

Die Beeld

Editor: Barnard Beukman

Email: briewe@beeld.com;

barnard.beukman@media24.com;

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RIGHT TO REPLY:

LION & SAFARI PARK ADVERTORIAL

On behalf of the "[Coalition to Stop the Captive Breeding and Keeping of Lions and Other Big Cats for Commercial Purposes](#)", a coalition of 37 national and international organisations and NGOs, we would like to state our disappointment in the publication of an advertorial for the Lion & Safari Park in Die Beeld's Tuesday 10th March 2020 edition.

The links between the captive breeding of big cats, tourist related wildlife interaction activities, "canned" hunting and the lion bone trade are widely publicised, and the publication of this advertorial speaks to your apparent support of such unscrupulous activities.

Captive lion breeding and associated spin-off industries are morally, socially and ethically unacceptable

The captive lion breeding (CLB) industry, which creates opportunities for lion interactions, is currently legal, but this does not make it ethically, morally or socially acceptable. The CLB industry is considered by many professionals in the conservation and tourism space, both national and international, as unethical. Even prestigious international hunting organisations and pro-sustainable use countries have spoken out against the industry.

In 2016, the IUCN World Conservation Congress issued a Motion (No. 009) urging the Government of South Africa to "terminate the practice of breeding lions in captivity for the purpose of 'canned shooting' through a structured, time-bound process" and to "restrict captive breeding of lions to registered zoos or registered facilities whose documented mandate is as a recognised, registered conservation project."

There is a growing global social movement towards sustainable and responsible travel witnessed on platforms such as [TripAdvisor](#), [Instagram](#), [AirBnB](#) and [Expedia](#). In October 2019, the [New York Times](#) reported on Airbnb's new featured offering of "animal experiences," which will have an ethical focus and will ban any direct contact with wild animals.

In March 2019, the [New York Post](#) reported on a survey revealing that 57% of respondents said they want tour companies to have responsible wildlife policies. The respondents included riding on elephants, swimming with dolphins and *posing with wildlife* for photos on their list of unethical activities that they would not repeat.

As a result of growing a demand for an ethical tourism offering, the Southern African Tourism Services Association (SATSA) developed [guidelines](#) and a [tool](#) to evaluate interactive captive wildlife activities and attractions, with formal support of the [National Department of Tourism](#) (NDT). In conjunction with SA Tourism, SATSA undertook 12 months of rigorous, country-wide stakeholder engagement

workshops in all nine provinces, surveys and feedback sessions. These were open to all SATSA members, as well as the wider tourism industry and other interested and affected parties that intersect with the tourism industry. The need for homegrown animal interaction guidelines was voiced at SATSA's 2017 AGM, and the production of the guidelines and tool has been a 2-year journey.

SATSA's "line in the sand" clearly indicates what is generally believed to be ethically acceptable and what is not, and follows many of the international standards for wildlife tourism, such as the [ANVR guidelines](#). The Association of British Travel Agents (ABTA) released their revised captive wildlife interaction guidelines in December 2019, closely following the SATSA guidelines, but including animal welfare implications.

It is evident that there is a *global* shift in the way the tourism industry and tourists view ethical and responsible travel, which does not equate to a popularity contest, but a global movement that increasingly recognises animals as sentient beings.

Captive bred lions do not retire gracefully

As confirmed by the advertorial, cubs are generally only used in petting enclosures for the first three months of their lives, meaning they need to be replaced four times a year. If a facility has six cubs every three months, they generate 24 cubs per year that are subsequently used for walking activities until the age of one. After one year, these cubs become redundant and are allegedly kept on the property "until they die of natural causes".

Captive lions generally live for at least 15 years, if cared for properly, so any facility that has been in business for this length of time should have in the order of at least 360 lions in their care. To feed an adult lion costs around ZAR6,000 per month, including basic health care such as deworming, ascaricides, and nutritional supplements, if food is not donated. Hence, the cost for the lifetime care of 360 lions can easily amount to ZAR26 million annually, excluding medical procedures, labour, enclosure building and maintenance.

At such a vast expense, the lifetime care of adult lions that have outgrown their interaction role and are thus no longer "economically" viable, can never be a sustainable business model. The question needs to be asked, what has happened to all these lions? There is no evidence of the presence of such large numbers of "retired lions" at any of these petting facilities.

In comparison, the five true sanctuaries in South Africa ([Drakenstein Lion Park](#), [Jukani Wildlife Sanctuary](#), [LionsRock Big Cat Sanctuary](#), [Panthera Africa Big Cat Sanctuary](#) and [Born Free Shamwari Big Cat Sanctuary](#)) hold less than 200 big cats in total. These sanctuaries provide a forever home to the animals in their care and believe that the only way to do this responsibly and sustainably is by limiting their numbers. Hence their policy of no breeding, no trading and no interaction.

