Captive Breeding of Lions and The Hunting of Captive-Bred Lions, in South Africa

by **Ron Thomson** / in **TGA Public Position Statements** / on **December 20, 2017**

THE TRUE GREEN ALLIANCE – A Public Guidance Position Statement

The captive-bred lion hunting (a.k.a. *canned lion hunting)* controversy had an unfortunate consequence for the professional hunting industry in South Africa in 2017. Two factions arose comprising:

> (1) Those professional hunters who want to stop the Captive Breeding of Lions (CBL) and to stop what they call the *unethical hunting* of captive-bred lions (also called Ranch Lion Hunting – RLH); and
>
> (2) Those professional hunters who wish to create better norms and standards for both CBL and RLH – so that they can continue to offer pseudo lion-hunting experiences to their overseas clients.

Both these positions have merit.

THE CAPTIVE-BRED LION HUNTING
(A.K.A. CANNED LION HUNTING) CONTROVERSY
TGA

The differing points of view, however, caused a splinter group of the old Professional Hunting Association of South Africa (PHASA) to form an entirely new professional hunting organisation called Custodians of Professional Hunting and Conservation South Africa (CPHCSA). The new organisation largely comprises *the old school* founding members of the original PHASA, many of whom are past presidents. The members of the CPHCSA aspire to practice only the highest of moral standards in professional and *ethical* hunting.

THE CBL/RLH CONTROVERSY

No director of the TRUE GREEN ALLIANCE (TGA) likes the idea of hunting *canned* lions (as the practice has been portrayed in the media). However, the TGA recognises that this reflects only the directors' individual personal preferences which do not give them the right to demand the prohibition of CBL or RLH. They are also reluctant to get involved in the domestic affairs of any part of the wildlife industry – but, in this case, the TGA hopes to bring objective understanding to both sides of the professional hunting dispute; and to the general public.

The AR and the press have portrayed the practice of *canned lion hunting* as the shooting-to-death of tame lions in small enclosures; often through wire fences; and/or after the lions have been drugged. This has been refuted by many people in the CBL/RLH business. And because the animal rightist (AR) NGOs fabricate most of the stories they use in their propaganda campaigns, none of their utterances can be trusted. This state of affairs, therefore, deserves to be properly and objectively investigated and reported upon in the public domain.

The TGA wishes to record its belief that the term *canned lion hunting* was contrived by animal rightist NGOs to denigrate the CBL/RLH business – but with the ultimate intention of persuading society to support the abolition of ALL hunting. This initiative is not home-grown. It is driven by NGOs in the U.S.A., the U.K. and the EU.

The AR communities in these First World countries have very greatly achieved their objective because the *canned lion* label has given hunting-in-general a bad name. This is a fact about which the TGA is deeply concerned.

The TGA has no expertise in CBL or RLH. Nevertheless, it supports all kinds of what is euphemistically called *true hunting* – provided the off-take is sustainable; and provided the killing of the animals is carried out humanely. We do not accept that the killing action, itself, constitutes cruelty. For an action to be *cruel* requires that there be an *intention* to cause *pain and suffering* and that is not what hunting is about. Quite the contrary!

It is necessary at the outset, therefore, that the TGA explains just who the animal rightists are; what their philosophy is; and how their doctrine is in conflict with the principles and practices of science-based wildlife management. To this end, you are referred to: **The TGA's Public Guidance Position Statement on the Animal Rights Doctrine**. It is suggested that you read this document NOW – before proceeding further with this report.

The TGA recognises that hunting is an essential management tool in the harvesting of WILD *products of the land* (wild animals). Indeed, there is no other way to do this. Hunting is also a hereditary human pursuit and a wide-spread recreational social practice. It is easily justified and it is reasonable, supportable, and when practised within the law and with common sense, it satisfies man's residual primordial instincts. And it is legal!

