

Zambia Lion Project

The future of African lion populations – and the desire for continued access to hunt trophy lions for sport – are inexplicably linked in that they share a common goal of long-term conservation of the species in the wild.

While controversy persists over the value of sport hunting to conservation, the stark contrast of lion population status in countries such as Zambia (where hunting still exists) versus Kenya (where hunting was banned many years ago) illustrates the benefits of consumptive tourism.

In Zambia's Game Management Areas, hunting safari operators engage in land stewardship that includes anti-poaching patrols and enforcement against illegal human and livestock encroachment, thereby protecting vast tracts of prime wildlife habitat adjacent to National Parks. In addition, hunting activities distribute crucial income and provide development aid such as bore holes, schools, and clinics to remote villages through local employment and community pledges, respectively. Economic incentives derived from safari hunting of lions also promote tolerance for villagers to co-exist with large predators that they otherwise seek to destroy as dangerous pests.

In turn, it is the responsibility of the hunting community as well as the wildlife managing authority to ensure that hunting of lions is done in a sustainable fashion. This includes sustainable quotas and age-based selection of older male lions as trophies. Sound management practices must be built upon a strong, scientific basis and must also constitute practical measures that can realistically be applied in a hunting situation.

Since 2004, the Zambia Lion Project has collected empirical data on African lion populations within Zambia. The goal of the project is to assist Zambia Wildlife Authority in developing and implementing a rigorous, scientifically based management plan of African lion populations in Zambia that includes sustainable trophy hunting. Working in partnership with Zambia Wildlife Authority, and with the kind cooperation of the Professional Hunters Association of Zambia and the Safari Hunters and Operators of Zambia, the Zambia Lion Project collects samples (photographs, tooth, and DNA) on the trophy lions taken each year. In exchange, safari operators are provided with individualized results of their trophies, while an overall summary is presented to the greater hunting community.

In May 2010, the Zambia Lion Project produced a booklet on age-based trophy selection that was distributed to each safari operator in Zambia. Funded by Conservation Force and Safari Club International Foundation, "A Regional Guide to Aging Lions in Zambia" compares physical characteristics (trophy photos) with age criteria (tooth x-rays and tooth wear) for each of 47 trophy lions taken in Zambia between 2006-2009. The purpose of the booklet is to inform and elicit

dialogue between clients and professional hunters alike on the topic of lion trophy selection. Presented as a 'work in progress', the booklet is intended to generate feedback that, along with trophy data from the 2010 season, will be incorporated into a final version for 2011. Ultimately, the final guide is intended to serve as a practical and informative tool that will assist in age-based trophy selection of Zambia's lions in the bush.

Zambia Lion Project's research has contributed to Zambia Wildlife Authority's completion of "Zambia's Conservation Strategy and Action Plan for the African Lion" which marked an important step forward and helped demonstrate to the international community that Zambia is genuinely committed to lion conservation.

Further aspects of the Zambia Lion Project's research include field surveys and interviews to determine lion distribution and abundance countrywide, in-depth genetic analysis of Zambia's lions, and quantification of the socio-economic benefits derived from trophy hunting in Zambia.

For more information on this project, please contact:

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