

Save the lion!

With just 25,000 lions left in Africa — a number that could comfortably fit inside Wembley Stadium — these big cats really are in dire straits, so how can we help?

As with all large and dangerous predators in the world, lions have been threatened by loss of habitat and natural prey, and conflicts with expanding human and livestock population. But they also face an increasingly important threat that few other big cats have to deal with — trophy hunting.

A total of 6,652 'trophies' were exported from Africa from 2000 to 2009, according to the Convention on International Trade of Endangered Species of Fauna and Flora (CITES), most of which were male lions, with hunters preferring to display a big maned lion on their wall. As a result there has been a severe impact on male

lion population numbers in hunting areas and even in protected areas, with hunters using bait to lure lions to the boundaries of National Parks.

Despite the efforts of many conservation foundations to improve the fate of the African lion, the rate of decline is accelerating and in the last few years Ghana, Ivory Coast and Congo have lost all their lions. Nigeria might have just 39 lions left and Kenya and Uganda predict local extinction in the next ten years.

Act now, before it's too late

Fears are that the lion could become a conservation emergency much like the

tiger. Lions still have potentially viable populations in a few African countries, such as Botswana, Tanzania and South Africa, but charity LionAid says we have to do something now before it's too late and numbers become too low.

Dr Pieter Kat, a leading expert in biology, genetics and conservation, and a founder and trustee of LionAid, says: "Twenty years from now, without considered conservation plans, all natural lion populations will be gone. Hunted, poisoned, speared, trapped, slaughtered. In the past 50 years we have allowed 175,000 lions to become bleached bones or tanned skins. New ideas and new ways forward are necessary for the remaining numbers."

What's next?

LionAid is seeking and has been successful in gaining support from the UK Government and the EU Parliament to strictly control and limit the impact of lion trophy hunting.

Richard Benyon, parliamentary under-secretary of state for the environment, food and rural affairs, says: "I agree about the urgent need for action. I am lucky enough to have seen a considerable number of lions in the wild and I want my children and grandchildren to be able to have the same experience."

The European Commission was due to consider the case for further protecting lions at its Scientific Review Group meeting on February 23 (after this issue went to press). LionAid has also recently been awarded UK Government funding to organize a conference among African range states to determine support for an uplisting of lions to CITES Appendix 1 (species that are threatened by extinction), which would greatly protect lions from unsustainable levels of trade. ■

A mother washes one of her cubs.



Photo: Martin Fowkes

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How you can help

- Make a donation towards the LionAid campaign at www.lionaid.org
- Visit the online shop to buy unique artwork and photos donated by famous wildlife artists, with all proceeds going to the charity
- Visit the website (see above) to sign a petition to ban trophy hunting
- Consider LionAid in your local fundraising activities and/or contact them at info@lionaid.org for more information or to help with the campaign.



The hunter has become the hunted.

Photo: Kate Saunders



Male lions are the focus for so-called 'trophy hunters'.