Psychologists tell us that man has a natural instinct to hunt; and that hunting is good for man's psyche. They say that man attracts physical and mental disorders when he is denied the right to follow his instincts. Furthermore, research in America suggests that there is a direct link between the extent to which people in human communities hunt, and the relative degrees of violent crime that occur within these communities. The statistics indicate that where pro-rata annual hunting license sales are high, the incidence of violent crime is low; and vice versa. This refutes the ARs' statement that hunting is an archaic pursuit that has no place in a modern and civilised society.

There are just as many people who enjoy hunting as there are people who are repelled by it. The fact that the ARs disapprove, however, does not qualify them to disburse any kind of moral or learned advice on the subject of hunting; nor does it give them the right to do so.

The ARs particularly disapprove of *trophy* hunting. Nevertheless, it is a justifiable pursuit; and contrary to the doom and gloom predictions of the ARs – that trophy hunting reduces the quality of population gene pools – world record horn lengths are still being exceeded or equalled every year. This proves the professional hunters' persistent assertion that by the time a trophy male achieves world record rank, it has long ago passed-on its genes to the next generation. It is probably also true to say that when a male animal achieves world-record trophy dimensions it is too old to breed.

There are still trophy hunters who seek animals with the biggest and the best trophies but there are a great many more who are quite happy to collect *representative* (average size) animals. Most hunters, today, participate in the sport because they enjoy the hunting experience and because it is *their* way of communing with nature. So, the meanings of the terms *trophy* and *trophy hunter* are somewhat smudged in the modern day and age; and the denigrations that the ARs heap on the heads of today's trophy hunters are grossly unfair and misplaced.

Keeping with the erosion of the gene pool theme, in today's world, population-gene-pools can be improved by introducing high-quality captive-bred animals to wild populations. Modern wildlife management practices have thus opened a whole new range of possibilities in the conservation of wild animal populations.

Finally trophy hunting – as opposed to biltong hunting or venison hunting – is still a preferable option because the higher prices that overseas hunters are prepared to pay for trophy quality animals, adds to the game rancher's profit margins which are very important if the economic viability of the game ranching industry is to be maintained.

The fact that the ARs disapprove of hunting is not an issue. Everybody is entitled to his or her opinion but personal preferences cannot and must not be allowed to dictate science-based wildlife management practices.

The TGA, therefore, fully supports all forms of hunting providing the take-off is sustainable. So, the establishment and the maintenance of all kinds of hunting associations – like PHASA and CPHCSA – are acceptable and desirable. It is through such associations that their members can be guided towards practising disciplined and acceptable behaviour.

ABOUT ETHICS

To say that trophy hunting or RLH is *unethical* takes the use of the word *ethics* beyond its limits. Pronouncements on ethics, ethical principles and morality, therefore, is best left to the philosophers. Suffice it to say there are narrow philosophical boundaries for the correct use of the word.

There is a considerable misuse of the word, too, particularly when one's personal preferences are construed to be ethical principles. It's also an unfortunate fact that this kind of *mind game* and *distortion of the truth* is a craft at which the animal rightists are experts. Their objective is to portray all animal killings as immoral, unethical and cruel. To do this, they play on the word *killing* and give it an anthropomorphic notion, as if one is contravening one of the Ten Christian Commandments: *Thou shalt not Kill!*

Hunters have allowed themselves to be suckered into using the term *ethics* when expressing their principles or personal preferences and this plays into the hands of the AR anti-hunters.

Instead of discussing *ethical hunting*, therefore, it would perhaps be better to remove all ambiguity by simply describing and prescribing *acceptable principles of behaviour*; and these can be defined in the articles of the various hunting associations. Don't be surprised, however, if they differ greatly. But that, too, is O.K. What should be sought after are benchmark disciplines for each association – and there is no reason why they should all be the same. To glibly say, however, that *we practice ethical hunting* is open to far too much emotion-charged and personal-preference argument.

