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ON SUNDAY

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Page 63

EXPOSED: HORROR OF LION FARMS

Year-long investigation reveals sickening trade – and ends with a dramatic rescue

THOUSANDS of lions are being bred to be killed by callous hunters or slaughtered so their bones can be turned into 'medicines' and trinkets sold for huge sums in the Far East.

Some of the animals are shot in fenced enclosures by wealthy trophy hunters – including Britons – who pay thousands of pounds to kill them for

By **Mark Hookham**

kicks. Many more are trucked to squalid slaughterhouses and held in appalling conditions until they are shot in the head and butchered.

The repulsive industry, which is rife in South Africa, has been exposed in a year-long investigation by former

Tory peer Lord Ashcroft, who last night accused the British Government of being complicit in the trade because of its failure to ban the import of trophy skins.

His exposé ended in victory as one lion was rescued from death at the hunters' hands, and released into the

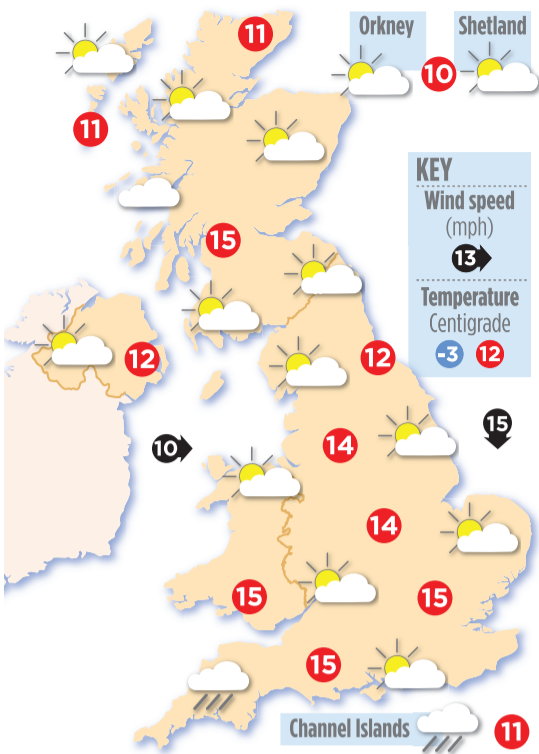
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Why women
are leaving
men... for
other women



**YOU MAGAZINE ON A
SEXUAL REVOLUTION**

Weather



UK FORECAST

GENERAL FORECAST

Unsettled, as a weak warm front pushes in from the west to bring light rain and some drizzle to the West. In addition, the remains of Saturday's frontal system will linger over the East Coast, bringing overcast conditions as well as some brief light showers at times throughout the day.

REGIONAL FORECASTS

South East, London, South, East Anglia: A front lingering over the East Coast will bring plenty of cloud and some light rain. Wind SE light. Max 15C 59F.

South West, Wales, Channel Islands: Dry start, then widespread light rain moving in. Wind W light. Max 15C 59F.

Midlands, North West, North East:

Unsettled and overcast. Risk of occasional light showers at times. Wind S light. Max 15C 59F.

Scotland: Unsettled. Risk of some brief, light showers, especially across central regions. Wind S light. Max 16C 61F.

Northern Ireland, Eire: Unsettled. A band of light rain will bring wet, drizzly conditions. Wind SW moderate. Max 16C 61F.

WEEK AHEAD

Largely dry for most areas tomorrow, with a risk of scattered light showers along the West Coast. Unsettled on Tuesday, moderate to heavy rain moving in. This front will linger across the country on Wednesday, leading to widespread showers. Thursday and the weekend will stay unsettled.

WEATHER WATCH John Kettley

Easter proved to be the warmest for eight years, peaking at 25C every day from Saturday to Monday, although a frost was reported in some rural areas on four consecutive nights. This year, parts of Scotland and Wales had their warmest Easter Day ever, at around 23C.

During the past three weeks we have moved from April's cold start into 'summer' warmth, now back to autumnal weather. But it was named storm Hannah that brought the awful weather from late Friday into Saturday.

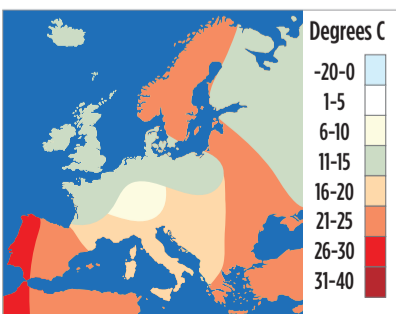
Severe gales affected the South West and, although late in the season for an intense low-pressure system, also brought much colder weather. But forget climate change, this is simply the British weather and its rich tapestry of good and bad. It never stays warm for very long at this time and we are susceptible to a colder blast of gale force winds or incessant deluges of rain.

