



Episode 4: Ian Michler on Canned Hunting and Making “Blood Lions”, Part 1

Transcription

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Released 20 May 2016

This podcast is brought to you by [African Family Safaris](http://www.africanfamilysafaris.com). Richard Field has been a safari guide for 20 years, and in the Life on Safari podcast he talks with safari guides and conservationists about their day-to-day life in the bush. The hope is that through these remarkable conversations, wild Africa will creep under your skin.

2:47 Richard: Ian, thanks so much for joining me, mate. Where are you at the moment?

2:52 Ian: Well, It's good to be talking to you Richard. I'm sitting overlooking the ocean in a wonderful town called Plettenberg Bay, on the Garden Route in South Africa.

3:03 Richard: Wonderful. That's a beautiful part of the world. Mate, the plan today is to chat about canned lion hunting and your movie in particular, 'Blood Lions.' I wanted to first ask you where you heard the term 'canned hunting.'

3:22 Ian: I think that could probably be traced back to 'The Cook Report.' And for those of your listeners who are not familiar with the history, The Cook Report was a British investigative television program that was anchored by a gentleman by the name of Peter [Roger] Cook and they've been very, very popular in the UK during the 80's and 90's. He did the first real global exposure of what was going on under The Cook Report. In that particular show, they had footage of a lioness being shot against the fence, while her cubs were on the other side of the fence and you could clearly see the cubs watching their mother going down. That is probably when the term was first used in the open, because they referred to the concept of this being a canned hunt. There were obviously journalists in South Africa who at the stage were referring to the practice of canned hunting, but The Cook Report is probably where it began to be used globally. That goes back to 1997.

5:01 Richard: Did you happen to see that Cook Report? Were you watching it at the time?

5:06 Ian: Yes, I did. As you are well aware, we were all together in Botswana, you remember? Guiding in the Okavango Delta. And by that stage, I was already interested in the whole notion of the sustainability of trophy hunting in general terms and in particular, I was very interested in the fact that everyone thought that lions could be sustainably hunted, given what we knew already as guides that you take out the pride male, another male comes in, kills the cubs, the hunter comes back next year and takes out the pride male, a new male comes in and kills the cubs. So this notion that it was sustainable was intriguing to me and I had started my research already into the sustainability of trophy hunting in general and that is what took me on to these breeding problems in South Africa, because they were linked. And it was pretty much at that time, that The Cook Report then came out, so yeah I have a vivid recollection of seeing it.

6:15 Richard: Can you recall your thoughts and feelings when you saw that? I guess it was probably confirmation of your suspicion that there were things happening that possibly weren't that ethical.

6:26 Ian: Well you know Richard, what is really I guess difficult to convey in this whole debate is you know, some people, for whatever reason are comfortable with animals being killed, being shot and there seems very little reaction or response to that. And then there are others of us who whether it's even for food purposes question the whole process, whether it's ethical, whether it's moral, whether it's sustainable, on a whole number of levels. And I've always been one who's questioned the killing of any animals, but particularly wildlife, when it's for construed as fun. And so my early research was this kind of I guess two worlds really that I was trying to struggle with. I was with my own personal, spiritual and philosophical outlook, trying to fathom whether this was just right or not. And then secondly, there was the whole scientific side of it, you know, is it sustainable and what does it do. And then when you come across this complete perversion of hunting which is itself a question, and now you've got this perverted form where people are breeding animals to be shot in confined areas when there's clearly no chase involved, where there's clearly no concept of sportsmanship because a lot of people consider it a sport, and then of course it's got nothing to do with conservation.

So I guess my initial response was one of a complete and utter horror that A, it was happening and then B, that there were people who were trying to justify why we could be doing this or should be doing this. And then once I got over the horror and the realization that actually, in fact, it's happening, and a little bit of research quickly uncovered that it wasn't an isolated incident, it was actually the beginnings of an industry already, that's really what set me on trying to unearth the whole process.

9:02 Richard: Were the justifications that were happening then the same that we're still hearing now?

9:09 Ian: You know what, that's a very interesting question because in the early years, they weren't that sophisticated in terms of their responses to inquiry so it was a lot easier actually in some respect because they were naïve in terms of how to respond to an investigative journalist or an inquisitive journalist. So you could find out a lot more, and so for many of them, it was just fun and it was a business. After the first exposures, including the Cook Report which was very much a global report, they then started realizing that just laughing it off as fun wasn't a good business model. They realized that they had to start looking at a justification process because there was very quickly going to be significant opposition, and so that's really when we had the first stirrings of trying to link it to conservation in a more formal setting. They started bringing economic argument, and employment and employer, and creating business in local and rural communities. What was interesting is that in 2005, our then Minister of Environment, Marthinus Van Schalkwyk, he at least was trying to clamp down on this industry and he appointed this panel of experts to look into the whole predator breeding, canned hunting scenario and I was an integral part of that whole process.

