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Poaching of lions for their body parts continues to increase in SA



The Endangered Wildlife Trust (EWT) says the targeted poaching of lions for parts, including bones, has been increasing in some regions in southern Africa. Picture: Mujahid Safodien

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The Endangered Wildlife Trust (EWT) says the targeted poaching of lions for parts, including bones, has been increasing in some regions in southern Africa, and this, if unmitigated, could potentially cause future local population declines.

Sam Nicholson, a lion expert at EWT, said lions have been directly targeted in the Greater Limpopo Transfrontier Conservation Area (GLTFCA). A study by Phantera found that the targeted poaching of lions for body parts accounted for 61% of mortalities within Limpopo National Park and 35% of known human-caused mortalities across the greater landscape.

He said the lions were either caught in wire snares or were poisoned.

“SANParks has confirmed that in the northern parts of Kruger National Park, this has increased for the period January 2020 up until the end of June 2023. A total of eight lions were found poisoned in the Xanatseni north region of the park. A further six lions were killed in snares over the same period,” said Nicholson.

He said many targeted poisoning incidents have occurred in South Africa’s captive lion facilities.

“The International Union for Conservation of Nature’s (IUCN’s) cat specialist group on the African Lion Database has recorded 40 such incidents between 2016 and 2020, which resulted in an estimated 113 lions being killed — mostly through poisoning,” Nicholson said.

He said that, as with many species globally, lions are faced with a wide range of threats that vary in severity and that more can be done to save these animals.

“The EWT, in partnership with SANParks and Peace Parks, works in the GLTFCA, focusing on lion monitoring and threat mitigation to contribute to their conservation,” he said.

IFP member Narend Singh asked the Minister of Forestry, Fisheries and the Environment, Barbara Creecy, in Parliament whether there are any plans in place to prevent legal trade from being used as a cover for illegal trade and the stockpiling of lion bones.

The minister said there has been no legal trade in lion bones since the Gauteng High Court ruling of 2019 declaring the bone quota as being unconstitutional.

“As a result of this ruling and the relevant legislation, the minister has not authorised an annual quota. Since March 1, 2019, the DFFE (Department of Forestry, Fisheries and the Environment) has employed a tagging system for lion hunting trophies. The implication of this system is that all hunting trophies of captive-bred lions must

be tagged immediately after the hunt. The details of the tag are included in the documentation that is issued after the hunt, including export permits. Additionally, the provincial management authorities are requested to introduce random inspections of lion trophies throughout the value chain (including at taxidermists and freight agencies) to verify the origin of the trophies,” said Creecy.

She said from a law enforcement perspective, the environmental management inspectors (EMIs) from national and provincial governments, as well as SA National Parks (SANParks), are enforcing the relevant legislation, namely the National Environmental Management: Biodiversity Act and the National Environmental Management: Protected Areas Act, and other relevant regulations daily.

“This includes the prevention of illegal trade of threatened and protected species (Tops) as well as species listed on the appendices of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (Cites),” she said.