

Kruger Park Lions

Kruger National Park is home to a growing population of 1 800 lions amongst a large array of other wildlife according to parks spokes people. In an article published last year by Clara Wiggins, a park employee, Danie Pienaar, is quoted as saying:

“With a 1,800 km boundary, Kruger’s fencing is never going to be foolproof (it can be broken and lions can slip through small holes), and there’s never going to be 24/7 surveillance, so animals will regularly wander. Sometimes they return of their own accord; sometimes they’re darted, captured and unceremoniously put back. Unfortunately, there are also habitual offenders who are eventually put down ... but in most cases, no-one is any wiser that the big cats ever strayed from their normal habitat.”

Later he added, “This probably happens at least 10 or 20 times a year” although he believed the number was probably higher as not every incident was reported.



As an example, last year three male lions escaped from the park, killed and ate a cow. The farmer killed one lion and wounded another while park employees killed the wounded lion and the remaining one. According to the report, the spokesperson for the park when questioned, replied:

“... the reason they had put down the third unharmed lion is because once they had eaten cattle they can develop a taste for this and their behaviour changes. The remaining lion will constantly try to get out of the park and come in contact with more and more humans... Additionally, if they put only the uninjured lion back in the park it is likely he will be attacked by the pride of lions or driven out by the dominant lions that are believed to have driven the three out in the first place. The lion population has increased and so there is pressure on lions.”

So, what can be deduced from these facts:

1. The lion population in the park is healthy and growing.

2. So much so that young male lions in particular are being forced out of prides and the park as they begin to show more than a passing interest in the pride male's harem and some come into contact with local farmers bordering the park who, incidentally, are among the poorest in the country.
3. These males are often hungry, not being able to share in the pride's kills any longer and can, therefore, be dangerous
4. They are looking for a pride to take over and, if they are successful in killing or chasing away the pride male, they will kill the cubs to bring the females into oestrous to propagate their own line.



Turning to the highly emotional article, [Outrage after Kruger lion baited and shot by trophy hunter in neighbouring reserve by Don Pinnock on 11 June 2018](#), which appears to be nothing more than an attempt based on few, if any, facts to create another Cecil incident, let me make the following points:

1. The language used in the article is not only highly emotional and designed to stir outrage but also vague. The lion "may have been ... named Skye". Well, it equally may not have been but, even if it was, how does this affect the reality of the death of a single male lion out of 1 800 Kruger park lions – less than .001% of the total population – which appear to be too many for the park anyway?
2. "It is probable the lion was lured out of Kruger Park". Based on what information? As we have seen, lions regularly leave the park and, in this particular case, the land – the Umbabat Private Nature Reserve of 18 000 hectares – on which it was found is effectively part of the park being incorporated in Associated Private Nature Reserve (APNR) land – 180 000 hectares in total. The APNR, including the Umbabat, has contractual links to Kruger and has always had its own complement of lions.
3. The hunter is "believed to be an American. Good guess as about 65% of all overseas hunters who visit this country and contribute nearly R2 billion annually to the economy, come from the States.
4. The hunter is "estimated to have paid over R1 million to pull the trigger". That amounts to some \$80 000 which, all things being considered, is not that high. A legal, ethical, free range, fair chase lion hunt in Africa is the most expensive one on offer on the continent and has been known to set a hunter back almost double that amount and, as has been proven time and time again, hunting fees are the backbone of conservation in this and many other countries. The more people are prepared to pay to hunt an animal, the more land will be set aside to conserve them.
5. Pinnock indignantly goes on to question why the APNR reserves on the unfenced western boundary of Kruger are permitted to hunt animals from one of Africa's premier state owned game reserves. I am sure he knows the answer just as well as many readers – the lions may well be the

APNR's "own" lions because the properties that make up the APNR were all well stocked with game, including the Big Five, long before they contractually became part of Kruger. Game flows freely between the APNR and Kruger.

6. And oh my, oh my! Two little known animal rights organisations with probably less than 50 paid up members each, sent a "Cease and Desist warning" threatening legal action if the hunt went ahead. I am sure APNR were quaking in their boots when they received it especially as it arrived after the hunt was been concluded.
7. The entire article is speculative, not fact based and designed by the use of emotive language to try and provoke the kind of reaction that gave rise to the Cecil incident which, after careful investigation under the spotlight of the international media, was ultimately shown to be a perfectly legal hunt by the Zimbabwe government. The APNR is a highly respected body, most members of which fully understand the vital and irreplaceable role of hunting in conservation. Apart from anything else, in any given fenced area, no matter how large, the time will come when game numbers exceed the carrying capacity of the land and animals will have to be culled. Hunting saves Kruger and APNR from having to pay people to cull and, in fact, they are paid and keep the meat from the hunters who do it for them.
8. [The Umbabat Private Nature Reserve, where the hunt took place, issued a detailed, factual, three page statement on 12 June](#), which proved that every baseless accusation made by Pinnock and his fellow travellers was untrue. In addition, it stated that 65% of its revenue, nearly half of which was generated by hunting, goes to pay security costs necessary to counter the poaching epidemic from Mocambique, which has led to thousands of rhino and now elephant being poached.

It is abundantly clear from their consistently emotional writings, usually devoid of any scientifically established

fact or anything approaching an alternative conservation solution to hunting, that Pinnock and his fellow travellers like Michler and co do not give a fig for conservation in our country or anywhere else for that matter. They want to stop the use of any animal, whether wild or tame, anywhere. They have just chosen wild ones because they are more emotive. But, if and when they stop hunting, which is seen as low hanging fruit by them, fishing will be next, then domestic livestock and so on. If you support such claptrap, be careful what you wish for. One day you may get it and then I hope you will enjoy being a vegan. It will be compulsory!