But prior to that, it was very difficult to get any coordinated information. You couldn't go to any body or secretary and say, "Hey look, you represent the canned hunting, you represent the breeders." It was a very murky underworld and everyone was operating on their own. But very quickly after that, they had managed to organize themselves through a body and they first went by the name of the South African Predator Breeders Association. They've now taken out the breeding part because of the negative connotation. But yeah, I mean it was really difficult to find information in those early years. If you were looking for factual information, you could end up speaking to individual hunters or individual breeders. Some of them were very aggressive as well

back then. I had some nasty incidents. But some of them were unaware that the press were starting to cotton on to their activity, so they were quite open.

I was sitting with guys in their sort of pubs or little bars or their farm or their farmhouse with hunters, and traders, and breeders. I mean the stories that were going around, and then I was a fairly unsophisticated journalist at that stage in that I wasn't mic'd up with all sorts of equipment so I wasn't recording these conversations. Maybe if I think back now, I probably should have been. But if you find yourself in enough of those incidents, it becomes a very powerful, collective, anecdotal part of my writing.

12:50 Richard: You talk about the predator breeding and the canned hunting, how did you first draw the link between those two, as the predator breeding is separate from the canned hunting?

13:05 Ian: You know Richard, one of the most frustrating aspect of this whole industry is that they are murky; they are pretty much undercover, underworld as it were because they understand that what they're doing is unethical and in many instances, illegal as well. Not always, but in some instances illegal, but certainly unethical and frowned upon. So to get information has always been difficult once they realized the press was onto them. As I said, the early years, wasn't so bad, but once they realized the press was on to them, it's been very difficult. And that was one of the hardest things to do is to draw the link because once they had realized that there was, as I say, growing opposition, they started splitting the breeding facilities from the canned hunting facilities and many of them also had a front where they would pretend, or claim to be involved with some sanctuary park operation or even educational type operation. But if you did your homework and you went through the process of investigating, you would very often be able to draw the links, and that's what I set out to do.

So, there was one particular operator operating in the (Orange) Free State and I'm very happy to name him because I've written about him in a public report. They call themselves Camorhi [Note: Per Ian Michler, this property has since been sold and as of May 2016 is a great lion sanctuary called Lions Rock. It features in the film.] and they were just outside a place called Bethlehem in the Free State province. And why I particularly chose them is because of the fraud that was taking place on a number of levels. They were advertising in well-known travel and wildlife magazines, and they were advertising themselves as a sanctuary and as an education center. So basically, as a facility that was doing good. But the information that I had from a number of sources was that they were anything but. So I managed to get some information as to who we thought their hunting partner was. What we did is we did a sting on the internet and with the help of someone else in the area, we set ourselves up that we had a Saudi hunting client and we wanted to book a safari. And of course back then, anyone who mentioned the Middle East money, they just thought, wow this is great, this is going to be a bonanza.

And I mean lo and behold what came back was this most horrific list of species of animals that we could shoot. Included on that list and somewhere in my files, I still have that email, but, they offered us a tiger. They offered us a herd of elephants, so we could shoot the male and some adults, babies. There were wild dogs, wild dogs were on that list. They even had a pangolin on the list. But the prime target of course was the lion and they offered me a white lion for US\$130,000. And, as is characteristic of canned hunting, you know exactly what you're going to shoot because you get to choose. And so they sent me a picture of this white lion. So now what I had to do was with the image they sent me, I had to go and try and find this lion. It was easier back then because there were probably no more than about 15 to 20 facilities in the Free State. But my suspicion was that it was on the same property, Camorhi that was trying to sell itself as an educational facility.

And so I went and hung around and got to know some of the local staff who worked on the farm and when they used to come off duty, in the evening and I was literally in my car on the dirt road, and they would come wandering down the road and I would wind my windows down and start

talking to them. And so I did this on two different afternoons and got confirmation from two different groups that if I followed this particular road which had signs up saying 'Strictly forbidden. Trespassers will be prosecuted.' They said that's the road I must take because it leads to the farmer's house and if I go around the back of the house, that's where I would find all the breeding and stuff was located. And so needless to say this was a good 3 to 4 kilometers away from the area that all these visitors used to go to thinking what a wonderful place. And so the next question was to find out well when is the farmer off the property because he had a reputation of being a fairly aggressive fellow. I managed to get that information as well and then one day I said now is the time to go and see. And so I waited for the period when the staff had told me, in fact they told me what his vehicle looked like and sure enough, given that time, off he was going down into the town. So while he was off the property, I zipped in, took the road that said 'strictly forbidden' and sure enough, there were all these, I found all these predators in cages all around his house; literally, all around the house. I mean within 50 meters from his house and there was the exact same lion that they had sent me on the internet.