SIX-DAY FORECAST

	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT
LONDON	17	19	17	16	16	17
ABERDEEN	14	13	13	10	9	10
BELFAST	13	12	13	13	13	14
BIRMINGHAM	15	17	15	14	14	16
CANTERBURY	13	14	16	15	14	16
CARDIFF	14	15	14	13	13	14
GLASGOW	17	16	15	14	13	14
LEEDS	15	17	15	13	13	15
MANCHESTER	16	17	15	14	14	16
NEWCASTLE	13	15	14	13	11	13
NORWICH	13	15	16	14	13	15
PLYMOUTH	13	14	14	14	14	14

EUROPE WEEK AHEAD

Dry and settled across the West and Iberia. Unsettled across the Balkans and the East, with rain and showers, heavy in places. Dry and sunny across Greece, Cyprus and South Turkey, some rain in central Turkey.



With one bound... Simba's free!



LORD ASHCROFT

From Page xx

wild in joyous scenes last night.

Lord Ashcroft's exposé – compiled by a team of undercover investigators – is published in The Mail on Sunday today and also reveals that:

● 54 lions were killed at one squalid slaughterhouse in just two days;

● Lion skins are being smuggled into the US via Britain, where they are hidden inside deer skins so they are not detected by customs officials;

● Lions and tigers are being crossbred in captivity in a sickening bid to squeeze greater profits from the barbaric bone trade, conservationists claim;

● A British City worker paid thousands of pounds to shoot a magnificent lion with tranquiliser darts in an apparent breach of South African law.

That lion, a majestic 11-year-old called Simba, was at the centre of Lord Ashcroft's probe. The tragic creature was bred in captivity and touted to foreign hunters looking for prime specimens to slaughter.

But thanks to the actions of the undercover investigators, Simba's life has been saved – and yesterday the noble beast was released into a large enclosure at a secret location. Video footage showed him bounding out of a trailer and into a thick area of bush as one of his rescuers cried out: 'Yay Simba!'

The rescue came with just hours to spare, as a source reported that a professional hunter was on his way to kill Simba at the very moment he

was being rescued.

The lion was initially offered to one of the investigators last year, when he posed as a hunter wanting to bag a wildlife trophy. When the 'hunter' backed out – having had no intention of killing such a magnificent beast – Simba was instead offered to Miles Wakefield, a British hunter, who paid around £3,000 to pursue him through an enclosed hunting area before shooting it with two powerful tranquiliser darts.

Heartbreaking images of the harrowing incident are published in today's Mail on Sunday, showing a terrified and confused Simba staggering through the bush before finally collapsing in the dust.

Mr Wakefield, 48, this weekend said he believed he was participating in a legal conservation operation, and said he was 'misled' by the safari bosses who organised the hunt.

Lord Ashcroft's operators spent the last two months trying to extricate the lion from a ranch owned by professional hunter Freddie Scheepers. Mr Scheepers, however, kept dragging his feet. It took an offer of \$2,000 (£1,500) to speed up the process, and on Thursday a



DRUGGED SIMBA IS SHOWN OFF BY BRITISH HUNTER

7am on Friday. Unconscious, he was lifted into a trailer and taken to safety, via an 11-hour journey.

Lord Ashcroft's investigation heaps pressure on the Government to close a loophole that allows the import of hunting trophies of captive lions. A source close to Environment Secretary Michael Gove said he would be chairing a meeting on the issue in the next fortnight.

transport company and vet arrived at the ranch on the edge of the Kalahari Desert to humanely drug and move the animal. They were finally given the all-clear to move him at

OPERATION SIMBA SPECIAL INVESTIGATION PAGES 13 TO 21

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OPERATION SIMBA

EXPOSED: Farms where lions are bred to be slaughtered

And the Britons revelling in sickening trade



By **LORD ASHCROFT**

PHILANTHROPIST AND FORMER TORY PEER

THE sickening cruelty and horror of 'lion farming' – in which thousands of Africa's most noble beasts are bred to be mercilessly slaughtered for their bones or as hunting trophies – can be revealed today after a groundbreaking undercover investigation.

