



Mark Carwardine's **AT A GLANCE...**

17

CANNED HUNTING

WHAT IS CANNED HUNTING?

Canned hunting is trophy hunting at its most indefensible: animals are bred in captivity specifically for hunters to shoot them under controlled conditions. A lion, for example, is taken from its cage and released into a small, fenced enclosure where there is very little cover and no chance of escape. A hunter is then driven into the enclosure, right up to the animal, to shoot it with a shotgun, handgun or crossbow. It's akin to shooting a cow in a field.

WHY IS IT SO POPULAR?

The clue is in the name – canned means that the kill is guaranteed, or “in the can”. The animals have no fear of people (most have been hand-reared) and are often drugged to make them even easier game. The hunters shoot from point-blank range and no experience or skill is required. Not only are they guaranteed a trophy to brag about back home, they pay considerably less than for traditional trophy hunting.

WHERE DOES IT HAPPEN?

South Africa is considered the canned hunting capital of the world, with nearly 200 major facilities; more than half of the hunters come from the USA, with significant numbers from Germany, Spain and France. There are also about 1,000 facilities of varying size in 28 states in the USA (roughly half of them in Texas) that breed many species, including lions. Several other countries are involved on a smaller scale.

WHICH SPECIES ARE HUNTED?

The most popular animals are lions. In South Africa alone, there are more than 6,000 captive lions in canned hunting facilities and 800–1,000 of them are shot every year. For comparison, there are fewer than 3,000 wild lions in South Africa. But canned hunters will pay to shoot anything from leopards and tigers to zebras and crocodiles.

WHERE DO THE ANIMALS COME FROM?

Some are privately owned, or come from zoos and circuses, but most are bred specially. They are often held in what are effectively factory farms, in appalling conditions. Cubs, for instance, are taken from their mothers and hand-reared just a few days after birth to make the lionesses breed more quickly. In addition, wild lions are sometimes caught and introduced to maintain a diverse gene pool.

IS CANNED HUNTING LUCRATIVE?

Yes. The animals are commercially exploited from beginning to end. Unwitting volunteers pay to help hand-rear the cubs, in the mistaken belief that they are working in a wildlife sanctuary and the animals will be released into the wild. Unsuspecting tourists pay to pet or walk with the lions. Trophy hunters then pay to kill them and for their heads and skins to be prepared to ship back home. The bones



Many captive lions in South Africa are bred to be shot by hunters.

and other body parts can also be sold – into the traditional Chinese medicine trade.

WHAT ARE THE ARGUMENTS AGAINST IT?

Canned hunting is immoral – even the Professional Hunters' Association of South Africa has come out strongly against it for violating the principle of fair chase. It's cruel – inexperienced hunters rarely kill the animals with a single shot. And it's bad for conservation – by creating a bigger market for lion products and putting a clear price-tag on the head of every wild lion. Far from taking the pressure off wild lions, it has merely opened up a new market for hunters who would not be able to afford a wild hunt.

WHAT NEXT?

Canned hunting is legal and flourishing in both South Africa and the USA, and it's still legal to bring trophies back to many countries. However, since the documentary *Blood Lions* launched a campaign to stop it, Australia and France have banned the import of all lion trophies, and the USA has banned the import of lion trophies from captive populations. The challenge now is to persuade other countries to follow suit and, ultimately, to close all canned hunting ranches. 🐾

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MARK CARWARDINE is a frustrated and frank conservationist.

Every month he demystifies some of the most important issues affecting the world's wildlife and assesses the organisations that protect it.

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