18.54 Richard: And was your pulse rate sort of going through the roof at this stage?

18.56 Ian: Well. Yeah. I mean I literally knew that I had to get this done and get off the property before this guy returned. And so I had to quickly fire away a few shots and for those of you who have seen Blood Lions, that image that I took is in the film. They take a screengrab of that particular shot. So we were able to match, I mean and it doesn't say take too much to look at two different images and say, well that is the same lion, and that's what we were able to do. So this facility that was selling themselves as an educational awareness facility actually was also involved in breeding behind the scenes and was also involved in moving these animals to another farm that was involved in canned hunting. But I had to then complete the investigation. I had to try and find where there is other farm was. It went by a different name. The one that had sold all these animals so I started driving around the area and sure enough, a few hours later, literally not more than about 12 or 15 kilometers away down a different road, I found the other farm. What they were doing was just darting the lions on the one farm and just moving them to the other farm. That's how we were able to draw the definitive link. Subsequently we went on to do other things in other areas just to make sure, but by that stage, we knew that this was how they were operating.

20:24 Richard: That's amazing. So just to go back a little bit, originally you were living and working in Botswana as a safari guide and whilst you were still doing that, you were doing some investigative journalism pieces for Africa Geographic or Africa Environment and Wildlife as it was then. Was that the main output of you? Was that the main source of where your articles were going and how you were getting into the public forum?

20:51 Ian: At the time, yes absolutely. So my background is economics, banking, so I spent 8, 9 years a stockbroker and decided on a change and went up to Botswana and as you remember Richard, we were all budding wildlife photographers. Remember those days, we all thought we were going to get the next National Geo cover shot. That was me as well. I had my cameras and all the rest. But I quickly found out that when you submit images, there was always an editor who as saying well, where's the story to go with these? And then I also found out that there were editors who had wonderful stories, but they had no images to go with them. And I made a decision way back then, I said if I can submit stories and photography, then I'm going to make the editor's life a hell of a lot easier and that's really became a spur to start writing. It was just to make it easier for me to sell some images. And that's how it all began. But very soon after that, I also realized that, and I said this in one of the stories before somewhere that there's something deep within you that said this life is all well and good in paradise, but to make this worthwhile, I'm going to have to make a contribution. And that sat with me on those long game drives we always used to do, and I was always thinking about making a contribution and how best to do it. And I think then when I started investigating the sustainability of the trophy hunting industry, that's really what set my journalism career. I had also at that stage published a few books. I did my first books

on Mozambique. I had started writing as well but it's one thing to write a nice kind of just straightforward factual stuff about the history of Mozambique or giving details about a place, but it's another to kind of weave a story that involves investigative journalism and the science and the fact into it. And so that took a bit longer for me to come to terms with.

23:16 Richard: You also tend to ruffle a few less feathers when you're writing nice articles about Mozambique, than when you're writing stories on canned hunting and that kind of thing.

23:28 Ian: Well, I guess that's the nature of it, yes. I have to at this stage I think also recognize Peter Borchert and Eve Gracie, Eve Gracie was the first editor that I worked with. Peter was the founder of Africa Geographic but Eve was the editor that gave me my first kind of rein, or leash as it were, who said, okay well, you go out there and just bring whatever stories you can. So I owe them a huge debt of gratitude because not only did they give me the platform because they liked the way I wrote, but they also gave me pretty much free reign. And, I wrote for Africa Geographic for close on 15 years, or maybe more, actually 18 years, features and a syndicated column and blogs and in all that period, they only ever pulled two of my articles, two of my columns actually. And at that stage, the magazine had received their only, and they'd never sent or received a lawsuit. We had received a lawsuit on two of my stories on hunting issues and canned hunting, as well as also some death threats, and curses, and swearing, and threatened the secretary. And I think at that stage they were like, Ian hang on. I don't want to attract too many more of these type of suits. But in all that period, the only editorial control to say, right, I'm not going to run in two different occasions. And I'm happy to tell you what they were.

