

CANNED LION HUNTING

—A National Disgrace—

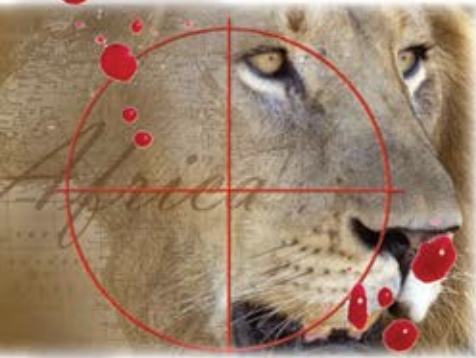
— Dr. Peter Hammond

A man wearing an orange baseball cap and a bright orange long-sleeved shirt is shown in profile, aiming a dark rifle. He is also wearing a tan vest. The background is a blurred green field with a large white target symbol. The text is overlaid on the right side of the image.

Canned lion hunting has caused controversy in South Africa. The removal of wild animals from their natural habitat for captive breeding purposes, in order to mass produce living targets for wealthy foreigners who want to shoot these magnificent creatures, has profound moral implications.



"They are quick to hurt and kill; they leave ruin and destruction wherever they go." Romans 3:15



CHRIS MERCER IS A RETIRED ADVOCATE of the High Court of Zimbabwe, with 20 years experience in the law. He is also a founder of the Kalahari Raptor and Predator Centre, a 600-hectare wildlife sanctuary near Kuruman which since 1998 has been rescuing and rehabilitating caracals, impala, eland, eagles, owls, vultures, bat-eared fox, jackals, porcupines and other "beautiful, intelligent and affectionate animals." Along with rescuing and caring for orphaned and injured wildlife, Chris and Bev were also involved in environmental education, with hundreds of school children coming through the centre each year.

As my family and I drove to meet Chris and Bev near Wilderness, I read up on some of his background. Chris Mercer is a retired trial lawyer, the author of: 'For the Love of Wildlife' and 'Canned Lion Hunting – A National Disgrace' and the leader of the campaign against canned hunting (www.cannedlion.co.za).

We were warmly welcomed by Chris and Bev and their furry family friends. It was a joy to see their photographs and film clips of wonderful wildlife rescued, rehabilitated and released back into the wild.

However, while wildlife welfare and rehabilitation is their passion, Chris wanted to enlighten us about the scandal of canned lion hunting in South Africa. He showed us shocking film clips of magnificent male lions lying on the ground, with a fence plainly visible behind them, where they had been shot by some 'trophy hunter.'

"Of course, we didn't take any of these pictures ourselves," he explained. "These are all video clips taken by the hunters themselves, some of which we downloaded off their own advertising websites promoting this cruelty."

Chris explained: "Canned hunting is the hunting of an animal where the target is unfairly prevented from escaping the hunter, because of either physical constraints (fenced in) or mental constraints (habituation to humans)."

But surely no one would be shooting some captive or tame lion? What possible honour or challenge could any hunter find in that? And surely that cannot be legal? What is our government doing about this?

Chris handed me his book 'Canned Lion Hunting' and his submission to the government. "The new hunting regulations are nothing but an elaborate public relations exercise. There was never any intention to stop the cruelty,

so what we have is a formula of pious, unenforceable aspirations, all designed to stifle public criticism. The result is pain and death for the animal and the plundering of our wildlife. There is a major moral issue here, which is being studiously ignored."

"The new regulations certainly look very impressive on paper, but just look who is going to enforce them – the very same conservation officials who have caused the problem in the first place! As Einstein reminds us: 'Problems can never be solved at the level at which they were created'. Nothing less than sweeping out of our conservation services all the hunting thugs who wear conservation uniforms will stop the cruelty. Expecting such officials to enforce the new restrictions is as absurd as asking Al Capone's henchmen to monitor his activities. Employing these hunters in conservation is like appointing serial rapists to look after a girls' hostel! This is simply industry self-regulation in a new disguise. So, far from stopping the cruelty, the new regulations seek to

extend the grisly business of killing captive wildlife for profit to black empowerment groups."

Chris showed me more documentation and photographic evidence. "There is a con in SA conservation, they are all involved. Just look at the fragmentation of our conservation structures, the flawed democratic process, the loop holes and loose standards, the cronyism, incompetence, ethical illiteracy and the culture of cruelty."

