

# THE VICIOUS CYCLE

A review of the exploitation of South Africa's  
captive big cats & its people.



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# 1. Introduction

At the beginning of 2020 when this report was in discussion, the first cases of COVID19 were reported in China, and the country had gone into lockdown to prevent the spread of this dreaded virus that has turned the world upside down. Little did we know that across the globe, the effects of this unprecedented pandemic would cause grave disruption to what the world knew and accepted as normal. Nearly every country has been hit hard, apart from a few that implemented drastic measures to curb the spread of the virus in the early stages of transmission.

A figurative virus that has been looming in South Africa over the last few years, is the captive breeding of lions and other predators. Thousands of lions are bred in captivity to be used for petting, walking interactions, breeding and killed – either for fun, trophies or their bones. Multiple investigations by FOUR PAWS and other NGO's dealing with this topic, have all come to the same conclusion: big cats, particularly lions, are exploited to a degree far beyond comprehension, and it is all legal.

Our report showcases three instances where investigations were undertaken about the conditions at breeding facilities – some open to the public and others closed. With insiders' knowledge of the operations there, the results from each scenario are more or less the same: animals are subjected to immense suffering, hygiene protocols are poor and a clear picture emerged that the welfare of animals and species conservation are not a priority, but that their very existence is purely for profit.

This report links, for the first time, not only the suffering of animals but the conditions that workers are subjected

to at these breeding facilities. While our primary focus is to showcase the suffering of animals and put an end to this industry, the human element simply cannot be ignored as one of the main arguments from the pro-hunting and breeding camps have always been that jobs are created by keeping this industry alive. It is true that jobs are created, but as our investigation reveals, workers on predator breeding farms, are often undocumented foreigners being paid well below the minimum wage, who work unimaginable hours and aren't compensated for the overtime that they have to work on a daily basis. Most concerning of all is the risk of fatal injuries that workers face and the necessity of resorting to cruelty to subdue the animals' natural instinct to attack humans.

While jobs may be created, it does not take a mathematician to see that the profit of breeding and killing lions and other predators are solely for the gain of a very few individuals, with workers living below the breadline.

Our investigations reveal that while all fatalities in the country must be recorded, other work-related incidents and injuries involving predators are generally not. When looking at the other side of the coin, hundreds, if not thousands of these predators have died due to bad keeping conditions, lack of medical care, hunger, malnutrition and thirst.

The publication of this report by FOUR PAWS highlights the urgent need for the abhorrent cruelty to end, and this we can only achieve by putting a stop to this industry in its entirety.



## 2. Executive Summary

The exploitation of big cats in captivity in South Africa, in particular of lions, has been well documented over the past decade. Though the industry has grown in its infamy, it continues to prove lucrative and now targets species that are not native to the country and hybrid animals, which are not covered by protective legislation from the South African Government. This report investigates the exploitation of indigenous species like lions, exotic species such as tigers, and ligers (a hybrid between lions and tigers).

In addition, it considers the exploitation of people who work on predator breeding farms and are required to work in close proximity with dangerous big cats without

safety procedures in place, protective equipment or training. The report reveals the disturbing truth that many South African nationals and illegal immigrants, often with less education, are being taken advantage of; paid below minimum wage and without the minimum employment packages set out by the South African Department of Labour.

This report reveals the captive predator breeding industry as a business that has been allowed to proliferate without regulation to facilitate the exploitation of two of the country's most important resources; its people and its wildlife.

**In conclusion, FOUR PAWS urge the South African Government to undertake the following key recommendations:**

1. FOUR PAWS urges the Department of Environmental Affairs to investigate South Africa's captive lion breeding and bone industry, as it has previously promised to do so. This should include an evaluation of the current lion bone export quota of 800 skeletons per year, based on scientific evidence to assess its effects on wild lion populations and investigate potential repercussions on the illegal tiger trade. In addition, it should establish and regulate binding welfare standards in legislation, relevant to the keeping of big cats in captivity to prevent cruelty (described here as any species from the family Felidae, with the exception of house cats, but including hybrids). We urge the Department of Labour to improve binding legislation to protect staff in such facilities from exploitation.
2. To ban all forms of interaction between people and big cats, including but not limited to, cub petting, walking-with interactions, feeding by non-qualified persons and the use of big cats as photo props.
3. To ultimately phase-out and subsequently ban, the keeping and breeding of native and exotic big cats in captive facilities in South Africa. This should be carried out through consultations with independent big cat scientists, veterinarians and NGOs, to find the remaining cats homes in genuine sanctuaries.





### 3. South Africa's captive population of lions and other big cats

South Africa is one of the few countries in the world that allows for large-scale captive breeding and keeping of lions and other big cats for commercial purposes<sup>1</sup>. In 366 facilities<sup>2</sup>, lions, cheetahs, leopards, caracals, servals, and many exotic species, such as tigers, jaguars, pumas, and a crossbreed between lions and tigers ('ligers' or 'tigons'), are bred and kept in substandard conditions.

Lions represent the largest proportion of this industry. Since the late 1990s there were around 50 facilities in existence, and this has substantially expanded. In 2005, the number of captive lions grew, but remained below 2,500 and in 2019, 366 facilities were estimated to be holding 7,979 lions, according to Ms Barbara Creecy, Minister for Environment, Forestry and Fisheries (DEFF).

*"In March 2019, the Department of Environment, Forestry and Fisheries indicated that 227 breeding facilities had been inspected, but offered no information on the number of lions involved. In August of the same year, the minister pegged the official numbers at 366 registered facilities with 7,979 lions, while by November, reported numbers were back down to 239 inspections and a total of 6,587 lions." – DailyMaverick extract, October 2020*

This official government figure of nearly 8,000 captive lions is most likely an underestimation as this would mean that the average number of lions per facility has halved from around 50 in 2005 to 22 some 15 years later. This is unlikely to have happened, since the breeding of captive lions and other big cats is driven by commercial targets. In addition, breeding farms that are shut to public tend to house much higher numbers of big cats than those that are open to the public and record-keeping is not centralised<sup>3</sup>. Extrapolating an average of 50 lions per facility across 366 facilities means that the captive lion population could be as large as 18,000, excluding all other indigenous and exotic carnivores. However, a more conservative estimate of 12,000 is currently used by most NGO's<sup>4</sup>.

*Independent estimates by conservation organisations LionAid, World Animal Protection and Blood Lions put the real figures at around 459 breeding facilities and between 10,000 and 12,000 captive-bred lions.*

In addition to the many lions kept in South Africa, a report by TRAFFIC/IUCN, published in 2015, estimated

there were 280 tigers in 44 captive facilities in South Africa<sup>5</sup>. Some organisations now believe this figure could have grown up to five-fold, equating to around 1,000 – 1,500 tigers<sup>6</sup>. Since tigers are an exotic species to South Africa, the keeping of them continues unregulated by the Department of Environmental Affairs (DEA) and the official figures are unknown<sup>7</sup>. This is despite the fact that tigers are listed by the Convention on International Trade of Endangered Species (CITES) as Appendix I animals. This prohibits international trade in specimens for commercial purposes and requires that any facility keeping such species, is registered with CITES by the National Authority, though many facilities in South Africa keeping tigers are not CITES registered<sup>8</sup>. Though it is known that a number of facilities breed hybrid ligers, even fewer detailed records exist to provide an estimate number of individuals kept in captivity in South Africa.

Estimating the overall figure of captive big cats in South Africa is further complicated as populations fluctuate all the time. Predator farm owners buy and sell lions and other big cats continuously and many are being bred, killed in trophy hunts and slaughtered for the (lion) bone trade.

There is also a large illegal wild cat population that exists without the knowledge of provincial nature conservation authorities, with a quarter of farms also not complying with permits or regulations<sup>9</sup>. Even though births and deaths of all predators need to be recorded with the provincial authorities, cubs are generally not registered until the age of four months – which is the prescribed legal requirement. This provides a window of opportunity to move unregistered cubs at a young age to holding facilities. Often these shadow farms are ordinary farms nearby that can accommodate animals on a temporary basis in makeshift enclosures.