One was on female circumcision, funny enough and I remember Peter Borchert saying – and I had been in Kenya – by that stage I was guiding in Kenya and I had been up to Kenya amongst the Maasai and I had attended a Maasai wedding and circumcision ceremony. I spent 4 days in this village, this rural village, and experienced how, from A to Z, these young maidens had been circumcised and the whole cultural experience. I was moved to try and write a story about it; not in any way to try and give an opinion but just to point out that on the one hand, it's one of the practices that for us in the Western World is completely aberrant and we would like to see the end of it. But on the other, you've got this very rural cultural aspect where you've got people and that's all they know. That's all they understand and you have these young women who really were looking forward to going into the next stage of their lives.

So that's what I wrote and Peter passed it around the Africa Geographic offices and all the women in the office read it. And Peter came back to me and said, you know what Ian, this is a very, very controversial topic and I'm not sure that a man is the best person to write about it. And he said, you may just end up attracting a lot of comments, negative as well, so we pulled that one. And then the second one was about the Johannesburg Zoo acting as parking center for trading wildlife. And at that stage, I'm quite happy, back then there were a lot of threads leading to people were involved with it in terms of what was going on there.

28:07

27:26 Richard. That's interesting.

27:30 Ian. But yeah, I owe a lot to Africa Geographic, to Peter Borchert, Eve Gracie and then of course subsequently Sarah Borchert.

27:36 Richard: It's interesting because you don't really think about that side; that they really need to put their hands on their heart and believe what they're publishing if they're going to put themselves through that. They're putting themselves on the line for conservation. It becomes more than just the name, or the title of the magazine. They have to actually stand up for it at some stage and it's good to hear that obviously they were willing to put their money where their mouth was.

28:07 Ian: Absolutely Richard. That's a vital point, you know. I tell the story always because for me, it's very important. There were other magazines who for example wanted me to write for them but it was under a condition. Peter Borchert never ever set a single condition. And you know when you receive that first law suit, I mean you're running a nice magazine, you've got a tidy subscription, you've got a tidy set of advertisers, global reputation and suddenly you get sued with threats of closing the magazine down, and, I mean, you know, a lot of editors would I guess take fright and I remember Peter called me and he said, "Ian, I cannot believe this. What do you have to say?" And I said, "Well, are you up for it?" And he said, "Well I have to believe you." And I said, "Well then let's go for it. We're in a fight here." And so he stuck by me and we produced, or I produced the evidence that was the basis of the story and they very quickly backed down. And so we realized, and Peter realized, that it was intimidation, it was threats.

29:27 Richard: You kicked the hornet's nest.

29:31 Ian: And we received the same sort of response to Blood Lions as well, like law suits. But I think that first incident way back 8 to 10 years ago was for him... I guess he realized then, okay so we're obviously on to something and I can trust Ian. I can trust his work, his investigative work. And the one thing that I've also always had right from the beginning is good sources and to be a good investigative journalist, I think you have to have good sources. Obviously, secondly, you have to have the ability to never unearth them or blow their cover. Today, there are a lot of people out there in the wildlife industry, hunters, vets, police who still give me information, who I've never unearthed, there's no link to them ever and no one has ever suspected them.

30:33 Richard: Do they come to you or was it a combination? Do you happen to find them or how did you go about finding those sources, without giving them away obviously.

30:42 Ian: Both. Absolutely both. Initially, I mean people came to the magazine. Down the years, I've had a number of introductions to people who were then reading my work and saying, I need to get a hold of this guy. One particular police guy who is still to this day is right up at the top in the South African Wildlife Policing Department. He came to me 15 years ago, after my first few articles on canned hunting and breeding and the wildlife trade. I wrote an article called 'Rotten Meat' which was the first exposé of what was going on in the wildlife ranching through South Africa. I guess back then it was quite tame but for the magazine and for the readers who knew nothing, it was weird. After reading that article, this policeman contacted me and he has become an unbelievable source since then. He just said to me, Ian, I can't do anything about this. I don't want to lose my job. I'm more effective in this department, working from within and I'd love to talk and speak out, but I can't, so I'm going to use you as a voice. He said all you have to do... I met him actually. For the first time, we set up a meeting on the N1 between Johannesburg and Cape Town, at one of those big service stations, those Ultra Stops and that's where we met. We had a one hour discussion where we laid out the parameters of the relationship. He said to me he likes the writing, he thinks he can trust me, and if I don't ever shop him, or draw any reference to who he may be, he will provide me with information forever, and that's exactly what has happened. And then there were others who came as well. I mean, but course once you start on that road, then of course you unearth your own contacts as well, because meeting one person leads to others; whether it's in the veterinary field or in the game ranching field or even pilots. Pilots are wonderful sources of information.

33:11 Richard: Because they fly some interesting cargo from time to time.