Industry self-regulation and welfare travesties

Where do the cubs in petting enclosures come from? The sad truth is that these lion cubs are bred in captivity by lion farmers, specifically for a life of exploitation. Far from being abandoned by their mum or orphaned (as is often told to high-paying "volunteers"), lionesses have their cubs forcibly removed within hours or a few days of birth, so that the cubs can be hand-reared and become habituated to humans.

Due to the lack of explicit legislative requirements, the CLB industry has promulgated its own '[norms and standards](#)' through the South African Predator Association (SAPA). It is notable, however, that these are unenforceable, voluntary, and insufficient in content. Further, it is unclear who subscribes to these standards, whether they are implemented consistently, and what the real value of such standards are. The [recent animal welfare travesties on the farm of a SAPA member](#) (Mr Jan Steinman),

currently under investigation and facing cruelty charges due to severe neglect, demonstrates the so-called value of “self-regulation” through industry standards.

No conservation value

In a [letter](#) addressed to Secretary Ryan Zinke, United States Secretary of the Interior, countering arguments made by SAPA requesting the lifting of the United States Fish and Wildlife Services (USFWS) ban on the importation of captive-origin lion trophies, the African Lion Conservation Community stated that in South Africa, free ranging lions have been down-listed from Vulnerable to Least Concern conservation status, which they attribute to “ongoing, concerted conservation action and concerted reintroductions, all of which have no connections with the captive lion industry”. In addition, the most prolific threats to wild lions are a lack of safe and suitable space, and conflict with people, not issues related to reproduction or cub-survivorship.

Are lion cubs in captivity better off than their wild counterparts? The letter adds that captive bred lions are kept in small, intensively-managed enclosures - land management that in “no way contributes to biodiversity conservation, or supports claims of benefits for mesocarnivores and veld rehabilitation, linked with lion breeding”.

Adapting business models according to global trends

The advertorial states that animal activists forget about “unintended consequences that may have a very serious impact on the welfare of local people”. The claim is often made that if facilities stop cub petting, many employees are in danger of losing their jobs with direct implications to their extended families.

Any business that wants to protect both its financial future and its employees, has a responsibility to adapt its business model to changes in the economy, customer behaviour, competitors’ innovation and global trends, or accept the consequences of their inaction.

Change is never black and white. Revenue earned from captive wildlife interactions is generally only a part of the total business income. There are examples of facilities in South Africa that have financially healthy businesses without petting. Organisations like SATSA have in fact offered to engage with those facilities who need to adapt their business model to facilitate change in a meaningful and sustainable manner.

Threat to brand SA

In an address to delegates at the 2019 Africa’s Travel Indaba, [President Cyril Ramaphosa](#) referred to tourism as the “new gold”. With a growth rate of 7% in tourism in Africa in 2018, and with the President acknowledging that “*Modern tourists are very discerning because they are spoilt for choice when it comes to choosing destinations. We live in the age of AirBnB and TripAdvisor. All these new technologies are opening up new opportunities and competition*”, wildlife interaction facilities should not be allowed to risk South Africa’s reputation as an authentic, wild, responsible and ethical travel destination.

Constitutional Ruling

The South African Constitutional Court recently endorsed Professor David Bilchitz’ view of conservation outlined in the SATSA guidelines, holding that the “*integrative approach correctly links the suffering of individual animals to conservation, and illustrates the extent to which showing*

respect and concern for individual animals reinforces broader environmental protection efforts. Animal welfare and animal conservation together reflect two intertwined values.”¹

In closing, we wish to bring to your attention the [responses](#) by the Minister, Departments and Industry specifically regarding the CLB Resolutions, in response to a [report](#) tabled by the Parliamentary Portfolio Committee on Environmental Affairs (PPCEA) after a two-day Colloquium on Captive Lion Breeding for Hunting in August 2018:

a) Parliament was instructed to put an end to the commercial exploitation of lions through the implementation of the National Assembly Resolutions.

b) The CLB issue has generated “huge international outcry” and “it is tainting South Africa’s brand image from abroad”.

We humbly ask that you denounce support for the Lion & Safari Park in line with global transformation and tourism guidelines, to ensure that tourism growth continues unabated in South Africa and remains untarnished by a minority captive wildlife industry.

Yours sincerely,

COALITION TO STOP THE CAPTIVE BREEDING AND KEEPING OF LIONS AND OTHER BIG CATS FOR COMMERCIAL PURPOSES

¹ *National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals v Minister of Justice and Constitutional Development and Another* 2016 ZA SACC 46