



KENYA 'DECIDES TO LOSE ITS LIONS' AS SADC COUNTRIES USE HUNTING TO SAVE THEIRS

By Emmanuel Koro

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Kenya has disastrously 'decided' to continue losing its lion population to poachers and communities that suffer the costs of co-existing with the lions without benefiting from them, forcing them to embark on revenge killings.

In sharp contrast SADC countries are successfully saving their lions, using international hunting revenue as an incentive to promote a lion conservation in communities co-existing with them.

Many researchers have pointed out that international hunting can be the saviour for Kenya's lion population and other wildlife, urging the East African country to draw lion conservation lessons from SADC countries.

Unfortunately, the Kenyan Government has never hinted at lifting its 1977 international hunting ban, in order to use international hunting as a solution for lion conservation.

Kenya has been described as a "famous example of a country which banned trophy hunting (in 1977) and [is] far from seeing well-conserved wildlife." This was revealed in a research paper recently published by senior research fellow with the Wildlife Conservation Research Unit at the University of Oxford and Joint Chief Executive Officer of Tanzania-based Lion Landscapes, Dr Amy Dickman and Dr Alayne Cotterill (also a Joint Chief Executive Officer of Tanzania-based Lion Landscapes).

Their recent study has shown that without international hunting incentives for communities co-existing with wild animals, Kenya's lions and other wildlife numbers have decreased since its infamous 1977 international hunting ban.

"Trophy hunting is not necessarily damaging to a population if it is well regulated and can have positive impacts," note Dr Dickman and Dr Cotterill in their research paper entitled 'Lion Landscapes' Contribution to the Call for Evidence, Animals Abroad Bill. "One key example is Bulyebe Valley Conservancy (Zimbabwe), where lions were reintroduced around 20 years ago, and now number around 500 individuals ([IUCN Briefing Document](#)), with well-regulated trophy hunting used as a key management tool. This demonstrates that trophy hunting can be a useful conservation tool."

On a wider scale, the research report said that, [the IUCN Red List data](#) shows that *wild lion populations* are only increasing in two countries, Namibia and Zimbabwe, both of which use trophy hunting (including lion hunting) as part of their sustainable wildlife management.

Using data on monitored lion population trends between 1993 and 2014 in the 2016 IUCN Red List the researchers analysed 38 lion populations in non-hunting areas, and of those, 22 (58%) were declining. Only 7 populations examined were in trophy hunting areas, and of those, only 1 (14%) was declining.

The report also presents evidence of lion revenge killings in areas where hunting doesn't take place and an increase in lion populations in areas where communities are benefiting from international hunting.

"As one example, one of our study sites is in southern Tanzania, in one of the most important areas left for wild lions (one of only five populations left with more than 1 000 lions)," said the Dr Dickman and Dr Cotterill lion research report. "There, we work on village land where there has traditionally been no economic value of lions through photo tourism or trophy hunting. The level of lion killing (and killing of other wildlife) was staggering in 2011. We had reports of over 25 lions and other large carnivores killed, mainly due to conflict with people. This equated to over 50 lions killed per 1 000 square kilometres - 100 times higher than the normal recommended limit of 0.5 lions per 1 000 square kilometres, if this had been a trophy hunting area."

Elsewhere, the Dr Dickman and Dr Cotterill lion research report also makes reference to how former President of Botswana Ian Khama's 2014-2019 international hunting ban negatively impacted communities co-existing with wildlife and by implication lion conservation.

Such observations were also made by Botswana's Ambassador to the U.S.A. and that country's former Minister of Environment Natural Resources Conservation and Tourism, His Excellency Onkokame Kitso Mokaila.

The Khama international hunting ban suddenly took away the benefits and incentives for wildlife and habitat conservation. This was a disaster for wildlife conservation in Botswana as communities reacted angrily by conducting revenge killings on wildlife that was killing their livestock, especially lions.

"In one incident four lions were killed," said His Excellency Mokaila in a recent interview while serving as that country's Minister of Environment Natural Resources Conservation and Tourism.

Meanwhile, in a separate research paper, Catherine E. Semecer (lead researcher with the Wild Africa Initiative), Dr Dickman, Professor Brian Child (Centre for African Studies at the University of Florida) and Dr Adam Hart (Professor of science communication at the University of Gloucestershire) said, "Indiscriminate bans, without better alternatives to replace incentives from high-fee trophy hunting to maintain wildlife and habitat, risk significantly amplifying major threats such as [poaching](#) and [land conversion](#) [from wildlife to livestock production]."

In their February 2021 published paper entitled Misinformation About Trophy Hunting Threatens Conservation, Ms Semecer, Dr Dickman, Professor Child and Dr Hart note that [peer-reviewed research](#) "shows a stark contrast" of wildlife management success between Kenya on the one hand, and Namibia, Zimbabwe, South Africa and Zambia on the other, where utilisation (including trophy hunting) enabled landholders to make a living from wildlife, and to reduce their livestock numbers, over the same period.

Elsewhere, other researchers who include Joseph Ogutu, Hans-Peter Piepho, Mohamed Said, Gordon Ojwang GO, Lucy Njino and Shem Kifugo and Patrick Wargute, recently reported extreme declines in wildlife and simultaneous increase in livestock numbers in Kenya rangelands between 1977 and 2016.

“Our analysis uses systematic aerial monitoring survey data collected in rangelands that collectively cover 88% of Kenya’s land surface,” said the researchers in their 2016 report entitled [Extreme Wildlife Declines and Concurrent Increase in Livestock Numbers in Kenya: What Are the Causes?](#) “Our results show that wildlife numbers declined on average by 68% between 1977 and 2016.”

About the writer: Emmanuel Koro is a Johannesburg-based international award-winning independent environmental journalist who writes extensively on environment and development issues in Africa.