When acceptable principles for standards of behaviour are properly and separately defined in their Articles of Association, hunters can then decide to which association they wish to affiliate. And they will choose the one which suits their own hunting philosophy the best. PHASA discovered this truth in 2017.

CBL/RLH – IN RELATION TO WILD LION POPULATIONS

There are a number of issues associated with CBL/RLH that need to be exposed and openly discussed.

First of all, the practices of CBL and RLH in South Africa has nothing whatsoever to do with wild lion management; or the growing predicament in which many wild lions find themselves, across the continent, as a consequence of Africa's huge human population explosion. There are currently some 750 million people living in sub-Saharan Africa. This number will have increased to over 4 billion by 2100! So, the predicament that unprotected lion populations face today is going to get worse, not better. Man would be foolish not to take this state of affairs into his wildlife management considerations.

Wild animals – including lions – can only be managed population by population. They cannot be managed as a species – and the lion, as a species, is NOT endangered. Indeed, the much-vaunted *endangered species* concept is a fallacy.

Many lion populations that are living outside protected areas might well be UNSAFE (low in number, declining and vulnerable), therefore, because of ever-increasing human encroachment on their habitats. And many of these UNSAFE lion populations may, over time, become locally extinct, but that fact does NOT impinge on the generally SAFE status of the species.

The long-term future for lions in Africa rests in the continent's protected areas: in Africa's game reserves; in its declared hunting safari areas; and in its national parks. This is where lions can live out their lives without conflict with humans. As long as these areas remain secure there is no fear that lions will ever become extinct. All that lions need to survive, and to thrive, is the maintenance of a number of sufficiently large protected areas with abundant prey bases. With that foundation, lions – which are prolific breeders – will organise themselves into many different SAFE populations (optimum in number and breeding well) which are quite capable of surviving on their own forever.

Where expanding lion populations disperse out of a protected area – consequent upon there being a saturated lion population within the game reserve – and the escaping *nomads* (which is what dispersing lions are called) come into conflict with man outside the reserve – and they are killed – society must accept that these animals can be safely sacrificed because they are *surplus* to their SAFE parental population inside the reserve. The loss of dispersing nomads, therefore, should be accepted as a natural process of population regulation. The maintenance of the remaining dynamically-stable lion populations *inside the game reserves* is really all that matters.

Surplus nomadic lions can be safely hunted on the peripheries of our national parks – without incurring any detrimental effect on the resident lion populations inside the parks. This has been amply demonstrated outside the boundaries of Hwange National Park in Zimbabwe. Indeed, the Hwange model is one that could and should be emulated everywhere in Africa. The TGA strongly supports and encourages such controlled and regulated wild lion hunting.

Even if they understand these realities, animal rightist NGOs constantly, in a frenetic display of urgency, pester society with the need to raise funds to save every lion that comes under threat from man – purposefully misnaming them *endangered species.* This is the ARs' commercial paradigm. This is how they make money from a gullible public to fuel their insatiable appetite for it.

NGOs that wish to save Africa's lions would be much better advised to raise funds to finance the annual administration costs of Africa's many very beautiful national parks that lack adequate finance for maintenance and development; and to control poaching.

Lions living in such national parks – when they are well managed – have a much better chance of permanent survival than have so-called *rescued* nomads. Nomads are pushed out of their parental home-ranges as a consequence of one of nature's immutable imperatives. They are evicted by dominant adults because their parental territories are saturated – which means all surplus lions are at great risk (from other lions) inside protected areas. One has to ask the question, therefore, where does one release a rescued nomad when lion populations in all the national parks are in a similar state?

The animal rightist NGOs, however, will not contemplate such a proposal because it is not their purpose to save lions or national parks at all; but to use greatly exaggerated stories about the predicaments and/or terrible deaths of nomadic lions, well-padded with maximum emotion, to raise funds to fill their own NGO coffers.

