Stars, politicians & campaigners unite to call for trophy hunting ban

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Campaigners & celebrities demand halt to Trophy Hunting

Leading conservationists, stars and politicians have called for plans allowing trophy hunters to legally kill the world's most important elephant population to be thrown out.

A protest in London against proposals by Botswana's government to permit the resumption of elephant hunting marked the launch of a new campaign to make the bloodsport illegal.

Sir Ranulph Fiennes, Bill Oddie, Peter Egan and Sir Ed Davey MP were among those who handed in a letter addressed to Botswana's President that has also been signed by Nicky Campbell, Stephen Fry, Ricky Gervais, Joanna Lumley, Virginia McKenna, Chris Packham, Sara Pascoe and Carol Royle.

They also delivered petitions with over 350,000 signatures calling on President Masisi to keep the elephant trophy hunting ban in place.

The Campaign to Ban Trophy Hunting says nearly 2500 trophies have been brought back into Britain by hunters over the past decade, of which almost 700 were elephant body parts. As well as tusks, UK hunters have taken elephant feet, skins, bones, ears, and tails.

Other popular animal trophies for UK hunters were hippos, bears, baboons, leopards, zebras and lions, and included whole bodies, skins, tails, tusks, feet, skulls, teeth, and bones, as well as mounted trophies.

Campaigners say that plans to hunt elephants in Botswana could push the species further towards extinction. The country has the world's largest population of African elephants - twice as many as any other nation - thanks largely to a hunting ban. However new President Mokgweetsi Masisi, who came into power in April 2018, wants to lift the ban.

In their letter to President Masisi, delivered to the Botswana High Commission in London, the group of celebrities and conservationists say:

"The population of elephants has plummeted in recent years, with trophy hunting and ivory poaching largely to blame. Today, one third of all African elephants in the wild are found in Botswana.

"With its population dwindling and increasingly scattered, the impact of trophy hunting could be disastrous and possibly contribute to the extinction of the species. This would be a major global conservation disaster - potentially the worst in living memory - and have tremendously damaging consequences for efforts to conserve endangered fauna and flora everywhere."

Figures released by the Campaign to Ban Trophy Hunting show that over the past decade (2008-17) 693 elephant trophies have been brought back into the UK by British hunters. In 2017 alone, the list of trophies included 8 elephant ears, 1 set of bones, 4 feet, 6 skins, 1 tail, and 4 tusks.

Over the last 10 years, 2498 hunting trophies in all have been imported by hunters into the UK. In 2017, the list included 15 lion bodies and skulls; 17 hippo tusks, skulls and 'leather products'; 2 polar bear bodies; 2 wolves; 2 brown bears; and a leopard skull.

Eduardo Gonçalves, founder of the Campaign to Ban Trophy Hunting, said an international treaty was needed to stop the bloodsport and protect endangered wildlife:

"Trophy hunting is cruel and inhumane. Large animals such as elephants suffer lingering and painful deaths after being shot. Trophy hunting is putting pressure on already-threatened species such as elephants, lions and rhinos, and may contribute to us losing them altogether. Trophy hunting needs to be banned now, before it's too late."

According to UN figures released by the Campaign to Ban Trophy Hunting, the list of animals killed by

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U.K. trophy hunters over the last 10 years includes: Elephants, Hippos, Black bears, Baboons, Leopards, Zebras, Lions, Caracals, Crocodiles, Vervet monkeys, Brown bears, Wolves, White rhinos, Cougars, Cheetahs, Polar bears, alligators, rhinos, walrus, pygmy hippos, North American river otters, Bleeding Heart Monkeys, Mantled guereza monkeys, Blue Monkeys, African Green Monkeys, wild cats, Eurasian Lynx, oryxes, bobcats, antelopes, Aardwolf, African civets, honey badgers, servals, wild goats, and Barbary sheep.

In a statement, Joanna Lumley said: “I have always considered trophy hunting the lowest of the low. Killing animals for fun is just disgusting. We are urging President Masisi to reject the proposal to lift the ban on trophy hunting for the sake of the elephants in his beautiful country and for the reputation of humans everywhere.”

Ricky Gervais also hit out against the moves: “If trophy hunting elephants in Botswana is made legal again, we might as well say goodbye to them now. It will be the end for African elephants, and all because some rich psychopath enjoys murdering a magnificent animal”.

Botswana’s plans have angered leading conservationists. Bill Oddie warned that allowing trophy hunting could spell disaster: “I’m just incredulous that anyone would even think this is a good idea. Elephants are fast approaching a pre-extinction phase. They’ve disappeared from much of Africa. You’ve got small isolated groups separated from one another. Trophy hunting in the one place where they are relatively thriving could spell disaster. Botswana is the last hope for the African elephant. If we lose them here, the whole battle could be lost.”

