

Hunting Trophies (Import Prohibition) Bill

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**HUMANE SOCIETY
INTERNATIONAL**
UNITED KINGDOM

Position summary and recommendations

Humane Society International works in the UK and around the world to end the cruel and damaging practice of trophy hunting. We welcome Henry Smith MP's Bill and encourage MPs to speak in support of it, representing the views of the vast majority of British voters. In December 2021 we welcomed a Defra press release setting out the Government's intention to introduce one of the toughest hunting trophy import bans in the world, protecting nearly 7,000 species.¹ We understand that Henry Smith's government-backed Bill will deliver on that ambition, and on the Government's manifesto and Queen's Speech commitments to a strong ban.

Around the world tens of thousands of animals are killed each year, not for sustenance or survival but purely for fun so someone can take a photo, cut off a body part and bring it home as a souvenir or trophy. Trophy hunters seek out the largest, most impressive and rarest animals to kill them for bragging rights and to win awards given out by the industry that supports them.

Since trophy hunting rose to prominence in the colonial era, we have seen catastrophic declines in populations of some of the world's most iconic wildlife including African elephants, lions, and giraffes.

Many wild species are under increasing pressure from human-induced mortalities, including from loss of habitat, climate change, poaching and the illegal wildlife trade. Yet, despite dwindling population numbers and increasing threats, trophy hunting continues legally in many countries. Over the most recent ten-year period (2011-2020) the UK has reported imports of 327 hunting trophies from mammal species listed under the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES) including the skins of leopards, horns of rhinos, bones of giraffes, feet of hippos and even ears and tails cut from African elephants. However, this figure may well be an underestimate, since exporting countries have reported over 1,500 CITES-listed trophies to the UK during the same period, highlighting data discrepancies and deficiencies as a problem.

Studies have demonstrated that trophy hunting can contribute to declines in populations. Despite the efforts of the trophy hunting industry to greenwash its image, the so-called "conservation" benefits have failed to materialise along with the purported benefits to local people.

The UK now has an opportunity to end our country's support for, and tolerance of, this outdated and damaging practice, by restricting the ability of hunters to bring home their gruesome souvenirs.

This briefing dispels some of the key arguments made in support of trophy hunting.

Isn't trophy hunting good for conservation?

Claims by the trophy hunting industry that it is vital to the conservation of imperilled species do not withstand scrutiny. Trophy hunting has actually been shown to negatively impact populations of many species.² Trophy hunting can have many ripple-effect negative conservation impacts, including increases in infanticide as dependent cubs in territories where males are lost to trophy hunting are killed, such as with African lions,³ and the disruption of complex social or territorial structures of animals including African elephants⁴ and leopards.⁵ Trophy hunting has also been linked to other negative impacts including genetic erosion as animals are taken out of the gene pool⁶ and phenotypic changes (alterations of physical characteristics) e.g, horn size.⁷

Trophy hunting industry claims that funds derived from trophy hunting, and the mere presence of trophy hunters, reduce poaching, are also generally unfounded.⁸ As Dr Bertrand Chardonnet put it in

his 2019 study of Africa's Protected Areas: *"the sums spent by the companies that organise big game hunting are insufficient and that this leads to the degradation of wildlife resources and their habitat in the face of the growing pressures"*.⁹

The trophy hunting industry in South Africa provides a vision of the tragic inevitable conclusion of an industry that derives profit from killing, and whose primary objective is to satisfy the depraved ambitions of a few western hunters. Many trophy targets, including lions and even tigers, are bred in captivity in order to be shot in enclosures by inexperienced hunters. In cases where ungulates are being raised for the purpose of trophy hunting, further collateral damage arises as natural predators are killed for fear they may predate on valuable animals being raised to become trophies.

The conservation argument is further undermined by the fact that in Zimbabwe, dozens of research lions have been killed by trophy hunters, demonstrating the lack of interest by the industry in research and conservation of these species.¹⁰

Key facts and issues for debate

- Studies have shown that trophy hunting can contribute to population declines through both direct and indirect impacts.
- In Zambia and Tanzania, 40% and 72%, respectively, of trophy hunting areas were abandoned once wildlife populations were depleted and hunting was no longer profitable. It is not a sustainable method for safeguarding wildlife.¹¹
- A study carried out by HSI Africa found 83% of trophies from CITES-listed mammals exported from South Africa (2014-18) were from captive bred animals, non-native species or species without an implemented or updated science-based management plan.¹² Tigers and other species are also bred in captivity to be hunted by inexperienced hunters in enclosures. In 2021, a High Level Panel for the South African government determined that there was no conservation benefit from the captive lion breeding industry.¹³
- Poaching still occurs in trophy hunting areas. South Africa, the largest exporter of hunting trophies on the continent, lost 394 rhinos to poaching in 2020 and 451 in 2021¹⁴.

Why can't trophy hunting be effectively regulated?

