



African Lion Working Group (ALWG) Skukuza 4th and 5th June 2018

2018-06-07

Dear Members,

Presentations were made by representatives of all the SADC countries on the status of lions in their respective countries and the current trends and threats. Without doubt, lions are in serious trouble in most countries.

For SA, Kelly Marnewick from EWT puts the wild lion population around 1700, mostly in the KNP and approximately 500 wild managed lions. CBL are not included in any counts. Only 1% of hunted lions in SA are from wild populations.

Zimbabwe has 1600 lions. Human wildlife conflict is the major problem. Trophy hunting at unsustainable levels is also a concern. The success of the Bubwe conservancy was discussed as it has 400-500 lions and need to reduce this number drastically. International hunting is not seen as a solution as most of the lion population are female or young lions.

Botswana has very few lions outside protected areas. Most of Botswana is being used for cattle farming and very little natural game occurs in these areas. There is no natural food for lions. Again, human wildlife conflict is becoming a major problem as range habitat is fragmenting and lions are being poisoned due to the conflict.

Zambia lion population doubled during the period of the moratorium on lion hunting enabling Zambia to again permit lion hunting. The poaching in the parks is alarming and it is estimated that Kafue and Luangwa are losing 18ha per hour to human encroachment.

In Mozambique the bush meat trade is rampant. Niassa is the best preserved to date and it is estimated at best that there remain 1000 lions there. Also, of concern is the poaching of lions for body parts. A lion bone carcass is worth a motorbike or \$1500 to the poachers.

In Angola there are virtually no lions. The only small population is in the SE corner and is very vulnerable should there be poisoning incident where an entire pride is wiped out.

Tanzania was described as a developing crisis as hunters handed back concessions to government as they were no longer economically viable.

There was also a presentation on the lion bone trade. All the trade is to SE Asia with Vietnam taking up 52%. Of the SA quota of lion carcasses, 67% were from the Free State and 32% from NW. Of these 73% were euthanized and 26% were from hunting.

Of concern to everyone is the rapid increase in poaching for body parts. Although there is not yet a direct link between the legal trade and the poaching, the fact that there is such a sharp increase in poaching incidents is extremely worrying. In SA, the poachers seem to be after the lion feet, face and teeth and leave the body and bones. This appears to be the trend in other countries. However, there is also an increasing number of poachers taking all the bones and it is likely that they are connected.

There were also presentations by Mike Eustace on the works of African Parks, Dr Paul Funston of Panthera, Peter Lindsay of the Lion Recovery Fund, as well as research papers on DNA sampling and new techniques from tiger research in India where DNA can be extracted easily and inexpensively from blood swabs, saliva, hair and scat and that with the growing database they can identify the origins of that individual animal.



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Using this on lions, they can say which country any lion part comes from or if it is from captive bred lions. They tested this technique on the last quota of lion bones and accurately identified that they were from the captive industry. This will help boost investigative work and prosecutions.

Lieutenant Colonel Steve Roets gave a brief talk on their investigative work in endangered species, especially with rhino. They are now collaborating with other units including the Hawks in breaking the rhino syndicates with growing success. While we were at conference he announced the arrest of 2 kingpins in Johannesburg after many months of investigation.

I was invited as president of CPHC-SA to do a presentation to the regional ALWG on the current situation relating to the captive bred lion industry and the professional hunting industry at the regional meeting in Skukuza.

My presentation explained the sequence of events in the professional hunting industry that lead up to the formation of Custodians. This included the takeover of PHASA by the supporters of CBL and the recognition of the reputational damage it has done the industry. The intention of Custodians is to move professional hunting into a new space of transparency, responsibility and accountability as well as find acceptable solutions through engagement with conservation NGO's and the scientific community.

The ALWG has 112 members and opinions on the role of trophy hunting vary from totally supportive to those who totally reject all trophy hunting. Thus, it is unlikely to find full consensus amongst the group, but it is highly likely to find acceptance amongst the majority (if conducted responsibly).

These 2 gatherings attended (Conservation-Lab and ALWG) has highlighted the need to get out of our trenches and engage opinion formers in an open and honest manner. I was taken aback at the high levels of public intolerance of trophy hunting, even by those who have had first-hand knowledge of the industry.

We must also start questioning the accuracy of information we regard as factual from our allies as when interrogated by the more informed, some facts don't stand up!! The same can be said of rhetoric put out by the anti-hunting lobby.

We need to build trust with credible organizations and use each other's information and science for mutual benefit. Without the support of these organizations, hunters alone do not have credibility on the international stage. Society is against us and the momentum to stop all trophy hunting is building. We can't be complacent.

Valuable contacts and friendships were made in this regard. Many organizations represented at the ALWG are branded as anti-hunting by some in the pro hunting lobby. I found this not to be true and that they will support hunting where it can be justified and is sustainable.

Sustainability is the key word and is made up of 3 pillars. These are economic sustainability, environmental sustainability and social sustainability. In today's world of social media, the 3rd is the most important. This is the crucial issue that Custodians need to address. If done properly, we will find support in many unlikely places.

Yours sincerely,

Stewart Dorrington