Damian Aspinall added: "As a conservationist and as someone directly involved in working to save persecuted species, I can say from first-hand experience that hunting for 'sport' is putting tremendous pressure on our wildlife. Trophy hunting is simply inexplicable and inexcusable, and those who practice it need to take a long, hard look at themselves and what they’re doing. Elephants have been with us for millions of years. Are we really going to allow them to disappear within the blink of an eye just because a handful of people take pleasure from killing them?"

Legendary explorer Sir Ranulph Fiennes has thrown his weight behind the campaign for a global ban: “Our children will despise us if we let elephants die out. We should hang our heads in shame at what’s going on. People who kill elephants for fun need to be stopped. We need a global ban and tough jail terms for all trophy hunting and poaching.”

Dr Mark Jones, Head of Policy at the Born Free Foundation, likened trophy hunting to a ‘colonial-era obsession’: “Born Free is opposed to the killing of any animal for sport or pleasure. Trophy hunting is a relic of a colonial-era obsession with killing iconic and often rare wild animals for sport, and has no place in progressive conservation programmes.”

Politicians from across the political spectrum have condemned Botswana’s plans and backed a ban on trophy hunting. Sir Ed Davey MP (Lib Dem) said: “The case for legal hunting of elephant ranges from weak to immoral. Legal hunting can often act as a cover for illegal hunting, endangering the species - and the idea that tourist money trickles down to support local people who then prevent poaching simply isn’t proven. We need the ban - and we need to resource its enforcement, urgently.”

Chris Williamson MP (Labour) added: “The appalling, indiscriminate killing of elephants for their tusks is barbaric. There has been a spate of killings in Botswana, a previous safe haven for these beautiful creatures. That’s why I am calling on the Botswana Government to take action to address the slaughter of these animals without delay”.

ENDS

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Notes:

1. Full text of open letter from celebrities/conservationists: https://bantrophyhunting.net/open-letter/

1. Link to 250,000-strong petition: http://care2.com/botswanaelephants

1. Data collated by the UN (United Nations) Environment Programme World Conservation Monitoring Centre for the CITES (Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species) Secretariat gives the following figures for British trophy hunters:

A) ELEPHANT HUNTING TROPHIES

Over the past decade (2008-17), 693 elephant trophies hunted by British hunters have been brought back into the UK.

- The trophies include elephant feet, skins, bones, ears, and tails.
- In addition, some 864.1kg of elephant tusks have been brought into the UK by hunters during the same period.
- In 2017 alone, there were 8 elephant ears, 1 set of bones, 4 feet, 6 skins, 1 tail, 4 tusks and 1 hunting trophy brought back to the UK from African safaris.

B) ALL HUNTING TROPHIES

Over the past decade, almost 2500 trophies have been imported by hunters into the UK.

- The total figure for 2008-2017 was 2498.
- After elephants, the most popular trophies were from hippos, black bears, baboons, leopards, zebras and lions.

The numbers of animal trophies and types of body part between 2008-2017 were:

- Hippos: 403 - trophies, skin, tails, tusks, feet, skulls, teeth, bones, leather products
- Black bears: 267 - trophies, bodies, skins, skulls, bones, teeth, garments
- Baboons: 191 - trophies, bodies, skins, skulls, teeth
- Leopards: 154 - trophies, bodies, skins, skulls, claws
- Zebras: 140 - trophies, skins, skulls, rug
- Lions: 103 - trophies, skins, bones, feet, claws, skulls, rug
- Caracals: 88 - trophies, bodies, skins, skulls
- Crocodiles: 76 - trophies, skins, skulls, leather products, teeth
- Vervet monkeys: 45 - trophies, bodies, skins, skulls
- Brown bears: 33 - trophies, bodies, skins, skulls
- Wolves: 30 - trophies, skins, skulls
- White rhinos: 15 - bodies, skins, horns, bones, skulls
- Cougars: 15 - trophies, skins, skulls
- Cheetahs: 5 - trophies, bodies, skins, skulls
- Polar bears: 4 - bodies, skins, skulls

Other animal trophies brought into the UK by trophy hunters include alligators (trophies), rhinos (trophies, skins), walrus (skulls, skin pieces), pygmy hippos (trophies), North American river otters (skins), Bleeding Heart Monkey (trophies), Mantled guereza monkey (trophies), Blue Monkey (trophies), African Green Monkey (trophies), wild cats (bodies, skins, skulls), Eurasian Lynx (trophies, skins), oryx (trophies, bodies), bobcats (trophies), antilopes (trophies), Aardwolf (live animal), African civet (trophies, skulls), honey badgers (trophies), servals (trophies), wild goats (trophies), and barbary sheep (trophies).

In 2017, the list included:

- 1 leopard skull
- 2 wolves
- 15 lion bodies and skulls
- 17 hippo tusks, skulls and ‘leather products’
- 2 brown bears
- 2 polar bear bodies

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