CBL/RLH IN SOUTH AFRICA

In facing realities the following is evident:

(1) There is no critical difference between managing a farm in Africa with cattle, with sheep and/or with goats – or with lions. The only requirement for success in any such farming venture is that there are markets into which the farm produce can be sold. With respect to CBL/RLH there are two products on sale:

(i) lion body parts, including bones, and

(ii) what the CBL/RLH industry calls *hunting opportunities*.

(2) The professional hunters in the new CPHCSA object to the use of the term *hunting* in RLH activities; and they have identified the use of the phrase *canned lion hunting* as casting a serious blight on what they call *ethical hunting*. And they are right! It does just that. And that is why they would like to see the practices of CBL and RLH totally abolished.

(3) John Rance senior, in his personal capacity – before he became a director of TGA – wrote about this subject a decade ago when the South African government invited public comment on the proposal to legislate against canned lion hunting. He suggested that the hunting fraternity – many of whom believe strongly in certain purist principles involving hunting – should consider legally *registering* the term *hunting* to distinguish it from killing or poaching. In his opinion, if they had done that it would have rendered it illegal to commercially use the term *hunting* for activities which did not comply with the registered principles that embody true hunting. It makes sense that if one can take such drastic action as legislating against certain hunting practices, as the Minister (unsuccessfully) did, it should be possible to legally brand the term.

- In his attempt to be fair, Rance went on to say that *"it is a personal preference"* (to dislike the CBL/RHL industry); but *"one's personal preferences gives no one the right to condemn or to call for the outlawing of such activities".* He further commented that *"no matter how one tries to sex-up personal preferences into ethical principles, the fact remains that provided CBL/RHL activities do not prejudice biological diversity (which, he maintains, is the only truly ethical principle involved) in the killing or breeding of animals, there is nothing ethically or intrinsically wrong with what those (CBL/RLH) folk are doing. And what makes everyone* (who criticises the CBL/RLH industry) *wrong, is that instinctively we all know that."*
- Rance goes on to say: *"It seems the main reason that most hunters support the* (call for a CLB/RHL*) ban is because so-called* canned hunting *gives true hunting a bad reputation and because, rather than face the onslaught of the bunny huggers full on, which we should be doing, we choose the easy way out by appeasing them."* His rationale is

sound because he goes on to say that: *"Banning (*the CBL/RLH industry*) is the thin end of the wedge. It's like appeasing the gun-ban freaks. Once they win this one, they'll be onto the next. We cannot appease such people. The only way is to tackle them head-on and one of the tactics could be to ensure such practices (*as the CBL/RLH*) are NOT outlawed and that they remain in place as a cause for the animal rightists to fling themselves against."* Because, when they *"have succeeded with the easy target* (CBL/RLH), *they will attack all other kinds of hunting."*

***NB:* Hunters and game ranchers should be cautious about passing negative judgement on (or not supporting) any legal facet of the wildlife industry with which they are not themselves involved. In South Africa, ALL the wild animals in the wildlife industry are contained within game- proof fences, so like the CBL lions, their hunting can ALL be similarly called *canned*. So, if ever the CBL/RLH industry collapses – due to AR pressure supported (maybe?) by dissident hunters and game ranchers – the AR NGOs will have multiple choices with regards to which domino in the canned hunting field they decide to destroy next. Canned rhinos? Canned put-and-take impalas? The list is endless! (RT)**

In this respect, the wildlife industry should not forget that dog-eared old maxim:

United we stand. Divided we fall. (RT)