The trade in illegal cubs in South Africa is substantial, with prices ranging from ZAR 10,000-15,000 (\$600-\$950) for a lion cub of one week to four months old, and ZAR 15,000-25,000 (\$950-\$1,500) per tiger cub, depending on the age, sex or subspecies. A three-month-old tame female cheetah without permit was offered on a WhatsApp group for ZAR 85,000 (\$5,100).

The sources from this report suggest that shadow farms are also used to temporarily house any predators not covered by the predator farm's permit, which prevents detection when provincial nature conservation authorities announce an inspection.



## 4. Why are big cats bred in captivity?

In South Africa, big cats are bred for a variety of commercial purposes including exploitative interactive tourism activities and voluntourism, live trade in animals to supply zoos or facilities, 'canned' or captive hunting, and the trade in skins, teeth, claws and bone for the production of traditional medicine.

These captive predators are exploited for profit at every stage of their lives. Cubs are torn away from their mothers within a few days from birth in order to bring their mothers back into an intensive breeding cycle. This means that a lioness can produce 2-3 litters per year compared to one litter every two years in the wild.

At the age of 3-4 weeks, the cubs are introduced to petting enclosures to provide national and international tourists with selfie opportunities, while international paying volunteers hand-rear the cubs. As the animals grow and become too boisterous, they are used for other tourist activities such as 'walking with lions.' Many captive predators are also abused in the advertising and film industry. As recently as 2018, the film, *Mia and the White Lion*, caused controversy when a number of lions were bought and used for the film that seemingly encouraged the captive keeping of lions, by ignoring the dangers of close interactions with big cats.

Many of these activities at such facilities, are offered through fraudulent marketing messaging under the guise of conservation. Visitors and volunteers are told that cubs were abandoned, orphaned, or the mother did not have enough milk, and that lions are ultimately

released into the wild. This is not true, and these facilities do not contribute to conservation.

Release is never possible as captive-bred lions are tame and ill-equipped to survive in wild areas as they have never learned to hunt and deal with other predators. Physically, they are simply not as strong as their wild cousins due to a lack of exercise and would most likely not adapt in a pride. In addition, many captive-bred lions are inbred and genetically compromised, which poses a risk to the genetic characteristics of wild populations. Lions also lose their fear for people and could therefore endanger people living in close proximity to wild landscapes.

Hand-reared and habituated predators lose their economic value in tourism at around two years old, when they become too dangerous to interact with. At this stage they are returned to holding facilities where they are kept until they are old enough to reproduce cubs; are sold to other breeders or zoos; killed as trophies; or slaughtered for their bones to be used in traditional medicine.

Based on trade data focussing on live lions, trophies and skeletons that were explored in this report, South Africa has legally exported more than 16,000 lions between 2008 to 2017. Additionally, over 400 tigers, dead or alive were exported, with the vast majority sourced from captive populations (Table 1a and 1b).

**Table 1a - CITES Trade Database analysis of lion exporter and importer reported quantities with South Africa as exporter between 2008-2017 for the purpose of live trade, trophy hunting, skeleton trade and bone; trade data was downloaded from the CITES Database on December 8th, 2020.**

	<b>Live Lion (term code: live)</b>		<b>Lion Trophy (term code: trophies)</b>		<b>Lion Skeleton* (term code: skeletons)</b>	
<b>Table 1a</b>	Exporter reported quantity	Importer reported quantity	Exporter reported quantity	Importer reported quantity	Exporter reported quantity	Importer reported quantity
<b>Total quantity</b>	1,895	739	8,855	6,238	5,725	5,216
<b>Average per year</b>	190	74	886	624	573	522
<b>% Captive bred (Source Code C)</b>	96%	91%	88%	56%	97%	42%
<b>Top 3 destination countries (reported quantity)</b>	1. China (298), 2. Thailand (212) 3. United Arab Emirates (129)	1. China (145) 2. United Arab Emirates (117) 3. Vietnam (113)	1. USA (4,677) 2. Spain (546) 3. Russia (322)	1. USA (4,313) 2. Spain (399) 3. Brazil (240)	1. Lao People's Democratic Republic (2,784) 2. Vietnam (2,466) 3. Thailand (355)	1. Thailand (3,045) 2. Vietnam (2,169) 3. Belgium (2)

\* 'Bodies' were not included in this study as these are for mostly trophy purposes (not commercial), nor were 'specimens' as these were for mostly scientific purposes.

The CITES trade database shows the quantities of lion parts and derivatives that South Africa has issued export permits for, are consistently higher than the quantities recorded by importer countries. Another disturbing discrepancy is evident in comparisons between the reported source of the animals or items for which permits have been issued. Export permits consistently claim the majority of animals or items are sourced from captive populations, however importer countries report a much smaller proportion comes from captive lions. In the case of lion trophies for example, export permits suggest 88% were captive from sources, while import permits register this figure as 56%.

South Africa issued export permits for 2,784 lion skeletons to Lao PDR (the highest to any country within this time period and the majority for commercial purposes: 95%). However, Lao PDR reported importing no lion skeletons. According to the recorded importer quantities, Thailand was the highest importer country of skeletons. Though inconsistencies such as this may arise due to differences in the way that data is recorded by each country or if trade does not take place, they are indicative of the ambiguity of the existing records of legal trade in lion parts and derivatives. This affects the ability to maintain an accurate trade database, which is ultimately used to inform management and permit decisions. Without proper oversight and a current management system in place, legal trade should not be permitted as it cruelly exploits captive lions and endangers wild populations.

In addition to the trade in Table 1a in live animals, trophies and skeletons, it should be noted that there are also permits issued for lion bones and other parts, such as hairs, claws and teeth. CITES does not require one standardised unit of measurement for these derivatives, thus records may be collected as items or kgs, making them difficult to analyse. In order to accurately estimate bone quantities for example, details such as to which body part the bone came from and whether the bone weight was recorded when the bone was dry or wet (with meat attached) are necessary. However, FOUR PAWS can state that records show significant quantities of bones have been traded from South Africa to South East Asia. One of the largest transactions recorded by a CITES permit shows that Vietnam imported 73,882 kgs of bones from SA in 2012 and a year later, imported another 4,592 kgs. In 2016, SA exported 300 kgs of bones to Lao People's Democratic Republic and previous to this, in 2012, 1,075 kgs.



**Table 1b - CITES Trade Database analysis of tiger exporter and importer reported quantities with South Africa as exporter between 2008-2017 for the purpose of live trade, trophy hunting and their body parts; trade data was downloaded from the CITES Database on October 27th, 2020; 'tiger items' include all term codes, except live and trophies. There were recorded export quantities for the following tiger items: bodies, claws, skins, skulls.**

	<b>Live Tiger (term code: live)</b>		<b>Tiger trophy (term code: trophies)</b>		<b>Tiger Items (term code: all, except live and trophies)</b>	
<b>Table 1b</b>	Exporter reported quantity	Importer reported quantity	Exporter reported quantity	Importer reported quantity	Exporter reported quantity	Importer reported quantity
<b>Total quantity</b>	326	233	49	10	38	39
<b>Average per year</b>	33	23	5	1	4	1
<b>% Captive bred (Source Code C)</b>	98%	95%	94%	70%	97%	97%
<b>Top 3 destination countries (reported quantity)</b>	1. Vietnam (73) 2. United Arab Emirates (43) 3. Thailand (39)	1. Vietnam (80) 2. United Arab Emirates (38) 3. Thailand (24)	1. China (16) 2. Pakistan (5) 3. Poland and Bangladesh (4)	1. United Arab Emirates (3) 2. Austria (2) 3. Numerous countries (1)*	1. Belgium (13) 2. China (9) 3. Poland (4)	1. Belgium (13) 2. China (9) 3. The Netherlands (4)

\* Pakistan, China, Qatar, Denmark, Norway

Similar to the trade data captured of lions, the imported and exported quantities of tiger items and live specimens from South Africa do not equate. The exporter permits of live tigers and their trophies are reported to have been exported in much higher quantities from South Africa, than the importer countries have recorded. For example, South Africa issued permits for 16 tiger trophies to be exported to China, but only one was recorded to be imported by China. In addition, some tiger items were reported to have come from wild individuals in South Africa, which cannot be true, further questioning the integrity of the CITES trade database. Furthermore, over half of all live tiger traded were reported to be destined for zoos. This is a significant proportion and there is speculation that some tigers supposedly destined for zoos will become sources to the illegal wildlife market, as in actual fact, these zoos do not exist, or their names have been used to forge permits. This was hypothesized around a case in 2019, where ten tigers were destined to be traded from Italy to Russia, without the correct permits and were stopped at the Belarus-Poland border<sup>10</sup>.