33:15 Ian: Exactly. They fly in wildlife. They fly in clients. People who drive trucks are sources of information. What have you got in the back there? Why are you driving from this farm in the Free State to OR Tambo International Airport? What's in the back? From auctioneers, to truck drivers, pilots, vets, people who issue permits in offices, in departments, are wonderful sources of information. But you have to keep their identity completely secret.

33:54 Richard: Just to go back a little bit, you mentioned Van Schalkwyk. Was he the Minister for Environment in the mid-2000's?

34:06 Ian: Yes, he was.

34:07 Richard: And was that when there was a high court ruling or there was a court ruling against the canned hunting and the predator breeders at around about that time? Did he bring that on?

34:19 Ian: Correct. So what happened was, so the Cook Report came up '97, '98 and then the opposition started building and journalists such as myself, but many others, there were many, many others involved in this battle, organizations, journalists who kept the pressure up and started basically global campaigns to end captive breeding and canned hunting. I think, you know besides, it was negative image to South Africa because he was then also Minister of Tourism. Back then, Environment and Tourism were in the same portfolio. And yes, he went to the panel of experts. I was commissioned by a big, leading international NGO, IFAW, I'm happy to name them, to do a report for them that would then go into the minister's bundle of information that would be reviewed. So I worked with attorneys and we did this huge report. A lot of the undercover footage that a big number appears in Blood Lions and elsewhere came out of that period. That was about 2004 when I started that and it took me about a year to put that all together, but it required a number of visits, some under cameras, some in the open.

Anyway, so the minister, I guess what he tried to do was he tried to be something to everyone. Rather than ban the practices outright or allow them outright, he said, no. What he's going to do is he's going to create what he referred to as a re-wilding period. The recommendation was in fact to drop regulations came out saying that canned hunting would only be allowed if a lion that had been bred in captivity had been re-wilded over a period of two years. So you couldn't shoot it, it had to be led into an area, and they nominated the size and hunting them at its own accord for a period of two years, then you could shoot it, and then it wasn't regarded as a canned hunt. The problem with that was that the lawyers for the South African breeders and the canned hunters scrutinized all of this and said, well hang on Mr Minister, you've actually gone against your own panel of experts who told you that it's not possible to ever re-wild a captive bred lion, which we know that today because that primary reason why there's no conservation value in any of these breeding facilities in South Africa. So these lion ecologists said to him, it's not possible. A lion is either captive or it's wild. It's been human imprinted or it hasn't. So the minister thought that he could tamper with that evidence I guess and stretch it out and be something to everyone. Well, and that's what eventually defeated the dropped legislation because the breeders took the minister to court when he published the legislation and the minister won the first round. We heard a lot about that in our press and I think today that's still the main reason why so many South Africans think canned hunting had been outlawed. Certainly before the release of Blood Lions, that was the case.

The breeders and hunters then took that decision to the appeal courts and the minister was defeated. They said to him, he has not applied his mind because his own panel told him that you cannot re-wild and yet he tried to base a whole raft of legislation under false premise, so it was thrown out. And I think the judges actually said the minister has not applied his mind. I think that comes verbatim from the tape. And so since then, nothing ever happened. The government never appealed or never took it any further. He lost his position. We had new ministers. The canned hunters and the breeders, they said right, this is fantastic. This is actually in effect a legalization of what we're doing.

38:47 Richard: A validation almost.

38:50 Ian: Yeah, exactly; a validation. And the industry has just boomed.

38:53 Richard: And then I guess when there was scrutiny and outcry in those early days, people would have been reluctant to join that industry because they would be perceived as making money out of a cruel industry. But then as soon as they won that court case, it's game on.

39:20 Ian: Exactly right, Richard. And you know what, that's a fascinating story to have followed which I have, is the way the Professional Hunters Association in South Africa had actually responded to this whole crisis, to this whole process. In the very early days, they all shunned canned hunting and they all said, "No it's unethical and we don't do that." But as years went by and it became more prevalent and they realized that, "Hang on, this is quite easy money here", more of them got involved but it was kind of still at arm's length, still at arm's distance, or they would just have nothing to do with it or have nothing to say about it. They didn't try and out each other for example. They might get involved but quietly under the radar and or would deny being involved and the others would just say that it's unethical and we don't have anything to do with it, but there was never a movement within the hunters to stop it. When the minister appointed this panel and they had this whole inquiry and then they attempt to draft legislation, the hunting industry said, "Well if there's an opportunity to keep it, in a way but kind of make it more ethical, and let's try and put a palatable face on it." When the minister won the first round in the courts and the professional hunters were kind of emboldened a little bit, but when he lost in the appeal, it then became apparent that this was, as you say, a validation. It was then open season and the hunters just climbed in and the hunting conventions in the USA were just full of South African canned hunters offering all sorts of species, not only lions but I buffalos, elephants, rhinos. Everything was for sale and it was like great, this has been a validation. And so it was a free for all and you can see from the permitting how the graph just climbed with the number of canned lion hunts for example.