In theory, trophy hunting is regulated by governments at local, provincial and national levels. For many species, international movement of hunting trophies is governed by CITES, a UN treaty signed by 184 countries that protects wild plants and animals from over-utilization through international trade). In all cases, hunting and export quotas should be based on scientific study of the hunted population in order to determine levels that would not be detrimental to the species/population. However, this system is deeply flawed, as one study of leopard hunting put it:

*"For decades, CITES bodies have endorsed apparently arbitrary quotas lacking robust scientific bases, without regular adjustment."*¹⁵

Trophy hunting quotas are often not based in scientific evidence or understanding of complex social and ecological factors, but instead are frequently subjective.¹⁶

Unfortunately, quotas are often set at the country-level, rather than for local populations where animals are hunted. This is especially problematic for species that are migratory or have extremely large ranges that traverse multiple protected and unprotected areas.

Although reliable population data and consistent species monitoring should be a prerequisite for the establishment of trophy hunting quotas, the lack of accurate data is often ignored in favour of economic interests, resulting in unscientific and unsustainable quotas.

Key facts and issues for debate

- Trophy hunting quotas are often set by government officials whose agencies profit from the permits sold to hunters which can create “*a perverse incentive*” to hunt at unsustainably high levels.¹⁷
- A 2014 study of trophy hunting in Zambia found that: “*Forced to generate their own funding, ZAWA [Zambia Wildlife Authority] rely on safari hunting in GMAs [Game Management Areas] for ~45–67% of their revenue. This reliance means that ZAWA are sometimes forced to make decisions to achieve financial survival at the expense of the wildlife they are mandated to conserve...Such quotas create a perverse incentive, forcing operators to harvest wildlife regardless of sustainability.*”¹⁸
- Hunting of lions at a rate that is higher than scientific recommendations has been identified in nearly all countries where lion trophy hunting occurs, and 62% of hunting operators felt that there were problems associated with trophy hunting of lions in their country, most commonly “*inappropriate, unscientific or excessive*” quotas.¹⁹
- A study in Romania found that brown bear population abundance was overestimated, and estimated growth rates were “*biologically unrealistic*”, that this may be as a result of “*economic factors, rather than demographic processes*” and that “*setting hunting quotas based on these estimates could lead to long-term population impacts.*”²⁰

Is trophy hunting humane?

The trophy hunting industry attempts to present an image of expert hunters humanely killing animals whom they respect deeply. Clearly this is not the case. There are no requirements to be experienced or proficient at hunting or using a weapon, and little concern for wounding animals. In fact, the industry actively encourages the use of less efficient weapons.

As the primary purpose of trophy hunting is to obtain a trophy, hunters are known to prioritize bullet placement that does not ruin the appearance of a trophy rather than placement that would ensure a quicker death for the animal. They will instead wait for the wounded animal to bleed out. Hunters use baits to lure wildlife out of protected areas and dogs to chase animals up a tree where they can be more easily shot by the hunter.

Key facts and points for debate

- When asked about the risk of inexperienced hunters, one professional trophy hunting outfitter at the 2022 UK Stalking Show stated, “*they will not bat an eye if you f**king wound anything*”. He went on to explain how professional hunters regularly wound animals “*the more you hunt, the more you f**k stuff up*”.²¹
- The industry gives out special awards, known as the ‘Alternative Method Award’, for using a bow, handgun or muzzle loaded rifle.²² Cecil the lion was wounded by a bow and arrow in 2015 and left to suffer for at least 10 hours before being found and killed.

Does trophy hunting support community development?

The trophy hunting industry tries to portray trophy hunting as a vital tool for community development and alleviating poverty in some of the world’s poorest countries. However, this is not borne out by the facts. Even the programmes claimed to be specifically designed to redistribute revenue to local communities have been found to be ineffectual and insignificant.²³ And even studies which claim significant benefits for communities have done so by asserting that the distribution of free leftover meat represents an income for communities, which can hardly be seen as a progressive form of development.²⁴

Key facts and points for debate

- Trophy hunting makes up only a tiny fraction of economic activity, estimated to be as low as 0.03% of GDP across 8 trophy hunting nations in southern Africa. ²⁵
- As little as 3% of the costs associated with trophy hunting make it to community development. ²⁶
- A 2014 study from Zambia found “*earnings for communities from trophy hunting are lower than estimated earnings from illegal bushmeat hunting and create weak incentives for conservation*”. ²⁷
- A 2019 study from Zimbabwe found that “*the total household income was found to be less than 0.5%*” from the CAMPFIRE trophy hunting programme. ²⁸

Is *stopping* trophy imports a form of colonialism, telling other countries what to do?

Trophy hunting is a colonial hangover: wealthy westerners travelling to some of the world’s poorest places, staying in expensive lodges which pride themselves on “colonial comfort”, ²⁹ to hunt and kill rare and magnificent animals to take home to show off to their friends.