South Africa has clearly established strong trade routes with Asian countries such as China, Vietnam, Lao PDR and Thailand. These have notoriously high consumer demand for wildlife items and are destination hotspots for illegal wildlife trafficking. Concerningly, the quantity in which both species are being traded to these destinations is significantly higher than those in other countries.





# STOP THE EXPLOITATION

**10 000 - 12 000** lions are held in captivity across the country, **3 times** the amount of lions in the wild in South Africa

Sign our petition calling on the SA Government to ban the breeding and keeping of big cats

Remember, if you are allowed to interact with a big cat, it can't be released into the wild.

Avoid facilities that allow interactions with big cats, including:

1. Cub petting
2. Walk with opportunities
3. Big cats used as photo props

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## 5. “Canned” or Captive Hunting

“Canned” or captive hunting is defined by the African Lion Working Group as the sport hunting of lions [and other big cats] that are captive bred and reared expressly for sport hunting, and/or sport hunting of lions that occur in fenced enclosures.

In reality, this means that lions and many other big cats that have been hand-reared and have lost their fear for humans, are released in small fenced areas with no chance to escape from the trophy hunter, or to give “fair chase”, as described in hunting terms. The predators associate people with food and can therefore be shot from a vehicle, often by inexperienced hunters, increasing the likelihood of tremendous suffering. The practice is heavily condemned by many wildlife conservation NGOs, animal welfare groups and more recently, hunting groups such as the Dallas Safari Club and the International Council for Game and Wildlife Conservation<sup>11</sup>.

In the North West province, where a large percentage of these captive hunts take place, the shortest legal release time from captivity until the actual hunt is four days. However, information from this report's sources suggest some animals are (illegally) shot in a much shorter period of time, almost immediately after release, as soon as they set foot on the hunting farm.



# LIONS ARE MORE THAN NUMBERS

Between 2008 and 2017, South Africa reports it exported:

A total of 1 895 live lions,  
equivalent to 190 per year



96% were from  
captive-bred lions

A total of 8,855 lion trophies,  
equivalent to 886 per year



88% were from  
captive-bred lions

53% of these went  
to the USA

A total of 5,725 lion skeletons  
for use in traditional medicine,  
equivalent to 573 per year



97% were from  
captive-bred lions

49% went to Lao People's  
Democratic Republic

43% went to Vietnam



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## 6. Bone Trade

Tiger bones have been used in traditional medicine in East and South-East Asia for thousands of years for their suggested medicinal properties to treat an array of ailments, including arthritis, rheumatism, leprosy and even impotence<sup>12</sup>. Around the mid to late 2000s came the first evidence that lions too, were being targeted by the same industry and were being included products labelled as containing tiger derivatives<sup>13</sup>. Although lion bones have never been a recognised ingredient of traditional medicine, the demand in Asia for lion bones as a supplement to tiger bones has increased in recent years, due to a decline in tiger numbers and a ban in China on the use of tiger items<sup>14</sup>.

Since 2008, just under 6,000 lion skeletons weighing a total of approximately 70 tonnes have been exported from South Africa to Southeast Asia for use in traditional medicine practices (Table 1a). Between 2008 and 2017, South Africa has reported exporting an assortment of lion products, the majority of which constitute skeletons, trophies and bone (including carvings and pieces) (Fig. 2).

An official lion bone export quota was agreed upon at the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) CoP17 through an annotation to the *Panthera leo* Appendix II in 2016. Whereas a zero annual export quota remains for wild lions, "annual export quotas for trade in bones, bone pieces, bone products, claws, skeletons, skulls and teeth for commercial purposes, derived from captive breeding operations in South Africa, will be established and communicated annually to the CITES Secretariat".



The DEFF set a legal export quota of 800 skeletons in 2017 and 2018, yet these quotas were based upon the economic principle of supply and demand and not on scientific evidence. There have been significant objections to the figures by wildlife conservationists, scientists and animal welfare organisations, including a public participation submission to the DEFF by the coalition *To Stop the Captive Breeding and Keeping of Lions and Other Big Cats for Commercial Purposes* in June 2019<sup>15</sup>. In August of the same year, High Court Judge Kollapen ruled that the setting of the lion bone quota in 2017 and 2018 was "unlawful and constitutionally invalid". Despite calls for the 2019 quota to consider the implications to the conservation of wild lion populations and the welfare of captive lions, a revised quota has not been established yet which means the 800 skeleton quota remains. In addition, no legislative action has been implemented nor has an investigation into South Africa's captive lion breeding industry been delivered, despite a parliamentary motion stating this was urgently required.



The next two sections; Exploitation of Animals and Exploitation of People, are predominantly based on information obtained through interviews with (ex-)employees of various predator farms in the North West and Free State provinces. The identities of both the facilities and interviewees are known to FOUR PAWS, but for legal and safety reasons are not identified in this report.

Though the issues raised in the following sections are presented at individual facilities, they are understood to reflect the wider commercial captive predator breeding industry in South Africa.