My year-long probe lifts the lid on barbaric and illegal practices at the heart of South Africa's deeply shameful lion trade.

The investigation, exclusively revealed in The Mail on Sunday today, shows how up to 12,000 lions bred in captivity are destined either to be shot by wealthy hunters – in what is often a pathetic charade of a hunt – or killed in squalid abattoirs so their bones can be exported to the Far East.

The booming trade in lion skeletons is worth tens of millions of pounds a year and meets an insatiable desire in South East Asia and China for 'traditional' medicines, including aphrodisiacs.

Britain's complicity in lion farming is also laid bare by my undercover investigators, which includes ex-Special Forces soldiers, who have exposed how hunters and middlemen from this country are involved in the despicable trade.

It also shines a light on how the UK Government's failure to close a glaring loophole that allows the import of captive-bred lion trophies into Britain encourages the international smuggling of lion skins.

Following this exposé, I will vigorously lobby Ministers to follow the example of the US and France and ban such imports. The investi-



A PRICE ON THEIR HEADS: When undercover investigators asked about hunting lions they were offered a 'catalogue' and price list via WhatsApp

gation's shocking revelations include how:

- Wealthy clients are emailed brochures with photographs of captive male lions, so they can choose which one to kill. Prices range from £10,000 to £42,300 and depend on the size and quality of the mane;
- One British hunter was filmed

shooting an exhausted lion with tranquiliser darts. It is illegal to dart a lion without a vet present. The lion had been chased by a vehicle around a fenced hunting enclosure before the grinning City worker from Essex shot the terrified beast from ten yards away;

South African safari company advised an undercover investigator how he could bypass a US ban on importing captive-bred lion trophies by legally importing it to the UK, before hiding the lion's skin inside that of a dead red deer and moving it on to America;

tered for their bones at a so-called 'eco-farm' in South Africa's Free State province in just two days;

● Lions were kept in tiny cages and suffered appalling conditions in the farm's blood-stained slaughterhouse before their deaths. Hor-

● More than 50 lions were slaugh-

Turn to Page 14 >>

Butchered...FOR BONES

OPERATION SIMBA

► From Page 13

rific pictures showed lion skeletons and innards littering the floor, while discarded body parts were piled high in overflowing black plastic bags on a trailer outside;

● In what is believed to be an obscene bid to maximise profits, breeders in South Africa are thought to be cross-breeding lions with tigers and creating hybrid offspring. The abusive process, which can lead to birth defects and the early death of cubs, boosts bone weight, earning the breeders more money;

● British tourists are unwittingly helping encourage the horrific trade by paying to play with cubs or to go walking with adolescent lions.

South Africa is the only country in the world that permits large-scale lion breeding, with the majestic animals kept in fenced enclosures or cages at more than 200 farms and compounds.

Codenamed Operation Simba, the undercover probe discovered that there are now believed to be 4,000 more captive-bred lions in South Africa than previously thought.

Astonishingly, the 12,000 animals that have been bred and raised in captivity outnumber wild lions in the country almost four to one.

Young cubs, often only a few days old, are taken away from their mothers and hand-reared, sometimes to pet and cuddle as tourist attractions. Tourists, unaware of the appalling fate that awaits many of the creatures, also pay to walk with adolescent lions at so-called conservation centres.

As the lions become too dangerous to be allowed near tourists and enter their majestic physical prime, some – particularly the most impressive-looking males – are supplied for South Africa's 'trophy hunting' industry.

Hunting clients pay as much as £42,300 to shoot a large male, often then triumphantly mounting its head on a wall. Such hunts, however, are often feeble pretences. Far from being a wild beast to be tracked and hunted, the lions in so-called 'canned', or captive, hunts are pursued in heavily-fenced private game ranches and have little or no chance of escape.

Many are partially tame, having been handled by humans for much of their lives, and are unable to hunt for themselves. Instead they rely on bait left out for them by those organising the hunt.

SOME 80 per cent of so-called canned lion hunting takes place in South Africa's North West Province. There lions are allowed to be shot just four days after they have been released into a private hunting area. Other provinces require lions to be released for up to 90 days before they can be killed.

As part of the investigation, one undercover operator posed as the intermediary for two different 'trophy hunters' who wanted to hunt and shoot a lion. On both occasions he was quickly offered several photographs of potential targets and price tags to 'hunt' and kill them.

In the first case, the investigator approached Mugaba Safaris, owned and run by professional hunter Patrick de Beer.

