



POSITION PAPER: Trophy Hunts and Canned Hunts of Wild Cats Big Cat Sanctuary Alliance

Position: Oppose

Position summary

The hunting of wild cats for trophies can jeopardize wild species and populations, disrupt ecosystem health, reinforce conservation myths and commodification of exotic felids, drive unsustainable markets for wild cat parts and products, undermine non-consumptive use values associated with wild cats, and cause significant animal suffering.

The Big Cat Sanctuary Alliance **opposes** the recreational killing—specifically through trophy hunts and canned hunts—of wild cats, including both imperiled and non-imperiled species.

Background (IFAW 2016)

“Trophy hunting” is a form of recreational hunting in which the hunter’s objective is to obtain an animal’s carcass, pelt or other body part (such as the head), as a representation of the success of the hunt. The term most commonly refers to the use of firearms or arrows to kill terrestrial animals, but may also be used to describe certain fishing, trapping, and other wildlife capture tactics. Trophy hunting differs from “poaching” because it is legal in certain regions for various species, whereas poaching refers to the illegal hunting and killing of animals.

“Canned hunting” refers to the pursuit and killing of an animal that is confined in an enclosure during the course of the hunt. The canned hunting of big cats is most widely practiced in South Africa, where the animals are bred and raised in captivity and may be exploited for other purposes, such as cub handling or entertainment, prior to being hunted. These animals may also be habituated to humans, sedated, or otherwise placed under conditions that make escape impossible.

Although discussions of trophy hunting often focus on Africa’s “big five” species, both trophy hunts and canned hunts take place around the world, including in the United States. The U.S. is both a source and a destination for animal trophies. In the case of African lions, the U.S. imported more lion trophies than any other nation between 2004 and 2014, with more than 5,250 trophies—1,133 of which were from canned hunts in Africa—imported during that period. Within that decade, at least 11,000 lion trophies and 10,000 leopard trophies were traded globally; mountain lion and tiger trophies also entered global trade, including legal imports to the U.S., though the figures for these species are substantially lower.

The truth behind trophy hunting

Each year trophy hunters kill big cats and other wild animals so they can put their heads, hides, pelts and other body parts on display. Hunters may employ cruel practices such as baiting, using hounds to chase the animals, and trapping. Quick kills are rare, and many animals suffer prolonged, painful deaths. The killing of Cecil, a well-known lion in Zimbabwe, generated international outrage after he was killed by an American trophy hunter in 2015. Cecil was lured with bait, shot with an arrow, and suffered for more than ten hours before his hunters tracked him down and killed him.

There is little clear evidence that trophy hunting in any way supports conservation, the protection of species' habitats and ecosystems, or local economic wellbeing. A 2013 report by Economists At Large cited research by the pro-hunting International Council for Game and Wildlife Conservation and the UN Food and Agriculture Organization which found that African hunting companies contributed only 3% of their revenue to local communities. The vast majority of revenues went to firms, government agencies and individuals located internationally or in national capitals. A 2016 report by the Democratic staff of the U.S. House Natural Resources Committee, "Missing the Mark", looked at the four African countries from which the most hunting trophies are imported into the U.S. and found scant evidence that taxes and fees paid by hunters were being used to help threatened species. The report concluded that trophy hunting may be contributing to the extinction of certain species.

The truth behind canned hunting

Canned hunting violates the principles of fair chase, fuels demand for trophies from the animals' (often imperiled) wild counterparts, and supports an inhumane system of speed-breeding and animal exploitation. The associated welfare challenges are numerous and glaring; many canned hunting facilities, particularly those that provide for lion hunts, operate cub handling and/or lion walks in conjunction with their hunting businesses. In addition to the ethical problems associated with hunting human-habituated animals, the premature separation of mothers—which are forced to have multiple litters per year—and cubs is physically and psychologically damaging to the animals involved. Crowded conditions may facilitate the spread of disease, and this risk is exacerbated by the underdevelopment of cubs' immune systems and regular exposure to human contact and pathogens.

As with trophy hunting, canned hunts ignore the intrinsic value of the animals that are bred, kept in captivity, pursued with no chance of escape, and killed. In addition, evidence of the purported conservation value of canned hunts is very limited. In some cases, canned hunt facilities are stocked through the continuous breeding of animals with limited genetic diversity, so their value as a backstop against extinction is highly suspect. Moreover, such arguments ignore the fact that many species are declining in the wild as a result of habitat loss and other conservation challenges unrelated to reproductive obstacles.

U.S. policy

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) allows for the import of certain hunting trophies, including those from imperiled wildlife. Species protected by the U.S. Endangered Species Act (ESA) and the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES) are subject to specific permitting requirements, but if those requirements are met, trophy imports are permissible (U.S. Fish & Wildlife, 2019). For ESA-listed species, permittees must assert that the import supports species conservation, and issuance is within the discretion of FWS. Oftentimes, the purported conservation benefits are tenuous at best. The BCSA objects to the import of big cat trophies to the U.S., and opposes the issuance of such permits.

Market response

At least 16 airlines have implemented partial or complete bans on the transport of animal trophies on their carriers, some shipping companies have restricted the shipments, and TripAdvisor refuses to offer bookings for trophy hunts involving endangered species, canned hunts, and related inhumane activities (TripAdvisor, 2016, 2018). These responsible corporate policies should serve as an example for other companies.

References

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U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service International Affairs, **Hunting Overseas**. Retrieved from <https://www.fws.gov/international/permits/by-activity/sport-hunted-trophies.html>.
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**For information on the Big Cat Sanctuary Alliance, visit www.BigCatAlliance.org.
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