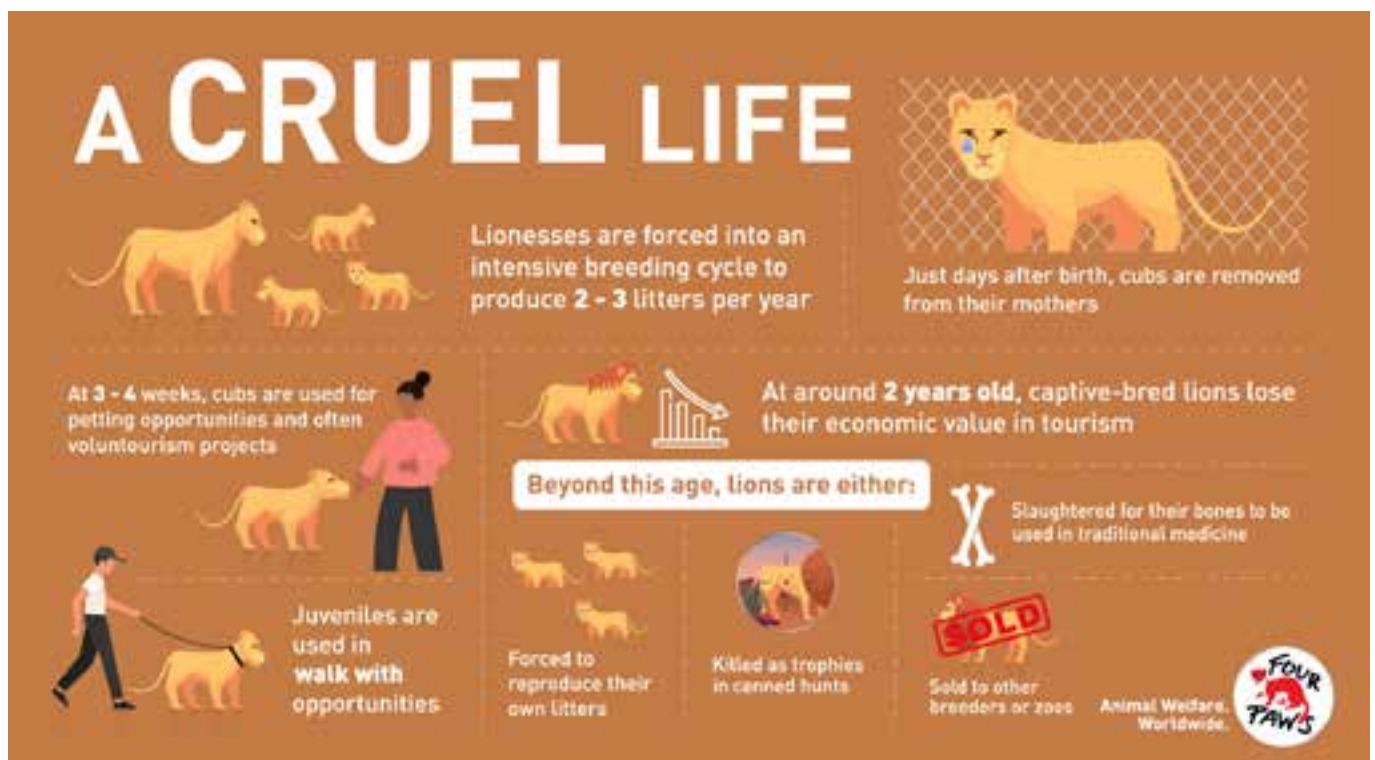
## 7. Exploitation of Animals

South Africa currently has no binding national standards for the breeding and keeping of predators in captivity that address animal welfare and health concerns. This is because no singular department is responsible for wild animal welfare, instead, the issue straddles the mandates of the DEFF, the Department of Agriculture, Rural Development and Land Reform and provincial authorities. In addition, animal sentience is not formally recognised in legislation or policy. Though pain and fear are addressed by the Animal Protection Act No.71 of 1962, animals are not explicitly defined as sentient, therefore ensuring wild animals are afforded a natural state is not a priority<sup>16</sup>.

However, FOUR PAWS believes any (wild) animal under human care, whether held on a temporary or permanent basis, should be afforded high animal

welfare standards. Basic standards were originally based upon the globally recognised Five Freedoms<sup>17</sup> of animal welfare. Now outdated, these have been modified to the Five Domains Model<sup>18</sup> which identifies the internal and external conditions that give rise to mental experiences undergone by animals. FOUR PAWS has taken this one step further through the emphasis we place on the positive experiences we believe animals should encounter, as documented in Table 2.

In an attempt to increase profitability in the captive breeding and keeping of lions and other big cats, lions and other big cats, especially when it comes to the lion bone trade, animal welfare is not a priority. A lack of adequate basic animal welfare conditions, such as sufficient water, food, shelter and medical care is inevitable and a stark reality in South Africa.





**Table 2 – The General Welfare Aims that FOUR PAWS recognises to grant animals suitable welfare standards, as adapted from the Five Domains Model.**

General Welfare Aims	Focussing Welfare Targets and Provisions.
Good Nutrition	To minimise thirst and hunger and enable eating to be a pleasurable experience by providing access to fresh water and a species-appropriate diet to maintain full health and vigour.
Good Environment	To minimise discomfort and exposure to adverse environment conditions and to promote physical comfort by providing an appropriate outdoor environment, including shelter and a comfortable resting area, different functional areas and good air quality.
Good Health	To minimise pain, disease, and other discomforts and to promote the pleasures of vigour, strength, robustness and harmonious physical activity by preventing or rapidly diagnosing and treating diseases and injuries, and by stimulating, such things as, proper muscle tone and digestive system processes.
Positive Mental Experiences	To promote the experience of various forms of comfort, pleasure, interest, confidence and a sense of control, by providing safe, species-appropriate and conspecific opportunities to have pleasurable experiences.
Appropriate Behaviour	To minimise threats and unpleasant restrictions on behaviour and movement, and to promote engagement in rewarding activities, by providing sufficient space, conspecific company and appropriately varied conditions to allow for species-specific behavioural expression.

## 7.1 Good Nutrition

Feeding routines vary greatly among the case studies and are heavily dependent on whether the animals are visible to the paying public or part of a commercial breeding routine.

Commercial breeding farms generally feed their predators whatever meat is cheapest and readily available. This frequently includes donated chickens from battery farms that do not provide lions with the right protein levels and nutrients and may contain antibiotics, growth hormones or other additives. In an extreme case, one lion was reported to have lost his mane after eating cattle meat that contained elevated hormone levels.

In some of our case studies, when plenty of chicken meat is available, the predators are fed daily with 2-3 chickens per lion, thrown into overcrowded camps from the back of a pickup truck with the fittest and strongest lions getting the best meal. In lean times, the animals can go without food for 2-3 weeks, which can lead to malnutrition and even cannibalism. The breeding farms also rely on donations of dead sheep and cattle in order to save money on buying more nutritionally rich, expensive red meat. Sometimes the donated meat is already rotting on the carcasses but is still fed to the lions.

Water troughs are generally refilled daily and cleaned once a week, but one shallow trough of about 70 x 70 cm is insufficient for 14 lions, as most of the water evaporates in less than a day (Case study A).

Many of the animals in predator parks (Case study B) are overfed and obese, as tour guides carry a bucket with meat snacks to entice the animals to the fence so that visitors can get a better view. Hence, the animals are fed throughout the day on snacks as well as their normal daily feed. The lack of exercise in captivity exacerbates such weight issues.



## 7.2 Good Environment

The minimum enclosure requirements for indigenous captive predators vary between the nine provinces with some, like Limpopo, having no prescribed minimum requirements. There are currently no minimum enclosure requirements for exotic predators in South Africa.

Many of the lion camps on breeding farms are massively undersized and overcrowded. A 2,500 m<sup>2</sup> camp holding 30-40 lions is no exception. The enclosures provide little to no shade and definitely not enough for the number of animals kept per enclosure to hide from the elements. Summer temperatures in the North West and Free State reach well above 30°C on a daily basis. During the rainy season, many camps get flooded due to the absence of proper drainage and on occasions stay flooded for 3-4 days. This can lead to infections and even death.

Smaller enclosures used for leopard, caracal, and serval often have cement floors. Enrichment is absent in all of the camps on commercial breeding and keeping farms.

Enclosures within predator parks are generally more spacious as they are visited by the public frequently, thus it is in their interest to reduce overt suffering. However, these often only just meet the provincial minimum requirements, if at all, and enrichment is mostly absent.





## 7.3 Good Health

Some of the more common health issues on the commercial breeding side of the industry are the result of not vaccinating against common diseases and not deworming cubs, as well as infected paws and broken teeth. Though these conditions are avoidable, the expense of veterinarian visits are often omitted as binding standards of practice do not exist and exploiting the animals for money, takes priority over welfare.

Cub mortality is probably the most shocking welfare issue at many of the commercial breeding farms, with lion cub mortality estimated by one worker on a predator breeding farm to be as high as 40%, tiger cub mortality up to 65%, and hybrids and leopard cub mortality (combined) estimated at 30% (Case study B).

Cubs are taken from their mothers too early and fed on Esbilac formula developed for puppies, as there is no specific formula for big cats. Cubs are bottle fed until two months and in the third month some meat is introduced, if they are lucky some red meat. After three months they are fed on chicken only. This, and the absence of their mother's milk, leads to nutritional deficiencies and a compromised immune system, making the cubs more susceptible to diseases.

In Case study A, many of the lion cubs appeared healthy up to 2-2.5 months and then started head bobbing or their front or back legs became paralysed. Eventually

the cubs were not able to stand and would lay paddling their legs to get away from their own faecal matter. In the final stages, the cubs were no longer able to use their tongues, preventing them from feeding and drinking. Their brains also did not seem to process visual, auditory and olfactory information properly. For example, in this case study, a cub knew there was food but was unable to pinpoint the exact location.