Mugaba's website states that De Beer, who is pictured holding up a dead leopard, specialises in 'dangerous game-hunting safaris' and prides himself on having 'successfully bagged' a large number

‘You stick the lion skin inside a bloody stag. It's a bit dodgy but you know...’

BRITON ADRIAN SAILOR, RIGHT, EXPLAINS HOW TO ILLEGALLY SMUGGLE A LION TROPHY INTO U.S.

of lions and buffalo. The investigator was offered an online brochure with photographs of 16 male lions ranging in price from £10,000 to £20,000.

He finally settled on an older lion called Simba, which De Beer described in a WhatsApp message as being 'a very good cat with a dense mane'. Simba's heartbreaking but ultimately uplifting story is told in detail on the next two pages.

The hunt was due to take place last October at Kalahari Lion Hunting Safaris near the Botswana

Cowering in a tiny cage, this King of the Beasts was due to be slaughtered so his skeleton could be turned into bogus aphrodisiacs and sold in the Far East. Mercifully, he was saved by campaigners – but thousands of others like him aren't so lucky...



border and Simba was supplied by a breeder in the Bloemfontein area. The undercover hunter, who had no intention of killing the animal, postponed the hunt indefinitely but the lion was then offered to a British hunter called Miles Wakefield who was to be charged £3,076 (\$4,000) to shoot the creature with tranquiliser darts in what investigators were told was a 1,100-acre hunting area.

De Beer last night told The Mail on Sunday that their hunts comply with rules governing the conduct of a chase.

Heartbreaking footage obtained by one of the investigators shows Wakefield, who lives in Essex and works for an insurance company in London, first shooting the animal in the right hind leg from the safety of a vehicle from about 20 yards.

Wakefield and Freddie Scheepers, who owns and runs the safari company, then slowly follow the terrified and dazed beast as it stumbles through bush. Taking his time, Wakefield finally shoots the cowering animal for a second time from just ten yards away before posing next to it as it lies semi-conscious in the dirt. The sickening spectacle can be seen on pages 18 and 19.

Under South African law, lions can only be shot with tranquiliser darts 'for veterinary, scientific, conservation or management purposes' and a vet should be present. Hunters are also banned from hunting lions from vehicles unless

they are tracking them over long distances or unless hunters are disabled or elderly. In the second case, the undercover investigator contacted Adrian Sailor, the UK representative for Settlers Safaris in South Africa, to arrange a hunt for his boss who he claimed wanted to shoot a lion.

Sailor, the general manager of a car-parts firm in the West Midlands, offered a choice of three male lions and sent photographs of all of them, along with suggestions of where to hunt them.

The lions cost between £8,500 and £16,000 to hunt and kill, plus £200 a day for the duration of the hunt.

In a tape-recorded phone call, the investigator then explained to Sailor that another client, an American, wanted to kill a lion and have his 'trophy' returned the US. However, since 2016, American law has banned the import of captive-bred



Hunted...FOR TROPHIES



LORD ASHCROFT

SICKENING: One of the lions kept in a cramped, squalid cage at the Wag 'n Bietjie slaughterhouse

lion trophies. Sailor, an amateur taxidermist, volunteered a method of bypassing the restrictions, suggesting that the client might want to initially export the lion to the UK, which is legal, and then send it on to the US by putting the lion's skin inside the skin of a dead red deer.

If salted and rolled, the stag skin sets hard, making it almost impossible for customs officials to detect the lion skin inside.

'You stick the lion, stick the lion skin, inside the bloody stag... It's all salted and rock hard,' Sailor said. 'It's a bit dodgy, but you know.'

In messages to The Mail on Sunday, Mr Sailor did not deny suggesting a deer skin could be lined with a lion skin but stressed he was not involved in the lion hunt which the conversation referred to.

He stressed that 'no crime has been committed' and added: 'How will a lion fit inside a deer skin?

Major size difference. I have no idea about any recordings.'

Colin Bell, a South African conservationist who has spent more than 40 years in the tourism industry, this weekend branded captive lion hunting as a 'cancer in our society'. 'If we don't get on top of this type of lion hunting, we are going to be in a situation where there is going to be a boycott of South African tourism. This is too ghastly to contemplate.'

BUT the trophy-hunting industry is only part of the appalling lion farming story. South Africa is the only country that allows the export of lion bones and the majority of the lions bred there are believed to be slaughtered for the grisly 'bone trade.'

