

Making a Killing

By Gareth Patterson

From Chapter Three--The Canned Lions

Today, lions occur in a fraction of their former range in South Africa. Though small "island" populations have been reestablished into various private and provincial game reserves, only two main populations exist in South Africa--that of Kruger National Park (estimated population is approximately 1500) and that of the Kalahari Gemsbok National Park (approx. 100-150).

However, in spite of the marginal occurrence of the lions in the wilds of South Africa, many other lions, in fact, exist within the country--the captive lion, lions kept for commercial reasons. These are the lions that are sold to be hunted by trophy hunters, sold for breeding purposes, and sold into the local and international wildlife trade.

Next to the Kruger Park lion population, the approximately 400 captive lions scattered around the country on game farms make up collectively the second largest "population" of lions in South Africa.

In an eighteen month period in 1996/1997, almost 100 of these lions were shot for sport in South Africa. Approximately half of these canned lions were hunted at one single lion breeding game farm--and the rest died in varying degrees of canned situations in other parts of the country.

Canned Lion Hunting--The Beginnings

Canned lion hunting has been taking place in South Africa for more than two decades. Between 1996 and 1998, as I researched into the canned lion industry, I learnt of what was presumably one of the earliest canned lion hunts. This hunt took place in the late 1970's.

I met an eyewitness of that particular hunt and additionally that person gave me photographs of scenes after hunt. The client was a Spanish man who was accompanied by his wife. A male lion was shot from a vehicle while in the presence of this lionesses and young. In two of the photographs that were given to me, one can faintly see a fence in the background.

My informant was convinced that the hunt took place under clandestine circumstances in a portion of the Kruger National Park. This is what my informant was told when accompanying the hunting party. It is possible though, that my informant--and the Spanish client hunter--were duped into believing that the hunt was taking place in the Kruger, i.e., that the client hunter would believe that he was hunting a famous Kruger lion. The hunt might, in fact, have taken place on a game farm near or bordering the Kruger National Park. But then again, I might be wrong...

This gruesome historical perspective of the South African canned lion industry furthers one's horror when pondering on how many hundreds of South Africa's lions have been murdered over the past two decades in the name of "sport" for the trophy hunters.