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- Rance's rhetoric is profound. He says: *"As for* (the) *canned breeding* (of lions), *far from being undesirable, it provides innovative employment and valuable forex inflow. Do we think those voiceless people who find themselves unemployed support the ban? And how many of South Africa's Afrocentric majority would support the ban if they knew the true facts?"*
- Rance again: *"There is nothing ethically wrong with the harvesting of animal products for the benefit of mankind, provided this does not compromise conservation principles. Given this, there is nothing ethically wrong with killing animals, even to the extent that it matters not how this is done.*
- *"It will be a great tragedy IF, finally – inevitably if society continues behaving like it is doing now – the animal rightists win their war to have hunting banned completely… as they succeeded in doing with fox hunting in the UK; and with the hunting of grizzly bears in British Columbia, Canada. What will be worse is if lions end up with no value at all and they become not worth breeding or protecting; or if their value and the demand for their body parts increases to the extent that wild lion populations in our national parks are poached into extinction. And as bad as that might be, it will be a serious indictment on society if the God-given right of a minority to ply their trade, is denied through force of majority opinion – especially if that state of affairs came about because of society's appeasement of the illogical demands of the animal rights brigade".*

(4). Professor Wouter van Hoven (Centre for Wildlife Management, University of Pretoria) – in the Game and Hunt magazine, November 2009 – stated:

- *"It is not in the interests of the conservation of free-ranging lions to outlaw the hunting of lions on game ranches. What should rather be outlawed is the hunting of free-ranging lions. We are* canning *the wrong lions*;
- *"In 2008, 1050 CBL lions were hunted on South African game ranches. If we force this client base elsewhere, the few remaining free-ranging lions in southern Africa will be put under severe pressure; and also those in protected areas. Lion conservation will not be served."*
- Van Hoven concludes by saying: *"The hunting of captive-bred lions has got nothing to do with ecology, conservation or wildlife management".*

NB: Whilst John Rance's and Wouter van Hoven's comments are not designed to portray the TGA's opinion on this matter, they do reflect unemotional logic from viewpoints with no commercial vested interest, and this is the hallmark of TGA's philosophy towards the utilisation of wildlife and wildlife products.

CONCLUSION: Shakespeare, in his famous play, *Hamlet*, Act 1, Scene 1, has his character Polonius say: *"This above all – To thine own self be true, and it must follow, as the night the day, thou canst not then be false to any man."* The TGA would recommend these words as sound advice to all concerned.

The TGA cannot – in all honesty – come to any conclusion about the rights and/or wrongs of the BLC/RLH industry. That there *are* rights and wrongs there is absolutely no doubt at all, but the truth is obscured by highly emotional and personal preference utterances; by blatant AR propaganda fabrications; and by differing and very subjective media interpretations of the facts.

It is surprising that, to TGA's knowledge, there has been no independent assessment of the CBL/RLH industry to date. The subject is so important; it has caused so much public upheaval; it has caused so much damage to the reputation of the hunting industry in general – and to the wildlife industry as a whole; and it has been so overwhelmed by very subjective, confused and highly explosive AR rhetoric, that the TGA believes an objective assessment should be carried out as a matter of urgency – in the interests of giving the public the facts if nothing else.

The TGA has no vested interest in CBL/RLH – other than the fact the TGA is concerned that the activities of the CBL/RLH industry have rebounded badly on the reputation of honest hunters; and the TGA would like to remove those negative consequences. What the TGA is not at all sure about, however, is whether the CBL/RLH industry actually deserves the huge and constant condemnation that everybody still throws at it. Much of the controversy revolves around and originates from AR propaganda (which is always based on falsehoods), and on biased media misinterpretations of the facts.

Recriminations based on such shaky foundations are not supportable. Regrettably, the media no longer just report the facts, as it should do. It records each journalist's very personal and uninformed *interpretations of the facts,* which are more often than not skewed in favour of the emotion contained in AR propaganda. Sadly, sensation seems to be key in modern day journalism.

Finally, stripped of all emotion, rhetoric and statements of ethics, it seems that the controversy within South Africa's hunting fraternity is about the use of the term *hunting* for commercial purposes. Perhaps, if the protagonists would focus on that, a solution might be found.

The TGA is prepared to carry out an independent and objective investigation into the CBL/RLH industry if it is requested to do so; and if the right conditions and terms of reference are extended to it.