Initially, it only affected lion cubs, but later also the white tiger cubs, whose enclosures were adjacent. From starting to show these symptoms to eventually perishing would take between 1-2 weeks. Without the intervention of veterinary care, their suffering is inevitable.

The vast majority of commercial predator breeding facilities lack proper hygiene protocols to prevent the spread of zoonotic diseases (e.g. Case study A). Some camps consist of simple rectangular fenced spaces without feeding areas, and proper cleaning can only take place when the camp is empty. Many of the predator camps are subsequently littered with faecal matter and decaying carcasses. This is a concern not only for the health of big cats, but as zoonotic diseases and pathogens can be transmitted to humans through close contact, the captive lion industry has been identified as a considerable threat to animal and human health<sup>19</sup>.





The lack of hygiene protocols also means an absence of prescribed cleaning methods and materials. Water troughs for example are cleaned with domestic cleaning products such as Jik (household bleach) or Jeyes Fluid (outdoor cleaner and disinfectant) instead of an appropriate non-toxic disinfectant. Stepping points to disinfect shoes between enclosures are absent and the transmission of infectious diseases between camps is inevitable.

Mange is prevalent in mammals that are kept in unhygienic conditions and is highly contagious and readily transmitted between individuals through contact. The disease thickens the skin, causing painful cracks that can become infected and usually leads to hair loss and intense itching. In 2019, one farm in South Africa's North West Province was found to have 108 big cats in cruel and unhygienic conditions by the NSPCA and 27 young lions were reportedly treated for severe mange and ringworm<sup>20</sup>. As many of the lions had little or no fur left, the animals were sunburnt exacerbating their suffering, particularly since there is hardly any shade present in the predator camps.

Their suffering is compounded by the fact that unless the value of the animal justifies the expense, most predator owners refuse to call for veterinary assistance. If they do, local vets tend to have limited big cat expertise

and have no medication specifically developed for big cats. Often the medication used is intended primarily for domestic cats or livestock. Additional to this, it is nearly impossible to isolate an individual big cat when cramped into a small and heavily over-populated enclosure – increasing the likelihood of disease transmission and subsequent mortality.

Overbreeding, inbreeding and hybridisation are also hugely problematic, leading to compromised health and genetics. Without detailed studbooks and parental lineage, the number of generations of inbreeding is often unknown and physical deformities as a result of inbreeding are prevalent in captive-bred lion. Common inbreeding deformities include lions with shorter back than front legs, stumpy tails or no tail, floppy or very small ears, no teeth, paws that look like flippers, too few or too many toes, and even cheetahs with two heads.

Crossbreeding or hybridisation of lions with tigers, servals with domestic cats, and leopards with jaguars are increasingly common to provide rarities for tourist attractions, the trophy hunting industry, the trade in skins and/or live trade (Case studies A and B). The hybridisation of lions and tigers to produce ligers or tigons still occurs, even though it is widely considered unethical due to the occurrence of health problems and growth of absurdly large bodies.



## 7.4 Positive Mental State

The unethical removal of cubs from their mothers is fuelled by the cub-petting demand, where lion and tiger cubs are handled by the paying public for up to 8-10 hours per day, seven days a week. It is crucial for a predator cub's development to get enough sleep – which is not possible when being constantly touched and petted. In the wild, adult lionesses sleep between 15 to 18 hours per day, while males sleep up to 20 hours per day.

Sub-adult lions and adult cheetahs are used for interactions, often restrained with harnesses and as photo props for up to 10 hours per day, seven days per week. After a full day at the predator farm (Case study B), some cheetahs were taken to Sun City for further interaction. "The mental well-being of the interaction animals is worrying. Repeatedly, one of the cheetahs had to be dragged by its harness, as she just didn't want to perform," one of the guides stated.

Case study B sometimes saw the daily number of paying visitors reach 100 people interacting with cubs (which held approximately 50 lions, much fewer would have been cubs) and even more interacting with sub-adult lions and adult cheetahs, generating a substantial amount of income for the owners.

In order to prevent cubs' natural behaviours that may harm visitors such as biting or scratching, animals are subjected to a brutal training programme. After about three weeks, a litter of lions is split into two groups to break the sibling bond. In the petting enclosure, lion and tiger cubs are trained using the sound of a spray, to condition them not to bite or use their claws. Toilet or deodorant sprays are also used as a deterrent and sprayed into their faces. The trainers use sticks, striking the cubs forcefully on their knuckles to inflict pain and discourage the use of their claws. Some cubs are even declawed to prevent them from scratching people. If the lion or tiger jumps, it is hit on the hind legs or on the ear.

In order to train older lions for walking activities and general interaction, they are kept leashed with chains and frequently subjected to pepper spray from about four months old. This limits their natural behaviours and prevents jumping, the use of their claws, biting and running. In Case study B, cans of pepper spray were frequently used to punish or subdue lions. This results in lions with painful red, swollen and streaming eyes, which can lead to eye infections and even partial blindness.

Later on in the animal's lifecycle, the presence of a stick is sufficient as a deterrent as the cats associate the object with being hurt and therefore, exhibit submissive docile behaviour. On lion walks, visitors are always given a stick to carry as a reminder for the lions.



In comparison to lions, cheetahs are much easier to train and are often rewarded with snacks for being good. In contrast, leopards and jaguars are not typically used for interactions as they are unpredictable and much more difficult to train.

Animals that need to be crated for transport are often soaked with water and endure electric shocks to move or stun them without the need to use expensive sedatives. To get them out of the crate, they are often shocked again, and it is not unusual for the terrified animal to run straight into the electric fencing of the new enclosure or into the gate, hurting themselves.



## 7.5 Appropriate Behaviour

The keeping of large numbers of carnivores in cramped enclosures is a regular occurrence on commercial breeding farms. Moreover, when a group of new lions arrive, they are often combined with an already bonded group, which can lead to vicious fights, injuries and even death.

Under crowded conditions with several male and female lions in one camp, breeding is random. In these cases, new-born cubs are immediately taken from the mother, as there are no separate nurseries or breeding pens. If the cubs are not removed in time, they are most likely going to be killed by either the stressed mother or the other lions in the camp.

Under more controlled breeding conditions of lions, tigers, leopards, caracals, and jaguars, cubs are still taken away from the mothers within days, or even hours of birth, to hand-rear and habituate them. This makes them easier to handle, keep and sell. Leopards are often taken from the mother immediately, sometimes without having had any of the mother's milk, as they are traditionally difficult to habituate.

Big cats and other predator species are often housed in unnaturally close proximity to one another on predator farms, for example leopards next to caracals and servals, and lions next to hyenas or wild dogs. In one extreme case, 14 caracals, which are solitary animals in the wild, were found together in one small enclosure of

about 20 m<sup>2</sup> (Case study A). Of these individuals, some were taken from the wild or captive bred and a small number were even pregnant.

These unnatural situations are hugely stressful for the predators involved and can lead to extreme mental and physical suffering. Adding the lack of sufficient enrichment and stimulus for captive wildlife, their psychological well-being in captivity cannot be ensured and there is no opportunity for these animals to express their natural behaviours.



### Case Study A: Breeding Facility - Closed to the Public

**Number of predators:** Approximately 240 predators spread across several locations, including 150 lions, 30 tigers, 8 leopards, 25 caracals, 20 servals and wild cats, and 5 jaguars and pumas. The numbers change dramatically throughout the year with many big cats coming and going.

**Number of people employed:** 3 managers and 8 farm workers.

**Human resources:** No qualifications required, no contracts, below minimum wages, cash in hand, no payslips; no set annual leave, 12-hour working days, 12 days working 2 days off; some illegal immigrants.

**Safety:** No safety and cleaning protocols, no sticks, no pepper spray used, no handheld radios, no protective clothing and no disinfectant between enclosures.

