

An interview with Arthur Thomas, Public Affairs Manager at HSI/UK about trophy hunting

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"We will deliver on our 2019 Manifesto Commitment to ban the import of hunting trophies from endangered animals abroad, by bringing forward legislation to ensure UK imports and exports of hunting trophies are not threatening the conservation status of species abroad."

- DEFRA Action Plan for Animal Welfare, p.11

1. What is trophy hunting and what are the types of trophy hunting?

Trophy hunting is the killing of an animal to obtain animal parts (such as their heads, hides, claws, teeth, tusks, horns, skin, or the whole stuffed animal) for display but not for subsistence. Trophy hunters compete with one another in contests sponsored by trophy hunting industry organisations to kill animals with the largest trophies (for example biggest tusks or horns) or the most animals of a certain type (for example, "Bears of the World Grand Slam").

2. Which countries are the biggest importers and exporters of trophy animals?

The biggest exporters of hunting trophies currently are Canada and South Africa according to the trade data of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES) between 2014 and 2018. Every year hunters from around the world travel to Canada to hunt and kill black and brown bears, wolves, mountain lions, lynx and even polar bears and other species. In South

Africa, African elephants, lions, leopards, rhinos, giraffes are all killed for fun by trophy hunters, despite dwindling numbers of the species in recent years. The United States is the world's largest importer of hunting trophies. One estimate puts the U.S. trophy imports accounted for 71% of this global trade.

However, trophy hunting is not limited to Africa and North America. Our HSI Europe team have just released a report looking at trophy hunting across Europe and the numbers are shocking. Trophy hunters from across the continent import thousands of trophies a year, but also some European countries allow trophy hunting of wolves, bears, lynx and other majestic species. This is a global problem, a relic from the Victorian age which needs to end.

3. Apart from being cruel, why is trophy hunting so bad ecologically?

Trophy hunting is bad not only for the welfare of the animals but for the conservation of populations, the survival of species and the biodiversity of habitats.

From a welfare perspective, trophy hunters delight in the "sport" of killing and not the welfare of the animal. Hunters use weapons that can cause prolonged suffering. The classic example of this is Cecil the Lion who was shot with an arrow and suffered from injuries for around 10 hours before finally being killed by the hunter. Hunters are also often inexperienced and will wound and animal and take many shots to kill it, leading to enormous suffering.

From a conservation point of view, trophy hunting is a disaster. Trophy hunting is legal in a number of countries in Africa and elsewhere and many endangered species are targeted. While the hunting industry likes to claim that it provides funding for anti-poaching efforts and protects species, this is not backed up by the science or conservation ethics. So called conservation fees are paid by hunters but the money raised is woefully insufficient to conserve declining species and rarely make it to where it is needed most. In the meantime, population numbers have continued to decline due to myriad of anthropogenic and biodiversity threats since the practice of trophy hunting came to prominence. We need



to invest in genuine non-consumptive measures that protect these species and benefit the communities that live alongside them. Sadly, that will never be achieved by the hunting industry whose primary motive will always be greed and killing animals.

4. What is the Humane Society doing to stop trophy hunting?

Humane Society is working in a number of countries to oppose trophy hunting. In the UK we are working to support the government's efforts and hold them to account to their commitment to introduce the world's toughest import/export ban. Many of our other offices are supporting similar efforts in their countries. However, this work extends beyond trophy import bans to increasing protections of specific species, promoting co-existence between wildlife and humans, supporting non-consumptive conservation efforts and much more.

Lord Goldsmith was right when he said we need a new covenant with nature, we are living

through an extinction age and without a radical recalibration of our relationship with the natural world many of the species that we learn about at school will be lost for ever. HSI offices around the world are working to end the most harmful practices inflicted on the animals and the natural world and help write that new covenant.

5. What is the UK position in the light of the Animal Welfare Action plan? Are the plans in danger of being watered down?

The language used in the Animal Welfare Action Plan was concerning. Under the current system UK hunters who kill endangered species can do so and bring back their trophies once approved by the government. This system is fundamentally flawed, relying as it does on a complex paper trail and on importing countries often just trusting the declarations of hunters and exporting countries, without carrying out due diligence. For example, exporting countries are required under CITES to present non-detrimental findings (NDFs), which are designed to ensure that trophy hunting of animals do not have a detri-

mental effect on the survival of the species. In reality, NDFs are rarely rooted in rigorous science and lack strict oversight. Numerous studies have shown quotas set at unsustainably high levels, widespread corruption and a well-funded industry trained in finding loopholes and exploiting them. That is why banning only trophies of endangered species or giving “conservation exemptions” to certain trophies, as the government has indicated, was so troubling, it appears to mirror the current system and would amount to business as usual.

6. What strategies could be used to put pressure on the Safari Club International and other such outfits?

HSI has worked to expose trophy hunting industry groups like Safari Club International by drawing attention to their promotion of killing at-risk species for fun and weakening wildlife protection measures. However, applying pressure to the industry will not end trophy hunting, which is why our main focus though is on working with governments to bring in laws to end the practice of trophy hunting, including through import bans that ensure that hunters can't bring their macabre souvenirs home with them.

7. Given that this is an international trade, how could a ban on trophy hunting be enforced?

In the UK we are working towards a ban on the import and export of hunting trophies. This would effectively end UK involvement in the trophy hunting industry. Similar bans have been implemented in Australia and France on the import of lion trophies. The UK public overwhelmingly oppose trophy hunting with recent polling showing that 85% want a strong ban brought in as soon as possible. The UK ban would not end trophy hunting globally but end UK involvement in the practice and would send a powerful message internationally that killing for kicks is not acceptable, especially in a world facing an extinction crisis.