"Blatant Untruths" – "Nowhere to hide: Canned big cat hunting explained" (News24)

by Ron Thomson | in In the news | on October 11, 2019

The Hunting of Captive-bred lions.

I found your article entitled "**Nowhere to hide: Canned big cat hunting explained**" (News24) – compiled by Riaan Grobler – disturbing because it contained so many "blatant untruths". When I write a magazine article I try to tell the truth. Seemingly the truth doesn't matter in this modern day and age!

Nevertheless, I have my own personal preference opinions about the Captive Lion Breeding Industry (CBL). I, too, disapprove of lion cub-petting tourism; I disapprove of tourists 'walking with lions' simply because it is such a crazily dangerous thing to do; and I disapprove of lion cub owners recruiting overseas students to look after their so-called "orphaned lions".

As for the rest, I must tell you that during the month-long CBL survey (that I conducted last year) I was instructed by some people to condemn the CBL industry. Others told me I should consider it. However, the conclusion my colleague and I came to – after we had seen a good cross-section of the industry – was that although we did not agree with everything that we experienced, we found no good reason to condemn the industry. So, we recommended to government that it should nurture the CBL industry; and that it should guide it towards achieving a state of excellence. And now, 15 months after we completed that survey, I have had no reason to change my mind.

I am astounded and surprised, however, by the blatant lies that Four Paws and The Humane Society International, told your reporter and which News 24 accepted, and reported upon, as being gospel.

There were many practices carried out during the formative stages of the CBL Industry's development that were unsavoury. One such practice was the shooting of lions in small fenced-enclosures. Some were actually shot through the wire fences.

I believe nobody who does such a thing can call himself a "hunter". However, it happened, and that practice was called "canned lion hunting". Since then, however, canned lion hunting has been declared illegal; and, today, reference to those days are never mentioned by the captains of the industry. So, to keep dragging the term "canned lion hunting" into every discussion on the subject is, in my opinion, bad taste. It is tantamount to using the "K" word anywhere in Africa.

It is not true that the cubs used in the petting trade – which Mr Grobler says have been *'habituated and have lost their fear for humans"* – are later hunted. And no lions are drugged before they are presented to a client for hunting. Lions selected for hunting are carefully matured outside any kind of close-association with man. And in only one year were 800 CBL lions hunted (not 'on average over the last 10 years')

It might well be, however, that the lion cubs used for petting – after they have out-grown that purpose – are later used for the lion bone trade. Nevertheless, I have no problem supporting the lion bone trade provided the killing is done humanely. Which it is! Rearing lions for the lion bone trade is not much different to rearing beef cattle for human consumption.

Would I hunt a captive-bred lion? No! No, I wouldn't! But then I have had my fill of WILD lion hunting in my younger days. Nevertheless, I can understand why people who have never hunted a lion will be attracted to hunting a CBL lion. So, I support CBL lion hunting… ranch lion hunting… call it what you like. And I might add that when a fully mature CBL lion is pushed hard by a pursuing hunter, it will be infinitely more dangerous than hunting a wild lion under the same circumstances.

What I can tell you… Surprise! Surprise!… is that the CBL farmers have a great love for their lions; as do cattle farmers love their cattle yet still they send them to the abattoir. And there is no 'cruelty' employed in the farming methods used to raise lions. Furthermore, today, cubs are left with their mothers until they are weaned at 4 to 6 months of age. And the lion farmers go to a lot of trouble to prepare the lions they have selected to be hunted; and they make sure that the lion hunting experience they offer to their clients is as close to the real McCoy' (to a genuine wild-lion-hunt) as they can make it. And don't think that it is just a 'walk in the park'.

In South Africa it is illegal to hunt a lion, over a bait from a hide – as hunters do in Tanzania. In South Africa it is obligatory to carry out what is called the "walk-and-stalk" method of hunting. The hunter, and his tracker, have to pick up last-night's-tracks of their intended quarry, and they follow those tracks all day long until they catch up with it. And the lion can walk wherever it wants to go in its 1000 (up to 10 000) ha free-range hunting camp. One hunter I spoke to, who had just come off such a hunt at dusk, took off his leg-dependant and informed me that, since dawn that day, he had walked 32 kilometres in pursuit of his lion; and they had seen it but once during the day. He got it the next day.

If people have not grown up with a rifle in one hand and a fishing rod in the other, it is understandable if they have no concept of what 'huntin', shootin' an fishin'' is all about. And, hunting is an instinct which mankind will ignore at his peril. If people don't know what they are talking about, therefore, they have no right to condemn hunting.

The Humane Society International and Four Paws are both died-in-the-wool animal rights/ NGOs whose purpose in life is to ABOLISH all animal uses by man. For those of us who strongly approve the sustainable utilisation of 'living resources' for the benefit is mankind, animal rightists are an abomination whose fraudulent opinions on this subject are not worthy of societal consideration.

The Author's profile: Ron Thomson

I am an 80-year-old ex-game warden with 24 years' service in what is now the Zimbabwean Department of National Parks and Wildlife Management. My last post in Zimbabwe was that of Provincial Game Warden-in-charge of Hwange National Park (one of Africa's biggest and most prestigious game reserves). I then served for one year as the Chief Nature Conservation Officer, Ciskei, in South Africa. And I was Director of the Bophuthatswana National Parks Board for three years. I then operated, for another three years, as a professional hunting guide in the Great Karoo where I took out international hunters on trophy hunting adventures, but I discovered that that was not my forte.

I am a university-trained Field Ecologist; was a member of the British Institute of Biology (London) and a Chartered Biologist for the European Union for 20 years. And for the last 30 years I have operated as an investigative wildlife journalist. See my website: www.ronthomsonshuntingbooks.co.za.

I am now the CEO of an organisation called THE TRUE GREEN ALLIANCE (TGA), the purpose of which is to educate the general public about the principles and practices of wildlife management, and the wisdom of sustainably utilising the earth's living resources for the benefit of mankind. See the TGA website: www.mahobhoh.org.

I am the author of 15 wildlife management (conservation) and big game hunting books; including five text books on wildlife management (some of which are still in use in South African Universities); and I am the author of hundreds of outdoor magazines (and newspaper) articles on the subject of wildlife management and big game hunting. And I am still writing.

My big game hunting experience is vast. All my big game hunting was conducted in my capacity as a government game ranger – when I hunted problem big-game animals extensively. I am NOT and never was a trophy hunter (although I support Trophy Hunting as an integral and important part of wildlife management). I have never purchased a hunting licence. I have never had to, because hunting dangerous big game problem animals was part of my job description.

My experience with lions! I have shot a great many stock-killing lions over the years – and have hunted down and killed six man-eating lions, too. During the whole month of June 2018, together with another TGA colleague, we carried out a survey of the Captive Breeding of Lions Industry (CBL) in South Africa when we visited some 40 lion breeding establishments in the Free-state, North-West Province and the Limpopo Province. Our report on this survey was entitled: "Searching for the Truth." I have no business or emotional connections with safari hunting, with meat-hunting; or with trophy hunting; but with 60 years in 'the business of managing wildlife in our national parks, and problem animal hunting" I have a very good appreciation of the facts surrounding the CBL controversy; and I have read a lot about what other people have had to say, too. My understanding of all these issues is interpreted on the basis if my understanding of science-based wildlife management practices and principles.

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