But what subsequently happened is that only through the efforts of a few, and I'm going to say a few, they formed an organization called SAMPEO, which for the life of me I can't remember what it stands for, but basically, they were a very, very small group of ethical trophy hunters who belonged to PHASA, the Professional Hunters Association of South Africa and said you know what guys, this is not acceptable. We are for the first time going to make a stand. And two of those hunters Garry Kelly and Paul Stones are in Blood Lions. They play a very important role in the film Blood Lions. And for the first time there was opposition and a strong opposition from within. And so when Gary and Paul used to go to the conventions in the US, they would stand on their stands with big signs saying no to canned hunting, no to captive breeding. And they were slowly started collecting a few other members and testing the waters of the Professional Hunters Association. They were the first to warn the hunters in general to say, listen guys, what you're doing is you're actually ruining the entire industry, you're ruining our reputation and we're actually pulling the rug from under our own feet by tolerating or even climbing on the band wagon with canned hunting.

43:08 Richard: And how did they feel as hunters? I'm sure they probably feel that the lion hunting is probably sustainable, which we would probably question.

43:21 Ian: Correct. They make a living out of trophy hunting and they believe that of course if it is done properly and ethically, then of course it is sustainable and it makes a contribution. So yeah, we would obviously differ, I would differ with them on that level but they certainly deserve all the credit for being the beginning of the unraveling I guess of the professional hunting industry who were involved in canned hunting. The end of that story is that the film Blood Lions was actually shown at the Professional Hunters Association AGM on the 17th of November last year. I mean who would ever have thought?

44:10 Richard: That's incredible.

44:17 Ian: The film was shown at their AGM.

44:19 Richard: Did you go?

44:20 Ian: No, no, no. I was in European Parliament at that time. I'm sure they wouldn't have allowed me anywhere near their premises. And so Dr Andrew Venter, CEO of Wildlands who is a partner of the Blood Lions project, he was instrumental in being the conduit with the hunters. Anyway, the next day they took a vote on canned hunting and they voted 60% to support the aims and objectives of Blood Lions, which is the majority of the Professional Hunters Association. So in essence, most of them had come full circle now and they understand that it's completely unethical, unacceptable. They also understand that there is no conservation value whatsoever and if that if they want hunting to continue, they had at least got to try and rid themselves of these people who shoot animals in cages.

45:16 Richard: I've got a couple of things to come out of that. I think probably the first question I've got is around the justification around the conservation value of canned hunting and the thing that you tend to hear is that it takes the pressure of lions being hunted in the wild. Would you say that that's the dominant justification?

45:38 Ian: Richard, that is completely untrue. On a simple, factual level, you look at a chart and you plot the demand for lion trophy permits of the last 15 years to 20 years. Let's go back. And that graph climbs. It's a constant climb. In other words, increasing demand year after year. You do the same on the same graph; you plot the demand for permits for canned lion and that graph also it climbs, year after year in a straight line, up. So there's been clearly no drop-off in demand for wild lions permits. But thirdly and here's I think the clincher for me is that you then plot the overall lion population across Africa on that same, and that's a falling line and so we know now clearly from the very recent research coming out that's there's no more about 20,000 to 25,000 wild lions left. And if you go back 10 years, that's probably a quarter of about 10,000 to 15,000 lions under that period. So there's clearly been no benefits to wild lions.

What has happened is that all canned hunting has done is it's introduced or opened up a whole new market to hunters who could otherwise not have afforded a wild lion hunt. And here's why, if you're an ethical trophy hunter and you want to shoot wild lion, you're going to have to pay now anywhere from about US\$55,000 to possibly US\$85,000, US\$90,000 for that animal. Plus it's going to take you a minimum of 14 days and in some instances more, and you're never guaranteed of your trophy because you're hunting these animals, well you're supposed to be hunting them in open, free-ranging populations. The canned hunts in contrast, you can shoot for as little as \$10,000 but on average, you could probably get a decent sized lion for about \$18,000 to \$20,000.

47:56 Richard: And these are males?