**Management:** No lion management plan, no studbooks, most predators not microchipped, and no information on parental lineage.

**Enclosures:** Undersized, overcrowded, no feeding camps, some enclosures not built to species specific requirements, dirty, little to no shade, and no enrichment.

**Breeding:** Uncontrolled, inbreeding and crossbreeding, cub mortality estimated up to 60%.

**Feeding:** An average of 2-3 chickens per lion per day thrown into overcrowded camps from the back of a vehicle, but at times no food for 2-3 weeks.

**Veterinary care:** Absent.

**Illegal activities:** More predators than holding permits allow; facilities with predators unknown to provincial nature conservation authorities; buying, selling and transportation of predators without permits.



## Case Study B: Predator Park (open to the public) and Breeding Facility (closed to the public)

**Number of predators:** Approximately 140 predators in total at the predator park and the breeding farm, including 50 lions, 30 tigers, 9 leopards, 20 caracals, 20 servals, 2 cheetahs, 3 ligers, and 2 jaguars. The numbers at the predator park stay more or less the same, whereas on the breeding farm, which is shut to the public, the populations fluctuate throughout the year.

**Number of people employed:** 1 manager and 7 tour guides/farm workers.

**Human resources:** No qualifications needed, no contracts; guides earn below minimum wage topped up with tips, cash in hand, no payslips; no set annual leave, no paid sick leave: 12-14 hours days, 7 day per week, 4 days off per month; signed indemnity that owner takes no responsibility for accidents in the workplace; some illegal immigrants.

**Safety:** Sticks and pepper spray used; no safety and cleaning protocols; no handheld radios, no protective clothing; no disinfectant between enclosures. Only age restrictions on lion and cheetah interaction with public.

### Predator Park (open to public)

**Management:** Studbooks in place, microchipping of all animals, DNA, parental lineage information available.

**Enclosures:** Decent size with limited number of animals per camp, clean, limited enrichment.

**Breeding:** Several breeding pairs of lions, (white) tigers, (black) leopards, and (black) jaguar. Cub mortality very low.

**Feeding:** Mostly donated chickens, with red meat once a week, if available. Many predators overfed and obese because they are fed snacks throughout the day, on top of their normal daily feed.

**Veterinary care:** Deworming done by park manager, no regular vet check-ups, except in cases when interaction cats are injured.

**Illegal activities:** None. All trade done with the correct permits and paperwork.

### Breeding Facility (closed to public)

**Management:** No lion management plan, no studbooks, no microchips, no information kept on parental lineage.

**Enclosures:** Undersized, overcrowded; no feeding camps; dirty, little shelter or shade.

**Breeding:** Uncontrolled inbreeding, crossbreeding; estimated cub mortality of lions around 40%, tigers 65% and ligers and leopards around 30%.

**Feeding:** Once a week, when meat is available; cannibalism observed.

**Veterinary care:** Generally absent.

**Illegal activities:** More predators than holding permits allow; facilities with predators unknown to provincial nature conservation authorities; buying, selling and transportation of predators without permits.



## 8. Exploitation of People

Breeders and other proponents of captive predator breeding argue the industry provides economic opportunity for transformation and job creation. However, according to the DEA and a report commissioned in 2009, the number of full-time job opportunities created by captive lion breeding facilities was 225<sup>21</sup>. This figure increased to 379 under the inclusion of direct, indirect and induced full-time jobs, which clearly demonstrates the industry provides only a modest contribution to South Africa's employment opportunities. It is also understood that the majority of income generated from the facilities accrues to a small group of economically advantaged owners. Moreover, many captive predator facilities rely upon paying international volunteers which deprives local workers of employment opportunities (e.g. Case study C).

In addition to considering the quantity of jobs created, the quality of employment opportunities on the breeding farms must be interrogated too. The case studies within this report show a worrying trend in the cruel exploitation of people working at these farms.

Sectoral Determination 13 (SD 13) regulates the basic conditions of employment and remuneration of farm workers in South Africa. The minimum wage for farm workers is currently set at ZAR 18 (USD 1.18) per hour. SD 13 further stipulates that farm workers may not work more than 45 hours in any given week and overtime is due on any agreed work exceeding 45 hours.

SD 13 does not prescribe any policy requirements protecting farm workers from work-related accidents and most predator farms have no safety protocols in place. In February 2020, a fatal accident involving a 21-year-old game manager at a facility near Bela Bela<sup>22</sup> (Limpopo) acts as a reminder that even hand-reared and habituated lions will never lose their wild nature or instinct. Similarly, in August 2020, the owner of a luxury game farm died after two hand-reared white lionesses overpowered the man<sup>23</sup>.

Working with predators involves a substantial risk and Standard Operating Procedures (SOP), including safety protocols, are currently not part of SD 13 nor of any permit conditions, which places workers at considerable risk. Fatal accidents are reported, but other work-related incidents and injuries involving predators are generally not. Hence, the true extent of attacks on workers by captive predators is unknown.

A simple Google search of "lion interaction incidents in South Africa," where members of the public have been harmed, shows over 9 million results and reinforces the prevalence of substandard safety procedures the facilities are operating in. Such incidents also have grave welfare implications for the animal as euthanasia is commonly the default solution.





## 8.1 Working conditions

The case studies in this report suggest a normal working day starts at 06:00 in the morning and finishes between 18:00 and 20:00 at night, with at most one day off per week. This means employees, including managers, work 12-14 hours per day and an average of 70-85 hours per week – a direct violation of SD13.

People who work with cubs have long periods when the cubs need feeding every 2-4 hours around the clock, without shift work or night-time compensation paid. Case study C would see up to 16 lion, tiger, cheetah, caracal and leopard cubs with two people to care for them around the clock, whereas case study A would have up to 25 lion, tiger, leopard, caracal and serval cubs and only one carer.

Most farm workers and guides in our case studies earn ZAR 2,500-3,000 (USD 165 – 195) per month and are paid cash in hand. Considering the minimum wage of ZAR 18 per hour and the long hours these employees work, their pay is well below South Africa's set minimum wage. Managers are paid between ZAR 5,000 – 6,000 (USD 330 – 390) per month, which roughly equates to the minimum wage. In addition, no employees receive overtime, Sunday or public holiday remuneration, nor time off in lieu.

Employees are rarely provided with payslips and are thus uncertain whether Unemployment Insurance Fund (UIF) contributions and Pay As You Earn (PAYE) taxes are paid. Only facilities that are open to the public may allow guides to supplement their income with tips from visitors (Case study B).

The farm workers or tour guides are the least well-paid and most dangerous jobs in the industry. In addition, the vast majority of workers have no written contracts, no set annual leave, no paid sick leave or contribute towards medical aid. The only additional benefit workers generally receive is free basic housing on the farm and some may receive a free lunch. Many of these roles are filled by African immigrants from neighbouring countries, sometimes working without permits, leaving them vulnerable to exploitation. This report also showed that the ratio of management roles to the lower-ranking roles do not demonstrate racial equality. In every case study, management roles were occupied by white managers and the subordinate roles, most vulnerable to exploitation, were only occupied by black nationals or immigrants. This is indicative that black South Africans and immigrants are disproportionately exposed to exploitation by this industry.

Many young people mostly from Europe and North America want to make a difference and are willing to pay handsomely to spend time volunteering in Africa. Many captive wildlife facilities take advantage of this willingness to give back by offering volunteers the opportunity to be surrogate mothers for their "orphaned" cubs.

International volunteers are often ill-informed and unaware that the cubs they are bottle feeding are not orphaned and will never be returned to the wild. Instead they are grooming and habituating these cats to become part of the lucrative cub petting and walking with big cat scams. Unintentionally, they are facilitating an exploitative and unregulated industry.