The exports began a decade ago, after strict laws protecting tigers

led to the increased use of lion bones in medicines, including aphrodisiacs, in the Far East.

South Africa's government allows 800 captive-bred lion skeletons to be exported each year as part of a hugely lucrative industry.

They fetch about £125 a kilo, or £4,600 for a whole skeleton, including the skull.

About 98 per cent of the legal sales go to Vietnam, Thailand and Laos, where the bones are boiled down and made into a cake that is meant to give those who eat it the strength of a cat. A 100-gram bar can be sold for an astonishing £769. Campaign-

ers, however, believe that many more than the permitted 800 skeletons are leaving the country each year via illegal lion-bone smuggling. Once smuggled out of the country, organised crime networks in Vietnam and Laos traffic lion bones through South East Asia to China. There they are often sold as fake tiger products, including jewellery and even wine.

Last November six Vietnamese nationals and two South Africans were arrested in North West Province, around 155 miles from the capital Pretoria, after more than 40 lions were slaughtered at a nearby lion farm.

The men were caught with lion bones along with gas burners, knives and a saw, which it was believed were going to be used to process the bones into a paste.

Campaigners have exposed the horrific conditions endured by lions at one licensed slaughterhouse. Officials from the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals in South Africa raided the facility at the Wag-'n-Bietjie 'eco-farm' on the bank of the River Vaal in May last year and found that some lions were being kept in small temporary containers for three days amid a 'disgusting' scene of squalor and blood-stained filth.

'It was totally disgusting that they were kept like this,' inspector Renet Meyer of the SPCA said. 'For me, a

lion is a stately animal, a kingly animal. Here he is butchered for people to make money.'

In another sickening twist, campaigners fear that lions are being crossbred with tigers to produce 'ligers' (whereby the father is a lion and the mother is a tiger) or 'tigons' (where the father is a tiger and the mother is a lion).

A three-year-old liger or tigon can be the same size of a nine-year-old lion, so producing more bone to sell once slaughtered.

Although the investigators were unable to prove cross-breeding, they identified one centre where a group of five lions and two tigers were being kept in the same enclosure and another game lodge which had around 50 tigers, which are not native to Africa.

Meanwhile, unwitting tourists are helping to fuel the lion farming industry by paying to play with cubs or walk with adolescent lions.

In February, two of the investigators paid £13 for a tour of a 'lion and tiger park', which culminated in petting three cubs, which were 14 weeks old and the offspring of a lioness at the centre.

'You have got to stop yourself feeling, "This is really cool, I've just been licked by a real life lion cub",' one of the investigators told this newspaper. 'You've got to think, "No, these poor things are destined for a lifetime in captivity and then the possibility of an appalling death".'

'It has absolutely no conservation value to lions in the world. We were told the cubs we were interacting with would go into a three-year rehabilitation programme where they would be taught to hunt and fend for themselves and then they would go back into the wild.'

'There is no reputable study that we have been able to find that indicates that captive-bred lions can be successfully released into the wild.'

There are now only an estimated 20,000 wild lions in the world compared with 200,000 just over a century ago. Respected conservationists fear that wild lions could become extinct in just 30 years.

The South African Predator Association, a trade organisation for the captive breeding industry, insists the breeding of lions in captivity has a crucial role safeguarding the big cat's future.

But Dr Mark Jones, a vet and head of policy at the Born Free Foundation, a wildlife protection charity, said: 'Far from contributing to wild lion protection, captive lion breeding facilities cynically exploit these animals at every stage for profit. Ultimately many of these animals will end up in canned hunts or as part of the bone trade. It's factory farming by another name.'

● **Lord Ashcroft KCMG PC** is a businessman, philanthropist, author and pollster. For more information on his wildlife work, visit www.LordAshcroftWildlife.com. Follow him on Twitter

BORN IN CAPTIVITY TO BE SHOT FOR KICKS – SIMBA'S STORY NEXT PAGES



By **LORD
ASHCROFT**

Posing for the camera, City worker who paid £3,000 to shoot Simba with a dart

WITH his majestic mane and a scar running beneath one of his piercing yellow eyes, Simba looks the epitome of the King of the African savannah. But despite his magnificence, this 11-year-old is no wild beast. Instead he is one of South Africa's 12,000 'captive-bred lions': hand-reared as a cub by humans on a so-called lion farm before entering a breeding programme to produce more cubs.

After reaching his physical prime, Simba's imposing size and glorious mane sealed his fate: he was to be offered up to be slaughtered by wealthy hunters bent on killing him as a trophy to adorn their lavish homes.