47:58 Ian: Yeah, males. Correct. Secondly, it will only take you 2 to 3 days and in that same period, you could probably end up shooting another 10 other species. And then thirdly, you are guaranteed of your kill. You don't have to worry about the fact that you won't get it. So canned hunting has opened up a massive market for younger or middle- management type folks who otherwise couldn't afford the real deal and they come out to South Africa and they can now blast away and go back and they're part of the trophy hunting facility with all their trophies and they paid a third of the price. No doubt many of those will go on and once they get older or become more affluent to be able to afford a wild hunt. So instead of having a thousand people a year trying to buy lion trophies, you've got probably 10,000 people who are now trying to buy a lion trophy.

48:56 Richard: And not to take us off topic because I think this is something that I'd like to chat here about separately but potentially in the same way that you would, if you legalize trade in rhino horn, you're opening it up to a much larger market than you would otherwise be doing, so it's not necessarily a good thing for the rhino.

49:14 Ian: 100%. You're absolutely right. You're creating a demand and it's like an elastic band. If you hold it limply, on the one end you've got your corner convenience store and on the other end you've got your huge mass sort of hypermarkets. And if you stretch it, you've got space for the other smaller or medium sized operators to move in there and say, well, I can differentiate myself between those two extremes. So in the past we had people who couldn't afford a hunt and those who could afford a hunt. Now, we've stretched that elastic band, and we've got a whole lot of new markets in there. So yeah, you're just creating a demand.

49:58 Richard: Amazing. One of the things that I was blown away with by watching the movie Blood Lions was how pretty much every step of the way through the whole process, from pretty much Day 1 of a lion's birth through to after the day that they die, people are making money off lions. Would you mind running just through the life of a lion in a canned hunting situation?

50:27 Ian: Richard, yeah absolutely. That I think for me, one of the most vital points about Blood Lions is that while canned hunting has become the sort of global ugly face of this industry, there are all these other revenue streams that are as menacing if not more; so you're completely right. Basically a captive bred lion from birth to death is involved in a process of exploitation. They get bred under agricultural-type conditions and young cubs, some of them taken away literally as young as a week and I think in one instance we even had a 3-day old being taken away in the film, but mostly a few weeks old, and they do that because they want to human-imprint them and they want to tame them firstly. And then secondly, they bring the lioness into oestrus again so she can have a second litter, and a third litter, and a fourth litter. Typically a lioness has litters every 24 to 26 months and you know that as an experienced field guide. In these captive facilities, we've got lionesses in that same period giving birth to three or four litters. So they take them away and they're first exploited to the revenue stream as the cub petting facility. Young volunteers, day visitors to South Africa on safari or tourism on a holiday, you go to these facilities and you get to pet these young, little, fluffy lion cubs but you pay some money. You can get your photographs taken. You can cuddle them. You can sometimes even feed them with a bottle. In other instances they even hire them out to supermarkets or to festivals, events, or fairs where you can go and cuddle the cubs on a stand. So, that's huge.

Once they get to about 4, 5 months, they start biting. Their teeth become sharp. Their claws become sharp. And then they move them on to the walking with lions operation. So rather than petting and cuddling, you get to walk with them. And the minder has a big stick and he makes sure that he keeps his distance between you and the lions but off you go. You frolic around for an hour, hour and a half. You get to feed them on meat sticks and it's a hundred dollars a pop to go and walk with the lions. Once they get to about 14, 15 months, they then start becoming dangerous I guess, and they then go into a process where they get separated out. So those that they think would become good trophy lion males will go into one area. Those that they want for breeding stock will go into another area. And those that they deem to be inferior for those purposes will end being culled or part of the lion bone trade. The lion bone trade is a very, very dangerous revenue stream which in the future could put significant pressure on the wild lion population. Yeah, they get slaughtered and literally there are a sack full of lion bones that get shipped to Asia and those get used in traditional Chinese medicine.

So you have this entire sequence which is earning the breeders and the farmers significant sums of money. There are also the collectors. The Middle East for example, Central America, Southeast Asia, you've got collectors that are buying animals live. A lot of them are shipped off to these regions as well. And so yeah, a whole chain of streams for the breeders and the owners.

54:29 Richard: Are they interrelated? How independent are the different points so that the people who are have the young cubs, are they involved in the walking with lions operation and are they directly involved in the canned hunting or does it vary significantly?

54:44 Ian: It's interesting to unravel who's who. It varies quite a bit. So you've got quite a few of these facilities still and you saw them in the film, you saw them in Blood Lions, they still try to

deny any links between what they do and to these exploitative activities. They're still trying to draw the conservation, the fraudulent conservation link. They're still trying to claim some sort of educational purpose or some sort of research purpose. And to validate their facility, they deny any links to breeding or to canned hunting. So those facilities, for example will either not have a breeding facility and they will buy their lions at a young age and they will not have a hunting facility, but what they do is they'll sell a lion to an agent, and what the agent does is then no concern to you. You don't sell your lions directly...

