

Banning trophy hunting amid COVID-19 threatens African wildlife and livelihoods

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Hunting African lions is controversial but is legal in Tanzania, Zambia, South Africa, Zimbabwe, Namibia, and Mozambique. Credit: Alex Braczkowski

Griffith University scientists have revealed the devastating effects a trophy hunting ban will have on wildlife conservation and livelihoods in

Africa. Although controversial, the practice of trophy hunting conserves land that wouldn't otherwise be protected.

Dr. Duan Biggs, leader of the Resilient Conservation Research Group at the Environmental Futures Research Institute worked with a group of international collaborators to investigate the effect a [trophy hunting](#) ban would have on South African landowners, who hold the majority of the hunting market in Africa.

In an article published this week in *The Conversation*, the researchers stress the timeliness and importance of their findings in light of the COVID-19 pandemic, which has devastated the African tourism economy.

"Trophy hunting is facing increasing pressure due to perceptions as being grotesque and morally reprehensible, with many groups calling for a complete ban," Dr. Biggs said.

Hunters from the U.S., Russia, Spain and other global locations travel across the continent to hunt animals from the size of small antelope to 200 kg male lions.

Dr. Biggs and colleagues' research suggest that, despite its negative perception, trophy hunting conserves broad swathes of land that would not otherwise be protected. These areas contribute about USD\$ 200 million annually to African economies, supporting millions of livelihoods.

"Our study explored how [private landowners](#) would respond to a legislative hunting ban being lobbied for by several NGO's and international governments," said Dr. Hayley Clements, a member the Center for Complex Systems in Transition at the University of Stellenbosch.

"Private [conservation](#) land, where trophy hunting occurs, comprise about 14-17% of South Africa, that's more conservation land than in national parks," said Dr. Alta De Vos from Rhodes University, who co-led the study.

"This hunting land is critically important as it provides linkages between private and public conservation areas, and funds further conservation efforts. It turns out that about two thirds of landowners in South Africa would move away from a wildlife-based land use if trophy hunting is banned," Dr. Biggs said.

Dr. Biggs and his colleagues then asked whether ecotourism could be a viable alternative to trophy hunting.

Their study of South African private conservation landowners found a switch to photographic tourism wasn't feasible for the majority, due to the financial constraints related to entering and competing in an already saturated tourism market.

"High-end photographic safaris are often touted as an alternative solution to trophy hunting, but only one third of our 22 respondents said that they would switch to photo safaris or intensify the wildlife viewing they already have," said Kim Parker, co-lead researcher from Rhodes University.

"Evidence shows that hunters will travel to politically unstable and risky destinations to hunt, and severing limited funding in an already strained system would be catastrophic for both [wildlife conservation](#) and livelihoods in many parts of Africa," said Dr. Biggs.

"Advocacy groups and the [policy makers](#) they're pressuring to end all trophy hunting need to consider these potential ramifications of hunting bans, especially in the current COVID-19 climate. Alternative revenue

streams and transition plans must be developed with landholders and communities where hunting is a key source of income to sustain both conservation land use and livelihoods before the implementation of any ban."

More information: Kim Parker et al. Impacts of a trophy hunting ban on private land conservation in South African biodiversity hotspots, *Conservation Science and Practice* (2020). [DOI: 10.1111/csp2.214](https://doi.org/10.1111/csp2.214)

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