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CONSERVATION OF LIONS: REPORT ON KILLING LIONS: VERGENDEG AND OTHER BORDER FARMS.

1. On 22nd February 1966 reports were received from Namutoni stating that three motherless lion cubs were found in the Road Department enclosure near the Fort. Rangers Baard and Piepmeyer attempted to locate the mother but were unsuccessful.

2. As the cubs were still without their mother on 24th February and reports were received that a lioness was shot dead on a border farm, the writer decided to remove the cubs and translocate them to Okaukuejo where they would be fed and released when old enough to find food for themselves. Lions are scarce in the Etosha Game Park and the biggest tourist attraction.

3. The cubs were tranquillised with Serpylan and Acetylpyrinazine and placed in a fenced enclosure three miles from Okaukuejo on the Leebbron road. A springbok ram was shot for them.

4. Ranger Werksman reported that a lioness presumably the mother was calling near the fort on the nights of 27th and 28th February. On 2nd March, Ranger Werksman verified his suspicions that the lioness had returned to collect her cubs and it was decided to transfer them to Namutoni. The cubs were immobilised with Serpylan using the Palmer gas-operated projector.

5. The cubs were ear-tagged with red and white ear-tags in both ears and returned to Namutoni where they were accepted by their mother on 3rd March 1966.

6. On the writer's return on 30th March from Giraffe immobilisation in the Grootfontein district he spent the night at Namutoni and the next day saw the lioness with the three ear-tagged cubs near Twee Palms. Two of the cubs appeared fit and well and had grown. The third cub could not be seen clearly as it had disappeared into the bush.
7. During the first week of August 1966, reports were received from the Namutoni staff that an ear-tagged young lion had been shot dead on the farm Onguma. The writer was investigating the elephant damage to the game proof fence and decided also to determine whether the lion was in fact the one he had ear-tagged several months previously.

8. On closer investigation the writer ascertained that the lion had not been shot on Onguma, but on the neighbouring farm Vergenoeg.

9. Mr. K. Köhler, farm foreman of Vergenoeg stated that on the moonlight nights of June and July he shot two and one lions respectively. The lions were shot near the Game Park's boundary at a waterhole. No stock was caught by the three lions. One of the lion's shot had a red and white ear-tag in its ears. Another young lion with ear-tags was also seen on the farm but could not be shot.

10. The ear-tags were identified and found to be the identical tags that the writer placed in the ear of the young lioness cub in February. The skin and skull of the lioness were seen. The age of the lioness was estimated to be 9 – 10 months which corresponds with the dates when the lion cubs were originally caught.

11. As the three lions did not cause any damage on the farm, the writer fails to see why they were shot. Mr. Köhler could not give a satisfactory reason for shooting the lions. It would appear that they were shot for "sport" (very sporting to shoot a lion while it is drinking water.)

12. Mr. Köhler must have felt guilty about murdering the lions because he presented us with the skin and agreed that it could be hung in the tourist museum. The ear tags were also returned and it is suggested that they be re-inserted into the ears. An appropriate inscription on the skin, once cured and hanging in the museum could be:

"This marked young Etosha lion was collected by Mr. K. Köhler, farm Vergenoeg, Tsumeb."

13. Mr. Köhler was very sympathetic when he was informed of the scarcity of lion in the Park and in S.W.A. He had offered to report the presence of lion on Vergenoeg to Namutoni before he again murders them.

14. **Discussion:**

a) An alarming number of lions have been and are being murdered on farms bordering the Etosha Game Park.
1) According to Mr. Böhme, Onguma, Tsumeb over 200 lions have been shot on his farm during the past 10 years. (Personal comm.)

2) Seven lions were shot on Leeudrink and Kleinbegin since beginning 1966. (Namutoni)

3) Nine lions were poisoned on the southern boundary fence recently. (Ranger Stark.)

4) At least three lions of the suspected new subspecies were shot in the Otjozasandu area since the beginning of the year. (Ranger Meyer.)

5) A Mr. Roberts of the Kamanjab area shot two lions during June 1966. (Ranger Meyer.)

6) Two lions were shot in the Kowaribschlug early in May 1966. (Personal observation.)

7) Three lions were shot on Vergenoeg during June and July 1966. (Personal observation.)

b) Although not always the case, the majority of lions are shot or poisoned because they prey on domestic stock, causing a financial loss to the stockowner for this reason, lions are regarded as vermin in S.W.A.

c) Lion skins command a fairly good price on the market and are eagerly sought after.

d) Lions and elephants are the main attraction for tourists and visitors to the Etosha Game Park. Etosha Game Park is one of the few areas in Southern Africa where free-ranging lions can still be seen. However it appears that their numbers are diminishing and this state of affairs can be directly attributed to hunting—pressure along the borders of the Park.

e) i) Research in other game reserves in Africa indicate that the prey/predator relationship is held in very fine equilibrium. When the lion population is low up to six cubs are born. When the lion population increases and prey is scarce, a heavy postnatal juvenile mortality occurs or conception is limited to one or two cubs per litter.

ii) In Etosha Game Park, a tendency exists for full litters of four cubs or exceptional litters of six cubs to be born. This indicates that the prey/predator balance is upset and that lions are underpopulated.

iii) In Serengeti, Tanzania the lion population decreased due to trophy hunting and Masai traditions. As a result, the hyena became a predator. Rigid protection and legislation has ensured that the lion population will once again reach its optimum strength.
f) Paradoxically the lion is protected by legislation in the Cape Province even though it has been extinct for over a hundred years. Ironically the majority of Republican visitors to Etosha Game Park come from the Cape Province.

g) The last Namib lion, shot in the Kuiseb Valley in 1946. The writer is unable to ascertain why this lion was shot.

15. **Recommendations:**

a) Because evidence indicates that the lion population of Etosha Game Park is decreasing due to hunting and poisoning by white farmers, along the game park borders, and because the eco system is unbalanced as a result of this, and because lions are the main tourist attraction in South West Africa, the writer requests the S.W.A. Administration to do everything in its power to legislate for the protection of the lion.

b) A stricter patrol should be maintained along the borders to repair damage to the game-proof fence. Breaks in the fence should be reported and repaired immediately.

c) A R1000 fine should be imposed on a person convicted of shooting or poisoning a lion.

d) Predation by lions on domestic stock on farms should be immediately reported to the S.A. Police, the Chief Ranger, Okaukuejo, the Magistrate or the S.W.A. Administration. A ranger or official of the S.A. Police should investigate the complaint and report back to the Administration.

e) The farmer should be fully compensated for his losses by the Administration.

f) The Administration should attempt to translocate the lion or lions from the farm back to the game park. If this is not possible, the lion should be shot by officials of the Administration's Nature Conservation Branch.

g) After legislation has been passed protecting the lion, all tanneries in S.W.A. — the Republic of S. Africa should be asked to report on lion skins they receive from farmers.