



Conseil International de la Chasse et de la Conservation du Gibier  
Internationaler Rat zur Erhaltung des Wildes und der Jagd  
International Council for Game and Wildlife Conservation

*President*

*05 December 2019*

## **OPEN LETTER TO**

**Lord Ashcroft KCMG PC**

<https://www.lordashcroft.com/>

**Subject: Response to article in The Daily Telegraph, “Britain must ban trophy imports and help end the horrors of lion hunting”**

Lord Ashcroft KCMG PC,

On 23 November, 2019, your article entitled, “Britain must ban trophy imports and help end the horrors of lion hunting” was published in the Daily Telegraph. We appreciate your concern for wildlife, however we are troubled by some of your statements, which have far reaching implications for wildlife and, with all due respect, are not based on the best knowledge available. We feel it is our obligation to share with you a number of remarks that shed light on some of the issues dealt with in your article, which we hope might lead you to reconsider some of your opinions.

““It is a little-known fact that whereas there are now 3,000 wild lions in South Africa, there are also an estimated 12,000 captive-bred lions. The vast majority of them end up being killed for their bones or as hunting trophies. The lion industry involves the exploitation of these predators from the moment they are born in captivity. Cubs are snatched from their mothers when days old, held in tourist facilities and petting farms until they are juveniles, and then often shot in sham “canned” hunts.”

Our remark: We fully agree with your position on canned lion hunting. Our position is that the canned lion hunting industry does not employ responsible hunting practices – this is demonstrated by the expulsion of two of our members in 2018 due to their involvement with this industry. Despite our reservations, it should be noted that the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES), as well as the United Kingdom, already have measures in place to determine the sustainability of imports, which is conducted on a case by case basis for all animal parts.

It is also important to distinguish the difference between canned lion hunting and captive-bred lion hunting - canned lion hunting is illegal in South Africa, while the hunting of captive-bred lion has been declared as legal. Both should be unequivocally regarded as unacceptable and is in no way illustrative of sustainable hunting. In fact, the term captive bred lion shooting would be the appropriate term, as this industry has nothing to do with legitimate hunting activity.

“My desire is that these grim practices end, and the import of lion trophies to the UK is banned.”

Our remark: An outright ban on the import of lion trophies to the UK would be an unnecessary and counter-productive reaction, particularly when considering that not all lion parts originate from the canned lion hunting industry. There are examples where well managed, sustainable hunting programs have led to an increase in lion numbers. To introduce an overall ban would actually lead to the loss of wild lion in areas where sustainable hunting is practiced, the collapse of sustainable wildlife management schemes and the loss of livelihoods for many local people.

“By allowing trophy imports to the UK, this country is undermining the efforts of other nations which have imposed a ban on trophy imports. The reason is that Britain is being used as a smuggling route. I believe this applies to all animals.”

Our remark: The vast majority of countries do not employ outright bans on the import of trophies, and instead allow governing bodies, such as CITES, to determine the sustainable nature of animal parts. In countries where bans have been introduced, it can be argued that it is public sentiment, rather than scientific evidence, that have driven such decisions. One recent example of this is Botswana, which first banned hunting on sentimental grounds, and then resumed it once scientific data showed the clear negative consequences that came from the overpopulation of animals.

“There are about 20,000 wild lions left across Africa. They are listed by several agencies as “vulnerable” rather than “critically endangered”. But it is time to admit that species lists are often drawn up by states which have a vested interest in exploiting these creatures.”

Our remark: It should be noted that the IUCN Red List states that the lion population in Africa is between 23,000-39,000 mature individuals, which is significantly higher than the estimate given here. Africa is a large continent, and the prevailing state of lion populations can vary depending on the country and the relevant wildlife management policies. For many lion populations, trophy hunting is an essential element for sustainable monitoring and even increasing numbers.

“The main purpose of trophy hunting, as far as hunters are concerned, is probably to boost their standing. It has nothing to do with conservation, as the hunting lobby states.”

Our remark: To claim that the sole motivation for hunters is a desire to “boost their standing” would be absolutely incorrect. The continued health of wildlife species and habitats is the foundation of all hunting, therefore many hunters are motivated to engage in conservation activities. Even in rare instances where conservation is not a primary motivating factor for hunters, their activities and funds are still contributing to conservation efforts and livelihoods.

“I have seen scant evidence that hunting, or the profits from it, go into conservation or land management. It is largely a cash business with a few staff on low wages.”

