

South Africa puts year-long ban on leopard hunting

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A leopard sneaks out from the bush at the Born Free Foundation on May 12, 2010 in the Shamwari Game Reserve

South Africa has imposed a year-long ban on leopard hunting in 2016 in a decision hailed Monday by conservation activists.

"Provincial conservation authorities were informed that leopard hunts should not be authorised in 2016," the Department of Environmental

Affairs said, adding that the ban would be reviewed at the end of the year.

The department said it was acting on recommendations from South Africa's Scientific Authority, which had suggested an intervention to ensure the survival of the leopard population.

Under the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES), South Africa can allocate 150 permits each year for the trophy-hunting of leopards destined for export.

The size of South Africa's leopard population remains a mystery.

"We just don't know how leopards are faring in South Africa," said Guy Balme of environmental group Panthera.

"They're secretive, mainly nocturnal, solitary and range over huge areas," he explained.

Conservation groups hailed the year-long ban, saying it was crucial to protecting the species given that the size of the population is unknown.

"Until we know [population numbers](#) and carrying capacity we should not hunt them," said Andrew Muir of the Wilderness Foundation.

Kelly Marnewick, carnivore conservation manager at the Environmental Wildlife Trust, added: "It's important to ensure that any wildlife trade we do is sustainable.

"If we can't do that, it's highly problematical. We need a [trade ban](#) until we can get to that."

The mismanagement of trophy hunting and the illegal trade in leopard

fur are the main threats to South Africa's population of the big cat, according to the government.

Dignitaries from South Africa's Zulu community traditionally wear animal skins for ceremonies, particularly leopard fur.

South Africa earns substantial revenues from selling permits to wealthy foreigners willing to pay thousands or even tens of thousands of dollars to hunt one of the "big five" (lion, [leopard](#), elephant, rhino or buffalo).

Hunting generates some 6.2 million rand (\$375 million/347 million euros) for South Africa every year, according to the environment ministry.

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