Post script notes:

1. Please see the: **The TGA's Public Guidance Position Statement on the Animal Rights Doctrine.**
2. I am indebted to John Rance for his significant contribution to the final draft.

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TAGS

's Public Guidance Position Statement on the Animal Rights Doctrine, CBL or RLH, ethical principles and morality, hunting is an essential management tool in the harvesting of WILD products of the land, is best left to the philosophers, practices of CBL and RLH in South Africa has nothing whatsoever to do with wild lion management, Pronouncements on ethics, therefore

WRITTEN BY

Ron Thomson

5 COMMENTS

Kate
December 21, 2017 @ 9:42 am · Reply

Thank you for this informative article.

Do you think a rise in captive lion hunting could possibly reduce the need/desire for wild lion hunting and thereby weaken the imperative for protecting wild lion habitats and populations? This is one of the concerns I have about CBL hunting in regards to wildlife conservation.

Ohoty
December 29, 2017 @ 6:10 pm · Reply

I don't think that the Captive Breeding of Lions (CBL) – and their so-called "hunting" – will have any effect whatsoever on wild lion hunting – ever. The demand to hunt wild lions is just too great to be affected by Ranch-Lion-Hunting options. Ranch Lion Hunting is what they used to call "canned lion hunting" . It is the "hunting" of captive-bred lions. In the years ahead, the volume of wild lion hunting demands – of any description – will never be satisfied because production possibilities can never satisfy that level of demand. And you need to start understanding the realities of Africa in the years ahead if you want to evaluate your own questions properly. Today there are about 750 million people living in Africa south of the Sahara Desert. By the year 2100 there will be over 4 billion people living in this same region. By then every square inch of today's WILD Africa will be occupied by "people". By then there will be NO "wild habitats" left to protect; and all wild lion populations will by then be living inside already established and protected game reserves. There are going to be lots of changes to the way our wildlife is going to have be managed before the end of this century comes along. And we are going have to learn to adapt to rapidly changing circumstances. So, keep your mind open.
Looking after our wild lion populations – and managing them for production is, in my opinion, going to be the 'thing' that will cause our wild lion populations to thrive – or to perish. And CBL lions may yet, one day, have a big part to play in this whole conundrum. I hope that in 2018, the TGA will be conducting a survey of the CBL industry in South Africa; and after that we will know if there is any future at all for CBL activities. IF I am called upon to make this survey, I will place my report on CBL lion farming, and the "hunting" of captive bred lions, on the TGA website. At the moment, I can't yet say if I approve of Ranch Lion Hunting, or not. I am not in possession of enough good information on the subject. But my mind is open to all objective ideas. I am NOT, however, open to "personal preference" opinions because THAT approach to solving this problem is not objective.
RT

Ron Thomson
September 9, 2019 @ 2:32 pm · Reply

THE CAPTIVE BREEDING OF LIONS IS 100% DIVORCED FROM WILD LION POPULATIONS. CBL, THEREFORE, NEITHER ENHANCES OR DISTRACTS FROM WILD LION CONSERVATION. IT IS MORE AKIN TO CATTLE RANCHING THAN TO WILDLIFE CONSERVATION.

RON THOMSON

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mbaonline
January 9, 2018 @ 4:13 am · Reply

Have you ever considered creating an ebook or guest authoring on other websites?

I have a blog based on the same subjects you discuss and would love to have you share some
stories/information. I know my subscribers would appreciate your work.

If you're even remotely interested, feel free to send me an e mail.

Ohoty
January 9, 2018 @ 10:04 am · Reply

Hi there Fransces
Sounds good. Let's talk!
The email address you gave has a problem as it keeps coming back – is there an error in it?

First have a look at my private website: http://www.ronthomsonshuntingbooks.co.za

Have a look at our TGA website, too: mahohboh.org
Kind regards

Ron

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some regulated commercial trade
could occur together with some ban
on commercial trade

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