Chris pointed out that Kenya banned trophy hunting 30 years ago. Recently, when hunters started buying politicians and sought to lift the ban, he was invited up with other wildlife conservation experts to give submissions. "All the Kenyan government officials and concerned citizens were there. And they listened. Kenya has a democratic process. What we have here in South Africa is a complete sham. There is a refusal to address public concerns. They impose expensive bureaucratic burdens upon legitimate wildlife rehabilitation centres and sanctuaries,

"A good man takes care of his animals, but wicked men are cruel to theirs."

Proverbs 12:10



but they do not stop the canned hunters. They are delivering our remaining wildlife heritage into the hands of the very people who have damaged it. The conservation service is notoriously corrupted. These new laws will do nothing to stop the institutionalised cruelty to wildlife. They are importing misery and bloodshed to our animals and corruption to our conservation services."

Chris pointed out that his campaign against canned hunting has faced enormous opposition "sometimes from surprising quarters, including some authorities and conservationists."

Keley Grimm and Gregory Mitchell of Enkosini Wildlife Sanctuary (a registered South Africa trust and animal protection project of the Lion Foundation) rescued 8 lions from the canned hunting industry, then had to engage in a long court battle to defend these lions' rights to live out their lives in comfort and protection at a large fenced piece of wilderness. The Mpumalanga Parks Board refused to grant the Trust the permits needed to keep the lions and Enkosini, after protracted litigation, had to appeal to the Supreme Court.

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produce living targets for wealthy foreigners who want to shoot these magnificent creatures, has profound moral implications. Chris Mercer asked: "Why has the church remained silent on this issue?"

Chris points out the story of a dedicated Christian Afrikaans farming family, the Van der Merwes, who he writes about in 'For the Love of Wildlife', that have done much to rescue and rehabilitate wildlife. He asks: "What makes the Van der Merwe family the exception rather than the rule? We would like to understand where the church and congregations stand on the way we exercise dominion over animals. Indeed, we would like the church to support

our efforts to get captive breeding and canned hunting banned."

Chris would like to see Christians writing to their Synod representatives to ask them to see this presentation on the canned lion hunting scandal. "We hope to see all Christian churches speaking out against this cruelty to animals."

Other wildlife conservationists have come out publically in support of Chris Mercer's stand:

Beryl Scott, National Chairman of Beauty Without Cruelty (an international animal welfare organisation active in South Africa for over 27 years) wrote: "We are particularly appalled at the idea of

confining animals in fenced off areas with the intention of killing them. This is not only morally reprehensible, but it is highly unethical."

Gareth Patterson, well known African environmentalist and author of 'Last of the Free' and 'With My Soul Amongst Lions', has written: "The trophy hunting of endangered species is not only ethically and morally wrong, but causes great ecological implications... and erosion of the overall genetic diversity of the particular species."

Louise Joubert, of South Africa's Sanwild Trust, has said: "In the light of the unethical and illegal hunting of many endangered species, the global community must force South Africa to reconsider its conservation responsibilities."

Paul Hart, of the Drakenstein Lion Park, has written: "What is alarming about the proposed legislation is that it is to come into effect with seemingly no regard for issues raised in the public participation process or the laws that govern this process. The concept of hunting captive born predators as 'sustainable use' is fraud." Mr Hart points out that many international animal welfare organisations will support a call for a tourism boycott of South Africa should canned hunting continue. This action would negatively impact on all South Africans.

"How long will the land lie parched and the grass in every field be withered? Because those who live in it are wicked, the animals and birds have perished." Jeremiah 12:4

In light of the clear teaching of Scripture concerning Creation and mankind's responsibility for it, we should treat animals with the love and concern of those who must give an account of our conduct to God. We need to recognise that the welfare and protection of animals is an essential part of our Christian responsibility. We must do all that we can to secure the well-being of all animals who, with ourselves, inhabit the earth, and so fulfil the creative joy and purposes of Almighty God. ■

"Speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves. Protect the rights of all who are helpless."
Proverbs 31:8

SO, WHAT CAN WE DO ABOUT THIS?

If your church or organisation is interested to find out more about canned hunting in South Africa, Chris and Bev Mercer are available to make a presentation with supporting slides and video. After the presentation the subject would then be opened up to the floor for discussion. Their book would be also be available (R150 each) at these functions.

For further information, please contact Chris Mercer at:
Campaign Against Canned Hunting
P O Box 356, Wildemess, 6560, South Africa
Email: chrisandbev@mwweb.co.za
Website: www.cannedlion.co.za

