that figure jumped to 15.

Around half the trophies imported into Britain over the past decade were of mounted heads. Others included whole lion bodies, skulls, skins, feet and rugs.

Numbers of lions in the wild have fallen dramatically from 450,000 in the 1950s to around 20,000 today. They have disappeared from 90% of their range and gone extinct in 26 countries.

Researchers say unsustainable levels of trophy hunting are affecting wild populations. Approximately 10,000 lions have been killed by trophy hunters over the past decade – equivalent to half today’s total remaining population.

Current annual hunting quotas are equivalent to one-third of all remaining adult males.

Lion trophies are becoming increasingly popular with hunters worldwide. In 2006, a total of 1428 lion trophies were exported from African countries. In 2016, the figure was 1623 – up 14%.

Sir Ranulph Fiennes, who grew up in Africa, said:

“People will be incensed to find out that it is perfectly legal for a rich hunter to go to Africa and kill virtually any animal he wants, regardless of how endangered it is, just so that he can adorn his walls with a gruesome memento of his killing spree.

“The laws and institutions that are supposed to protect endangered wildlife allow people to get away with this. They need to be thrown out of the window.

“This has absolutely nothing to do with our past as hunter-gatherers. Humans never traditionally went out killing lions for food, much less for fun.

“There’s nothing noble about killing an innocent animal from a great distance with a long-range rifle. The people who hunt animals for trophies should be given prison sentences,

not permits”.

Eduardo Gonçalves of the Campaign to Ban Trophy Hunting added:

“The government says it doesn’t permit the import of hunting trophies unless there has been no detrimental impact on endangered species and the trophy has been obtained from a ‘sustainable’ hunting operation. I challenge the government to publish the evidence it holds proving this to be the case for each of the lions killed by British hunters this year.

“Michael Gove told Parliament this week that he finds the idea of trophy hunting a difficult one to contemplate and that it ‘troubles’ him. Given the stark decline of lion populations, and the mounting evidence of the cruelty involved in lion factory-farming, he should act on his conscience. He should put a stop to trophies coming into the country, and help prevent lions being killed by British hunters for so-called ‘sport’.”