I first learnt of Simba after one of my undercover investigators posed as the representative of a wealthy American client, hoping to pay thousands of pounds to hunt and kill a lion.

The investigator approached Mugaba Safaris, a firm owned and managed by professional hunter Patrick de Beer.

De Beer is described on his company's website as having grown up 'in a safari fraternity' and 'boasts unmatched African bow and rifle hunting experience'. Photographs show him holding up a huge dead leopard and straddling a dead male lion.

My investigator was emailed a brochure with photographs of 16 male lions each with its own price tag ranging from \$13,000 (£10,000) to \$26,000 (£20,000), depending on the quality of its mane.

He settled on Simba, an older male which De Beer, who is known as 'The Lion Man', described in a WhatsApp message as a 'very good cat with a dense mane'. He added: 'I am sure the client will be very pleased with his cat.'

The pair agreed a price tag of \$23,000 (£17,700) for the hunter to shoot Simba, with half to be paid in advance as a deposit and the balance in cash on arrival in South Africa.

The undercover investigator repeatedly requested to see Simba before the hunt, in a bid to witness the conditions that the lion was being kept in. But he was rebuffed by De Beer, who wrote of his reluctance to show visitors captive lions in their enclosures.

'You have to understand that due to the sensitive nature of lion hunting all over the world we are hesitant to take people around showing then [sic] lions behind fences,' he said in another WhatsApp message. 'It just takes the authenticity out of the hunt.'

Instead he offered to send my investigator 'as many pictures and videos as he wants of the lion'.

He added: 'We will photograph specific scars identifiable on the cat from various parts of the body to eliminate doubt. We guarantee the cat that he'll shoot is the cat as per the pictures sent to you.'

He sent a series of pictures of Simba, including close-ups of his face, to illustrate the creature's identifiable scars and markings. 'There are many distinctive features of which the spots on the nose is [sic] the lion's fingerprints... it works the same as a human's fingerprints,' he wrote.

'Each lion is unique. Other features are the scars on the face (note 2x black spots next to the left eye) and the tufts of belly hair. Also a scar next to [the] nose under right eye which goes horizontal.'

With the haggling over, the hunt was booked for October last year at Kalahari Lion Hunting Safaris, an exclusive hunting ranch on the edge of the vast Kalahari desert and near South Africa's border with Botswana. The ranch is run by experienced hunter Freddie Scheepers and his wife Zerna.

This was to be what campaigners call a 'canned' hunt, in which a

...but, for once, the story has a happy ending as undercover team rescue him

captive-bred lion is killed within an enclosed hunting area surrounded by electric fences.

My team learnt that Simba was to be supplied by a lion breeder in the Bloemfontein area, although they were unable to identify the exact farm.

Plans were put in place for Simba to be shot between October 22 and 25 – but my investigators had no intention on killing the magnificent animal, so found an excuse to pull out, hoping to find a way to rescue Simba.

A day before the hunt, a member of my team posing as the American hunter met De Beer and claimed that his wife and family had been in a serious car crash in the US and that he needed to fly home immediately. In fact, this was a made-up excuse to withdraw from the hunt.

But De Beer and Scheepers now had a problem: they had released a captive lion into a hunting area and

had no one to kill it, so they hatched another plan to make even more money out of the lion before it died. They decided to offer Simba up for a so-called 'green hunt', whereby a wealthy client would pay thousands of pounds to shoot the big cat with a tranquiliser dart.

LUCKILY for the safari bosses, a British hunting enthusiast called Miles Wakefield, 48, was also enjoying a six-night stay at the ranch, where he was hunting impala and other game.

Wakefield, who works as an insurance loss adjuster in London, was offered the cut price opportunity to shoot the lion with tranquiliser darts for \$4,000 (£3,076).

That morning, Wakefield went antelope hunting before joining Scheepers and De Beer in the afternoon to search for Simba in what

my investigator was told was an 1,100-acre hunting area.

They found the lion close to a perimeter fence where a 'bait' of offal had been left out and began their cruel pursuit of him in an open 4x4 vehicle. Wakefield took a shot from the vehicle from a distance of about 12 yards but missed. A terrified Simba bounded off and, with darkness approaching, the men returned to the comfort of the lodge, which has its own swimming pool and bar.

The pursuit resumed the next day, with the party again finding Simba near a perimeter fence. He was again chased in the pick-up truck until he was so exhausted that he slumped to the ground.

