

TODAY'S DEBATE TROPHY HUNTING

Our view

Shoot lions with cameras, not with weapons

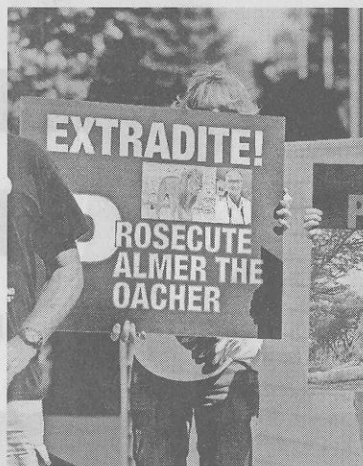
In the old Tarzan films, the evil hunters would invariably end up trampled by elephants, chewed by crocodiles or eaten by lions.

On that scale, Walter Palmer, the Minnesota dentist and big-game hunter who killed a beloved research lion in Zimbabwe known as Cecil, is getting off easy, though he has been subjected to the social media equivalent of being thrown to the lions.

Cecil was allegedly lured from his protected preserve with bait, shot by Palmer with an arrow and tracked for 40 hours as he slowly weakened, before he was finished off with a gun. The dentist, who says his guides led him astray, has been forced into hiding and threatened with extradition.

The only bright spot in this sorry tale is the light it has thrown on the plight of Africa's lion population. Already, several senators are pushing a measure that would prevent the importation of lion trophies to the United States. And three major airlines — American, Delta and United — declared Monday they will no longer carry big-game trophies as cargo. With good reason.

Just 32,000 African lions remain, facing long odds and complex dangers, even without safari hunting. An expanding human population in Africa has pushed into their habitat with settlements and farms. The lion's natural prey is being depleted by



ADAM BETTCHER, GETTY IMAGES
Protesters at Walter Palmer's dental practice in Bloomington, Minn.

human consumption of bush meat. And when lions move on to prey on farmers' livestock, the farmers inevitably retaliate, often by poisoning the lions.

Of all the dangers, the most pointless is trophy hunting. And the most prolific hunters are Americans, who in 2013 imported 292 wild lion trophies into the United States, almost six times the number imported into all other nations combined, according to calculations by Born Free USA, a conservation group.

Roam the Internet and it's easy to see why. Lion safaris are offered for anywhere from \$7,000 to \$58,000. Hunters are lured with promises of thrills, danger

and luxuries such as pools, spas and "sumptuous food." Some companies guarantee a kill, which is not surprising as the hunters can employ four-wheel-drive vehicles and "animal baiting."

U.S. safari groups argue that hunting proceeds heavily support lion conservation — a debatable point. For every study they put forward, conservationists counter with opposite findings. University of Minnesota professor Craig Packer, an expert on lion conservation, estimates that it takes about \$1 million to sustain a lion's habitat until the animal reaches age 6 — far more than is generated for conservation from a \$50,000 hunt like Palmer's.

The U.S. government has proposed designating the African lion as a "threatened" species, a less protective listing than "endangered" but one that, with restrictions on importing trophies, would go a long way toward encouraging better conservation in Africa. Trophies could be imported only from countries with strong hunting management.

Zimbabwe will determine Palmer's legal fate, but here's our advice for his fellow trophy hunters. Never kill a lion with a name, and consider trading your weapons for cameras. That way, you can bring home photos instead of heads, along with the satisfaction of having spared the lives of beautiful creatures.

Opposing view

Safari hunting brings benefits

John J. Jackson III

If it weren't for regulated hunting in Africa, most African lions would cease to exist.

If the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service listed the lion as a "threatened" or "endangered" species, the listing would not provide for critical habitat, recovery programs, cooperative agreements or funding of recovery because the lion is a foreign species.

Instead, listing would require import permits for trophies, which in turn require expensive documentation that is beyond the economic and personnel capacity of most African management authorities. These include repeated nationwide population studies that have long been considered impractical for lions.

Many countries could not bear those added administrative costs. They would have to forgo hunting and the benefits derived from regulated tourist safari hunting. Many lion populations would perish with the loss of hunting habitat, decline in enforcement and rise in the lion-livestock conflict.

Most lion habitat is in hunting areas that, in aggregate, are larger than national parks. There is no other place for

them! A major source of revenue for the operating budgets of wildlife and enforcement authorities is from licensed, regulated tourist safari hunting. A "threatened" listing would raise the cost of safaris, cause the loss of habitat and prey, and upset local residents by taking away their benefits.

Most of the affected countries oppose the U.S. listing. The Fish and Wildlife Service does not consider the costs and benefits of a new listing. But listing of a foreign species raises costs, not benefits.

It fails to provide essential habitat, revenue or community incentives now provided by tourist hunting, as designed by wildlife management experts. Listing is a regulatory measure of last resort with negative effects. It is not equal to or a substitute for hunting as a conservation strategy.

In fact, there is no substitute for hunting's benefits. The lion needs all its habitat, prey, anti-poaching and conservation revenue, and more — not less. Neither photo-tourism nor listing as a threatened species can fill the boots of hunting.

John J. Jackson III is chairman of Conservation Force, a Louisiana group that represents several hunting and safari clubs.