Our remark: Suggesting that hunting revenues do not contribute to conservation, land management or livelihoods is both incorrect and misguided. The main way that hunting contributes to conservation is by providing land use security. By allowing local communities to profit from hunting activities on their land, it provides them employment opportunities

without having to resort to other forms of land use, such as agriculture. The loss of land to agriculture is the primary cause for both habitat and biodiversity loss; hunting helps to prevent this conversion of land usage, thereby conserving wildlife.

“Photographic tourism employs many more people, including in guiding and hospitality. After all, scores of tourists with cameras can wander around a game park, but you can only have one hunter there with a gun.”

Our remark: While photo tourism can be a good way to support livelihoods and wildlife, it is simply not a feasible industry in all areas. It requires political stability, proximity to good transport links, minimal disease risks, high-density wildlife populations to guarantee viewing, scenic landscapes, high capital investment, infrastructure (hotels, food and water supplies, and waste management), and local skills and capacity. Furthermore, in places where photo tourism is practiced, it often has a complimentary relationship with hunting. Hunting generally generates higher fees to conservancies (used to cover operational costs and development projects), while tourism provides significantly higher cash income to households in the form of wages.

It should not be forgotten that the ecological footprint caused by big numbers of tourists is by far more negative than the impact of hunters. The profit per hunter is also significantly higher than the profit generated per individual in the photo tourism industry. Furthermore, hunting is often practiced in areas which are considered to be not “beautiful” enough for tourism.

“The hunting lobby asserts that hunters only kill animals that need culling and do not affect the breeding stock. This is false. Lions are hunted according to their quality. Healthy adult males with large manes are the most sought after. Trophy hunting kills the very best of the species.”

Our remark: The animals that are selected during hunts depends on several factors, namely the species, country and quotas. Professional hunters will aim to select older, post-productive males in order to preserve the gene pool and wildlife numbers. Furthermore, when evaluating the “value” of trophies, not all trophies are awarded higher scores based on size. In some instances, such as the chamois, trophies are given high scores based on the age of the animal in question.

“Often, lions are shot at close range from the back of a vehicle. Many canned hunters are not good shots and may require several attempts to kill the animal, meaning it dies slowly and painfully.”

Ethical hunting practices dictate that hunters should not shoot from the back of vehicles. Furthermore, the vast majority of hunters undergo regular shooting training and take great care to ensure that animals do not experience unnecessary suffering. A certificate of sufficient shooting ability is increasingly demanded from hunting ground proprietors from visiting guests. Those that do not take abide by these guidelines should be considered irresponsible hunters. In communities where hunting ethics is a highly prized quality, those who repeatedly make bad shots will often not be invited to attend further hunts.

“The lion farming and trophy hunting businesses are opaque. The origins and destination of the money involved are murky. They rely on illegal activity, including enticing prime specimens from protected areas, taking more kills than are licensed and issuing more licences than legally permitted. Criminality and corruption are rife.”

Our remark: We agree that corruption severely impacts the efficacy of well managed hunting programs. However, this issue is entirely separate from trophy hunting, which is proven to be a successful form of wildlife management when implemented properly. Rather than introducing an outright ban on the import of trophies, an alternative measure would be to work with nations to combat corruption, which can be achieved by improving governance, implementing compliance programs and by working with the private sector.

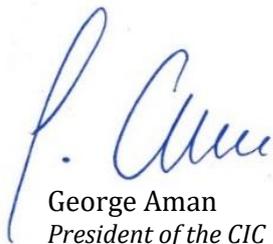
Based on this new information, we sincerely hope that you will reconsider your opinion on these issues. There is no question that hunting is a complex topic, particularly its relationship with wildlife conservation and livelihoods. Implementing policies such as this requires a consideration of all the facts, from both sides of the debate. Given the sustainability of hunting as a management tool, something which we hope has been clearly communicated in this open letter, the holistic benefits of hunting must be acknowledged and recognized.

As has already been discussed, the photo tourism industry cannot be successfully implemented in all areas of Africa. In the absence of viable alternatives to help support wildlife and, perhaps more importantly, the livelihoods of rural communities in Africa, the introduction of a total ban on the import of trophies may have catastrophic consequences. Hunting has helped to lift countless rural people out of poverty, and continues to be the sole source of employment in many communities. Supporting hunting would not only directly benefit human livelihoods, it would also help to foster greater ties between the United Kingdom and many African countries.

Not all “hunting” is perfect and without fault. However, our energy in general is to improve hunting and eliminate ethically wrong and unsustainable practices. This is where your support would be needed.

The CIC stands ready to assist, should you require any further details on this topic. Please contact Tamás Marghescu, CIC Director General ([t.marghescu@cic-wildlife.org](mailto:t.marghescu@cic-wildlife.org)) for additional information or any questions you have that concern this letter.

Yours sincerely,



George Aman  
*President of the CIC*