

# Trophy hunting of lions can conserve the species

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Image: Wikipedia.

One year after the worldwide controversy when an American dentist killed Cecil the Lion in Zimbabwe, the DICE team says hunting works but only when hunting companies are given long-term land management rights.

Dr Henry Brink and Dr Bob Smith from DICE (the Durrell Institute of Conservation and Ecology), and Professor Nigel Leader-Williams from the University of Cambridge's Department of Geography, studied [lion](#) population trends in Tanzania's Selous Game Reserve.

This protected area is divided into blocks in which hunting rights are allocated to different companies. Their study showed that blocks under

short-term allocation were over-hunted. In contrast, lion trophy hunting levels were sustainable in blocks owned by the same company for 10 years or more, thereby also maintaining important habitat for this threatened species.

Dr Brink said DICE's research shows that those who have secured long-term use rights to natural resources are more likely to manage them sustainably. This is an important lesson for lion conservation, as loss of habitat means this species is increasingly restricted to protected areas.

Dr Smith added that their findings may surprise the public, but most lion conservationists think trophy hunting could play a key role in conserving this species because lions need large areas to thrive, and managing this land is expensive. Their work shows land under long-term management for trophy hunting can help fill this shortfall.

This research also supports calls to change the hunting fee system in Tanzania. Nigel Leader-Williams explained that at present, the government sells hunting block fees cheaply, and raises more by setting high quotas and high fees for each trophy animal shot, which encourages those who are only allocated blocks over the short-term to shoot more lions, at the expense of long-term sustainability and profits. Increasing block fees, reducing trophy fees and reducing the hunting quota could bring in the same tax revenue, while reducing the temptation of hunters to over-use lions.

'Sustainability and long term-tenure: lion trophy hunting in Tanzania' (Henry Brink, Robert J. Smith, both University of Kent , Kirsten Skinner, University of Queensland, Nigel Leader-Williams, University of Cambridge) can be viewed online in the journal *PLOS ONE*.

**More information:** Henry Brink et al. Sustainability and Long Term-Tenure: Lion Trophy Hunting in Tanzania, *PLOS ONE* (2016). [DOI:](#)

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