A 2009 IUCN study found that “*Many reserves and hunting areas were defined more than 50 years ago under the colonial regimes...Therefore, it is hardly surprising that from the outset the design concept favoured the big game hunting industry to the detriment of local populations.*”³⁰ Trophy hunting revenue streams have also been shown to drive wealth inequality by making the poor poorer and the rich richer. ³¹

The UK Government has the right to decide what it permits to be imported and exported into the country, as we have demonstrated with the Ivory Act. It is well within our government’s prerogative to pursue a policy that reflects the moral values of the majority of the British public.

Key facts and points for debate

- This Bill does not tell any other country what to do; instead it is the UK aligning its own domestic policy with global recommendations to work to protect biodiversity in the face of our global biodiversity crisis. The UK must take a precautionary approach and close our doors to the import of hunting trophies.
- It is erroneous – and insulting even - to suggest that opposition to trophy hunting is the exclusive preserve of Britons or Europeans. IPSOS polling by HSI Africa in August 2022 reveals that more than 2/3 (68%) of South Africans oppose trophy hunting. ³²

What are the alternatives to trophy hunting?

Compared to overall tourism revenues and employment, trophy hunting is economically insignificant. ³³ Not only is using hunting as a conservation strategy misaligned with public opinion, there’s also no long-term future given the decline in public support and compounding negative impacts to species populations. As interest in trophy hunting decreases and opposition to the practice increases, vast areas of land currently controlled by the trophy hunting industry are abandoned. In his 2019 IUCN report *Africa is Changing: Should its Protected Areas Evolve?* wildlife vet and protected areas consultant Dr Bertrand Chardonnet concludes:

“The absence of the economic profitability of big game hunting, confirming that consumptive management (and thus big game hunting) cannot generate sufficient income to conserve nature, does not make this management an adequate conservation tool for the future. The solutions thus now involve the funding of public goods, which involves living animals, and not the development of conservation actions based on the commercialisation of dead animals.” ³⁴

Of course, there are many examples of positive conservation efforts which do not involve the killing of the animals they mean to protect. African countries like Kenya, Rwanda and Gabon that do not permit

trophy hunting are seeing their conservation efforts bear fruit, and communities in countries such as Kenya are seeing the benefits of non-consumptive conservation efforts.

The UK Government should be investing more in non-consumptive conservation efforts that genuinely benefit local communities and help to restore biodiversity.

Key facts and points for debate

- Compared to overall tourism revenues and employment, trophy hunting is economically insignificant. There are countless conservation programmes operating around the world which do not involve killing the animals they are meant to protect.
- Most African countries do not allow trophy hunting. Kenya, which does not allow trophy hunting, has seen increases in populations of elephants, rhinos, lions and giraffes, among other species.³⁵
- Reports from Gabon, which does not allow trophy hunting, have shown significant increases in populations of Forest elephants through conservation funded by sustainable forest management rather than trophy hunting.³⁶
- Communities benefit from non-consumptive conservation efforts. In Kenya, Maasai Mara conservancies engaged in ecotourism enterprises paid around \$40/ha/year to local communities between 2013 and 2015 compared to trophy hunting zones in Tanzania which only paid out \$0.08/ha/year over the same period.³⁷
- As a scientist from Oxford University's Wildlife Conservation Research Unit wrote recently: *"Ultimately, international solidarity is a much more substantial, and sustainable, source of funding than trophy hunting...now is surely the time to focus our efforts on far better alternatives for the conservation of lions and other endangered species."*³⁸

What is public opinion on trophy hunting, and what are other countries doing?

Polling consistently shows strong public opposition to the practice of trophy hunting, in the UK and elsewhere in the world. Countries including France, the Netherlands, and Australia have already restricted hunting trophy imports, with Belgium and Italy considering similar restrictions. The UK, ambitious to claim a position as a world leader in conservation and welfare, must not fall behind.

- UK – [YouGov polling from 2020](#) shows 80% of the British public support a ban on the import and export of hunting trophies and that 76% would like that ban applied to all species.
- Germany, Denmark, Italy, Poland and Spain – 85% of citizens polled oppose trophy hunting of internationally protected species and 81% want to end trophy imports. Almost 90% of Germans are against the import of hunting trophies from abroad ([HSI, 2021](#)).
- France – According to a [2017 poll by IFOP](#), 89% of the French public support a ban on trophy hunting and importing them into France.
- South Africa – [NEW IPSOS polling](#) shows that more than 2/3rds (68%) of South Africans oppose trophy hunting.
- United States – According to a [January 2022 representative poll](#) across the political spectrum, 75% of Americans oppose trophy hunting, and 82% of Americans oppose the trophy hunting and import of African lions and elephants, both listed as threatened under the Endangered Species Act.
- Argentina – [NEW polling](#) shows that 9 out of 10 Argentinians oppose trophy hunting ([HSI press release](#) with Ministry quote).

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