After the previous day's failure, Wakefield took careful aim under the direction of Mr Scheepers, who advised him to hit Simba in the muscle of his right hind leg.

My investigators have obtained footage of the appalling spectacle, which can be seen on Mail Online, with some still pictures from the 'hunt' on the following two pages.

The heartbreaking film shows the

distressed animal leaping up in shock after being shot and attempting to flee.

But, increasingly weakened by the drug, his rear legs begin to fail as Wakefield and Scheepers stalk him on foot. A pitiful and disorientated Simba is shown staggering into a tree and wheeling away from his pursuers, apparently confused about which way to turn.

He finally collapses in the shade of a tree at which point Wakefield – after turning back to grin at the rest of the party – fires a second dart into his right leg.

Minutes later, once the drugs have finally brought down the proud beast, Wakefield is filmed posing for his 'trophy shot' next to the semi-conscious Simba, whose tongue was lolling from his mouth.

The Briton appeared barely able to contain his delight as the dazed lion attempted to move his huge head. Wakefield exclaimed: 'He is turning his head and there's no fighting it!'

A group picture showed Wakefield lined up behind Simba with Scheepers, De Beer and another profes-

**TO SEE THE WHOLE VIDEO GO TO
MAILONSUNDAY.CO.UK/LORDASHCROFT/LIONS**





SOME TROPHY: From left, Patrick De Beer, another hunter, Freddie Scheepers, and Briton Miles Wakefield, with Simba, after they shot him with a tranquiliser dart

LORD ASHCROFT



sional hunter. Under South African law, it is illegal to fire a tranquiliser dart at a lion for purposes 'other than veterinary, scientific, conservation or management purposes'. The dart has to be fired by a vet or a vet has to be present. Hunters are also banned from hunting a lion in a vehicle, unless they are tracking it over long distance or the hunter is physically disabled or elderly.

Wakefield this weekend said he was misled by Scheepers and De Beer and that he believed he was taking part in a 'legal operation to relocate a lion in the interests of the health of the animal'.

He said he was only told that there should have been a vet present after the event, and that if he had known beforehand, 'I would have immediately withdrawn from the operation'. He added: 'I was led to believe, by the two South Africans, Freddie Scheepers and Patrick de Beer, who are both professional hunters, that

it was for conservation. By relocating the lion to another more controlled location the animal's life would be preserved.'

DE BEER insisted last night it was not a hunt, claiming Wakefield paid for the upkeep of the lion in return for the chance to shoot it with a dart. Speaking to this newspaper, Scheepers confirmed there was no vet present but denied it was a hunt, insisting they were simply 'darting' the lion to move it to another enclosed area after the original hunter had pulled out. 'That wasn't a hunt. We just darted it,' he said.

'What happened was the guy that was supposed to hunt the lion, when he landed in South Africa his wife and his daughters were in a terrible accident so he had to go back. We decided to take the lion back to the



Please find the pics attached as promised. There are many distinctive features of which the spots on the nose is the lion's fingerprints... it works the same as a human's fingerprints. Each lion is unique. Other features are the scars on the face (note 2x black spots next to left eye) and the tufts of belly hair. Also a scar next to nose under right eye which goes horizontal

FOR THE KILL: De Beer's email offering Simba left, for slaughter. Left: Wakefield fires a dart as Scheepers looks on

enclosed area.' He denied conducting 'green hunts' and said Simba would not have survived where he was. Scheepers claimed this was the 'first and only time' a client had paid to dart a lion and he insisted it was too dangerous to fire a tranquiliser dart at a lion while on foot.

After posing for pictures, the men helped load Simba into the back of a trailer, carefully monitoring the time that had elapsed to ensure that the drug would not wear off and that the huge beast was not about to come around and turn on them.

This was not, however, the kind of relocation operation that conservationists undertake across Africa. Simba was simply being moved to a holding area where he would await the American hunter who had

claimed the right to kill him. My undercover investigator, posing again as the American hunter, arrived at Scheepers' hunting site on February 20. But, after locating Simba, he then shocked his hosts by saying he was unhappy to continue with the hunt. To Scheepers' bafflement, my mole told him he now wanted to rescue the 'magnificent beast' and relocate it to a sanctuary.

After two months of nerve-racking uncertainty, I can reveal that my team finally managed to rescue Simba last week and he was taken to a sanctuary at a secret location.