55:49 Richard: You're clean.

55:51 Ian: Yeah, you sell them through an agent who then sells them to the canned hunters.

55:54 Richard: You're laundering your lions.

55:56 Ian: Exactly. Exactly right. You're laundering your lions. There's that going on. And then you've got the out and out hunters who say, well I don't want anything to do with all the breeding and the keeping of lions but they have contact with certain breeders and they get supplied X number of lions a month to shoot as trophies. And then you've got some of the big operations, for example, the one that was included in Blood Lions when we did our hunting setup. That facility breeds and they hunt and they are a very sophisticated operation. So there are some of these facilities that have 200, 300 lions, maybe even a few more on their properties and they're also involved in canned hunting. So it depends. Some of them have got a few revenue streams and others are trying to keep themselves at arm's length. The bone trade is an interesting one. I haven't done too much research. That's the one revenue stream I haven't spent much time on, but what I have got to understand is that there are a number of collectors of bone and they collect bones from a number of facilities and then obviously do shipments every few months.

57:20 Richard: We've both worked, and I still work in the tourism industry and I organize safaris for people. How complicit is the wider tourism industry in the whole scene? Given the walking with lions and the cub petting and all that kind of thing.

57:39 Ian: You've raised an extremely vital point there Richard. The tourism industry, mostly unwittingly, but in many instances wittingly, have been complicit and have supported these facilities and I think now that Blood Lions has come out, for 8 months now, we've at last got this message home. But yes, I think a lot of people never understood the link between this young cub they were cuddling and it ending up at the end of a hunter's rifle in a canned hunt. There is no conservation value whatsoever. There's no educational value whatsoever. So really what the tourism industry needs to understand is that by visiting the facilities, you are making no contribution. All you're doing is feeding an exploitative industry and as I said, those young cubs that you think are involved with some proper research project are nothing more than animals that are going to end up in a canned hunt or as a bag of bones.

The film and the campaign has been active now, working with the tourism industry. We've been to ITB in Berlin. We just been at World Travel Market Africa and at the end of this week I'm off to a conservation lab at We Are Africa, travel show in Cape Town and we're going to screen there and we're going to be working with the responsible safari industry to come out with a very, very strong statement against these practices. We're also working with the broader, wider tourism industry and that's the more difficult one. The responsible eco-tourism operators are easy to convince and it's part of their genetics or part of their DNA. It's part of their chemistry. These big mass market operators who bring in plane loads of visitors on discounted or certainly margined packages, where they throw them in the bus, and they race around, a lot of those, those of the guys that we need to get. But having said that, once you point out the links, most of them get it quite quickly. So we have work to do at that level but it has begun and I'm sure the tourism industry will become a significant partner in trying to bring in to the end to these cub petting facilities and walking with lions facilities, because it's got nothing to do with conservation. You're not making a contribution.

60:39 Richard: And one of the other things I wanted to ask about is the volunteers because I really felt sorry for them in the movie. Here are people from around the world wanting to pay, willing to pay to look after cubs at the petting facilities or the walking with the lions and they're paying good money and they think that they're doing something positive for conservation.

61:03 Ian: Richard, it's nothing more than a scam, an absolute scam. I mean and there's no other way of looking at it because they are being duped. The volunteers are being duped. And so this is what happens, these lion facilities or these farms that offer volunteer opportunities, what they do is they take the conservation line that lions across Africa are in decline which is true; we know that. But they pervert that storyline and say, well the best way to solve this problem is to breed lions and that's what we're doing. We're breeding lions and we're going to release them all across Africa and that will replenish the lion population. You'll see it in the film. There's one gentleman there, he clearly says that people that tell you that lions are in trouble are lying. I mean what a complete fraudulent message is that?

So this is what they do – you're a young volunteer. You're recently out of university or you've got a gap year. It's a very plausible argument I guess, if you're unaware of what lion ecology involves and what lion conservation is about. So someone says to you, lion numbers are plummeting, they show you the graphs and hey, we've got this farm where we've got 300 lions and we're doing something about it. We're breeding them up and we're going to release them into the wild. You come and spend \$2,000 for your two weeks with us and we'll give you the chance to cuddle these cubs, feed these cubs, and you can feel good about being part of this conservation program. And you can understand why these young kids fall for it. So that's why I call it a scam and it's completely fraudulent. So yes, that's a very important message of Blood Lions is to put the word out there that if you are running a volunteer agency, please do not send young kids to lion farms or petting facilities or breeding facilities across South Africa.

End of episode 1. @ 1:00:30

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