The average cost for four weeks of volunteering, including mid-range accommodation and catering, amounts to ZAR 22, and 000 (USD 1,400). Holiday packages for the same duration, but fewer working hours cost ZAR 34,500 (USD 2,100) this does not include transport to the facilities.





## 8.2 Lack of safety protocols

In general, staff receive no safety clothing, equipment, or handheld radios. Only Case study B provided staff with sticks and pepper spray. New staff are generally "trained" on the job by other workers. Volunteers also receive very basic information on how to handle the animals and dangerous situations they might face.

On breeding farms, predator camps are filled to capacity with no spare enclosures or feeding camps, which means that cleaning the enclosures is difficult and dangerous. Cleaning procedures often entail one worker driving a tractor into an enclosure while making lots of noise to move the predators to one side, while the other workers quickly clean the other end of the enclosure.

If a farm worker is injured by one of the predators and require medical assistance, a cover story, such as an incident with a domestic dog is used. No occupational injuries are reported, and the employees involved are paid off with a small amount in compensation.

Facilities dealing with the public tend to have some safety protocols. For example, two members of staff are required to enter an enclosure with any group of paying visitors; one to preoccupy the animals and the other staff interacts with the tour group.

Volunteers receive basic instructions that encourage them to always face towards the animal with a back against the wall, to kneel down instead of sitting around the animals and to strike a cat on the nose if it bites.

In Case study C, volunteers were allowed to play unsupervised with 6 to 7-month-old lion cubs and even sleep with the hand-reared adult cheetahs, resulting in injuries of varying degrees. A considerable number of cheetah attacks occurred involving staff, volunteers and the public – some with serious consequences. One volunteer required 100 stitches to her head and a tourist needed numerous surgeries after a cheetah attack.

The mistake often made by people working in big cat facilities is that they stop seeing these animals as wild because they bottle feed these predators and built up a certain level of trust and a personal relationship. Attacks might occur because they reach their limit and become aggressive – or even while they are "playing", simply because of the strength of these animals.

### Case Study C: Breeding and Interaction Facility - Open to the Public

**Number of predators:** About 34 predators, including 12 lions, 12 cheetahs, 4 leopards, 3 caracals, and 3 servals.

**Number of people employed:** 4 to 5 animal carers.

**Volunteers:** Twelve to 18 paying volunteers, mostly females from Europe between 18-30 years old, paying around ZAR 8,000 (USD 525) per person per month.

**Human resources:** Basic contracts; UIF paid; below minimum wage; 12-hour working days, 13 days working 1 day off although contract stated 45 hours working week; no overtime paid or nightshift allowance.

**Volunteer safety:** Basic training on arrival; not allowed to bottle feed cubs; allowed to play unsupervised with 6-7 months old lions; allowed to sleep with hand-reared cheetahs, resulting in several attacks, some serious.

**Staff safety:** Some safety protocols, e.g. two people per visitor group entering an enclosure; no pepper spray, no sticks; staff enter all big cat enclosures for feeding purposes, and cheetah, caracal and serval enclosures also for cleaning.

**Management:** No studbooks; no knowledge of parental lineage.

**Enclosures:** Enclosures meet minimum size requirements; cheetah camps given minimum size dispensation for breeding purposes; cleaning once a week and interaction enclosures open to the public daily; fresh water available.

**Breeding:** Limited breeding with cheetah, leopard, and servals; some inbreeding; lion, tiger and caracal cubs brought in from other breeding farms.

**Feeding:** All predators fed late afternoon every Mon-Wed-Fri. Cheetahs fed nearly daily. All mixture of red meat & chicken

**Veterinary care:** Some veterinary care, but boundaries are pushed beyond the limit in terms of animal suffering.

**Illegal activities:** Many falsehoods told to staff; volunteers and paying public are lied to about where animals come from and go to, as well as injuries sustained by predator attacks; euthanasia of animals by staff.

# KEEPING BIG CATS IN CAPTIVITY ENDANGERS PEOPLE

INCIDENTS OF INJURY SUSTAINED THROUGH INTERACTIONS WITH BIG CATS IN SOUTH AFRICA: 2010 – 2020



**NOVEMBER 2011**

A man is injured by a lioness in a Lion Park through the windows of a car at The Lion Park, Lanseria. Gauteng Province

**JANUARY 2010**

Two girls are attacked and bitten by a lioness on a 'lion walk' at Weltevrede Lion Farm, Heilbron. Gauteng Province



**FEBRUARY 2012**

A keeper is killed by a lion at Parys Zoo farm owned by Johannesburg Zoo. Free State Province

**MARCH 2012**

The owner of a tiger is attacked at Tiger Canyons in Philipolis and suffered puncture wounds and two broken ribs. Free State Province



**MAY 2012**

A woman is bitten on her face and is left with lacerations on her arm and leg by a lion at Tshukudu Game Lodge, Hoedspruit. Limpopo Province

**JULY 2013**

A woman is attacked by two lions and suffered severe puncture wounds at Moholoholo Wildlife Rehabilitation Center, Limpopo Province

**DECEMBER 2013**

A man is attacked by a lion through the window of the car at The Lion Park, Lanseria. Gauteng Province

**APRIL 2014**

A man is mauled to death by lions at East London Zoo. Eastern Cape Province

**APRIL 2014**

A man is attacked by two lions when feeding them at Bagamoya Wildlife Estate, Bloemfontein. Free State Province.

**MAY 2014**

A boy is attacked by tiger cub and required staples to the back of his head, arm and fingers at Mbidi Lodge / Mbidi Resort & Animal Sanctuary, Groblersdal. Mpumalanga Province



**FEBRUARY 2015**

A girl is attacked by lions after entering its enclosure during an interaction at Kudu's Rus. North West Province

**MARCH 2015**

A man is attacked by a lion through the window of the car at The Lion Park, Lanseria. Gauteng Province



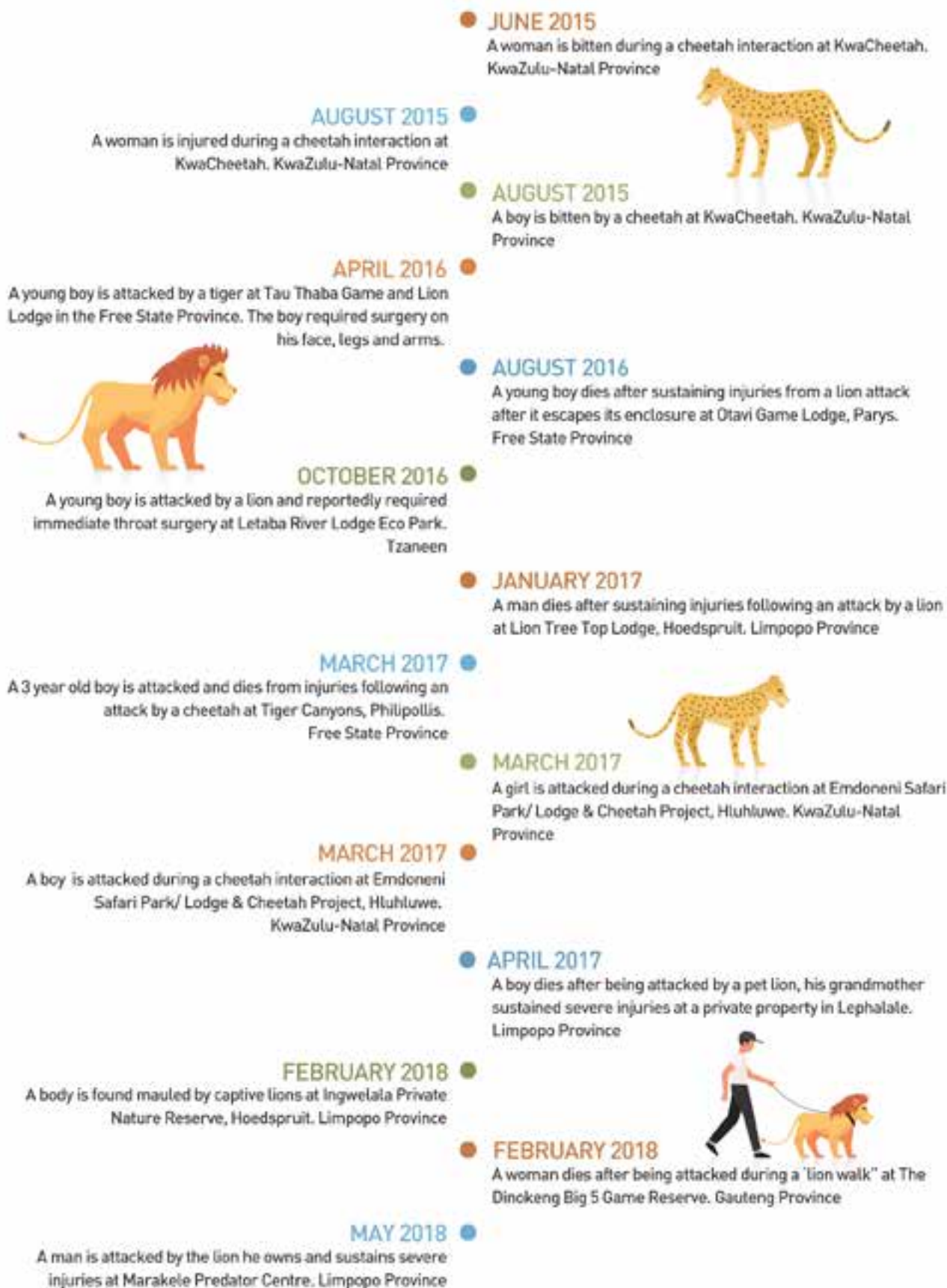
**JUNE 2015**

A woman is attacked and killed by lioness at The Lion Park, Lanseria. Gauteng Province

**JUNE 2015**

A woman is attacked by a lion and dies, and a tour guide is injured at The Lion Park, Lanseria. Gauteng Province

\*All incidents of attacks or injuries sustained within this timeline have been collated from news reports open to the public



\*All incidents of attacks or injuries sustained within this timeline have been collated from news reports open to the public





**MAY 2019**

A young girl is attacked by a lioness at Weltevrede Lion Farm, Heilbron, Free State Province. The girl was put into an induced coma for a sustained period following the attack.

**APRIL 2019**

A man is severely injured after being bitten by a lion at Tikwe River Lodge, Virginia, Free State Province

**AUGUST 2019**

A man is mauled to death by his captive lions at Mahala View Lion Lodge, Gauteng Province

**FEBRUARY 2020**

A woman working at a captive facility, is killed by lions at Zwartkloof Private Game Reserve, Bela Bela, Limpopo Province

**AUGUST 2020**

A man is killed by the lions he raised while walking the animals at Lion Tree Top Lodge, Hoedspruit, Limpopo Province.



\*All incidents of attacks or injuries sustained within this timeline have been collated from news reports open to the public

## BIG CATS IN CAPTIVITY EXPLOITS ANIMALS AND PEOPLE

Banning the keeping of big cats in captivity will protect people and wildlife

There have been 33 attacks by big cats on people between 2010 and 2020

This resulted in:



9 reported deaths of people



26 people sustaining significant injuries

**42% of attacks**

were during petting or general interactions



**6 % of attacks**

were during photo opportunities



**18% by cheetahs**



**15% of attacks**

were through the windows of vehicles

**9% by tigers**



**18% were**

keepers or owners



**9% of attacks**

were during walk with experiences



**73% by lions**



Animal Welfare Worldwide



# 10. Conclusion

To prevent the further suffering of the thousands of big cats held in captive facilities across South Africa, urgent action is required by the DEA to regulate and reduce the industry. This is echoed by other wildlife charities, conservation experts and the general public.

At present, the breeding and trading of lions and other big cats occurs unregulated and unmonitored. This has led to poor keeping conditions for the animals in such facilities.

Regulating the industry will not only seek to prevent the unsustainable trade in lion products, it has the potential

to ensure that workers on predator farms are not exploited through substandard working conditions and insufficient employment packages.

A multi-faceted approach to regulating and reducing the scale of the captive breeding of big cats will in turn, protect South Africa's reputation as a leader in wildlife conservation and enable it to continue to compete with other African nations in the wildlife tourism sector. Without immediate action, South Africa runs the risk of facilitating significant reputational damage.

## 9.1 FOUR PAWS South Africa's key recommendations:

1. As a minimum, FPZA urges the Department of Environmental Affairs to investigate South Africa's captive lion breeding and bone industry, as it has previously promised to do so. This should include an evaluation of the current lion bone export quota of 800 skeletons per year, based on scientific evidence to assess its effects on wild lion populations and investigate potential repercussions on the illegal tiger trade. In addition, it should establish and regulate binding welfare standards in legislation, relevant to the keeping of big cats in captivity to prevent cruelty (described here as any species from the family Felidae, with the exception of house cats, but including hybrids). We urge the Department of Labour to improve binding legislation to protect staff in such facilities from exploitation.
2. To ban all forms of interaction between people and big cats, including but not limited to, cub petting, walking-with interactions, feeding by non-qualified persons and the use of big cats as photo props.

To ultimately phase out and subsequently ban, the keeping and breeding of native and exotic big cats in captive facilities in South Africa. This should be carried out through consultations with independent big cat

3. scientists, veterinarians and NGOs, to find the remaining cat homes in genuine sanctuaries.



# 11. End Notes

- <sup>1</sup> <https://www.lordashcroftwildlife.com/2019/04/27/the-whole-story-about-lion-farming/>
- <sup>2</sup> <https://pmg.org.za/committee-meeting/29435/>
- <sup>3</sup> [https://www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/wildlife/2020/World\\_Wildlife\\_Report\\_2020\\_9July.pdf](https://www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/wildlife/2020/World_Wildlife_Report_2020_9July.pdf)
- <sup>4</sup> <https://bloodlions.org/the-brutal-industry/>
- <sup>5</sup> [https://www.traffic.org/site/assets/files/2474/bones\\_of\\_contention\\_report.pdf](https://www.traffic.org/site/assets/files/2474/bones_of_contention_report.pdf)
- <sup>6</sup> <https://www.thesouthafrican.com/news/south-africa-breeds-lions-and-tigers-for-traditional-medicine/>
- <sup>7</sup> <https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2018-04-23-tigers-being-bred-in-gauteng-backyards-for-petting-and-bone-export/>
- <sup>8</sup> [http://emsfoundation.org.za/wp-content/uploads/FACILITIES-IN-SOUTH-AFRICA-KEEPING-BIG-ASIAN-CATS-IN-CAPTIVITY\\_BAT\\_EMS\\_March2018.pdf](http://emsfoundation.org.za/wp-content/uploads/FACILITIES-IN-SOUTH-AFRICA-KEEPING-BIG-ASIAN-CATS-IN-CAPTIVITY_BAT_EMS_March2018.pdf)
- <sup>9</sup> <https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2020-10-12-its-high-time-sa-shut-down-the-captive-lion-breeding-industry/>
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- <sup>14</sup> <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/11/12/world/asia/china-rhino-tiger-ban.html>
- <sup>15</sup> <https://conservationaction.co.za/resources/reports/captive-lion-breeding-coalition-submission-to-deff/>
- <sup>16</sup> [https://www.daff.gov.za/doaDev/sideMenu/acts/11%20Animal%20Protection%20No71%20\(1962\).pdf](https://www.daff.gov.za/doaDev/sideMenu/acts/11%20Animal%20Protection%20No71%20(1962).pdf)
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- <sup>18</sup> Mellor, D 2016. Updating Animal Welfare Thinking: Moving beyond the “Five Freedoms” towards “A Life Worth Living” <https://www.mdpi.com/2076-2615/6/3/21/htm>
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## South Africa

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