We were later told how perilously Simba's life had hung in the balance: sources told us that another hunter was on his way to the ranch on Thursday to kill him. 'The lion is now out,'

said Reinert Meyer, a senior inspector at the Society For The Prevention Of Cruelty To Animals. 'One lion has been saved from a terrible death. We are very happy and relieved.'

Sadly, the uplifting ending to this story is highly unusual. Thousands more lions are languishing in breeding centres and farms across South Africa waiting to be picked out for slaughter by foreign hunters.

Andrew Muir, widely considered to be South Africa's leading conservationist and wildlife expert, this weekend branded canned lion hunting 'deplorable'.

'I believe canned hunting should be outlawed throughout the world because it is inhumane and there is no conservation value or justification to it,' he said.

FRAME BY HEARTRENDING FRAME, HOW SIMBA WAS CRUELY STALKED NEXT PAGES

SIMBA SHOT FROM 10 YARDS IN



1 Exhausted and clearly terrified, Simba cowers by a tree after being stalked by British City worker Miles Wakefield and safari owner Freddie Scheepers in a 4x4 pick-up truck, on the second day of the so-called 'green hunt' in a fenced 1,100-acre area.



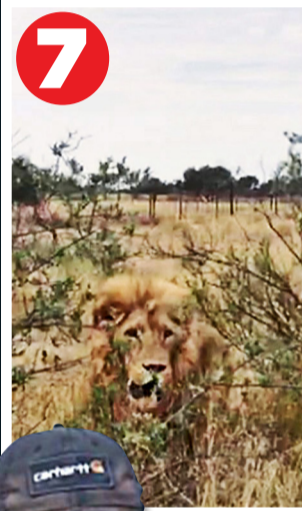
2 In the heartbreaking video footage of the so-called 'hunt' obtained by undercover investigators, Wakefield aims a tranquiliser gun at the lion from about 20 yards away. Scheepers tells him to aim for the muscle in Simba's right leg.



5 Wakefield raises the tranquiliser gun to his shoulder again but opts not to fire. Instead he and Scheepers continue to chase the increasingly confused and desperate Simba.



6 Once fearsome and majestic, now pitiful, terrified and stumbling, Simba staggers into a tree, not knowing which way to turn.



8 As he continues to shadow the increasingly distressed lion, Wakefield turns back and smirks at the rest of the hunting party as they watch the appalling spectacle from the safety of the 4x4 vehicle.



9 Cornered and close to the electric fence marking the edge of the hunting enclosure, Simba can be heard growling as he tries to flee his tormentors.



12 Members of the hunting party appear to mockingly laugh as Simba makes one last valiant attempt to escape, despite being barely able to walk, before he collapses in the dust.



13 As Simba lies helpless, a blue cloth is placed over his eyes. Throughout the 'hunt', one of the party has been monitoring the time. It is understood they fear the tranquiliser will wear off and that Simba will turn on them.



14

GROTESQUE PARODY OF A HUNT



After the dart hits its target, a delighted Wakefield, who works for an insurance company, is congratulated with a pat on his shoulder, while a startled Simba bounds into the scrub.

The hunters mercilessly pursue Simba in the vehicle. His rear legs collapse beneath him as the now weakened beast attempts to escape. Wakefield and Scheepers get out of their vehicle to stalk the disorientated lion on foot.



LORD ASHCROFT



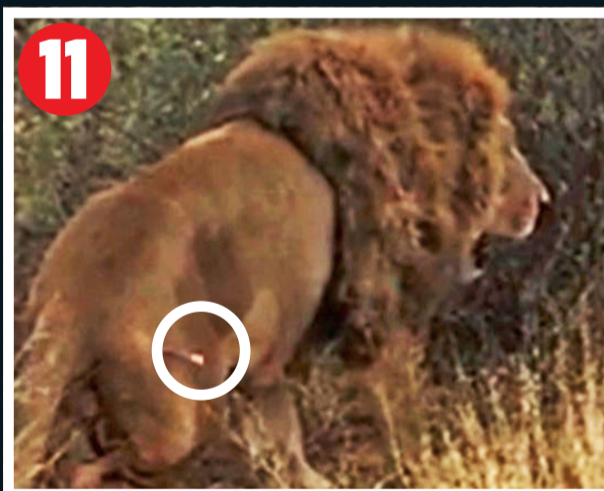
Scheepers appears to try to position Wakefield as close to the drugged lion as possible. Simba turns to confront his attackers – but his strength is fading and he instead desperately moves away.



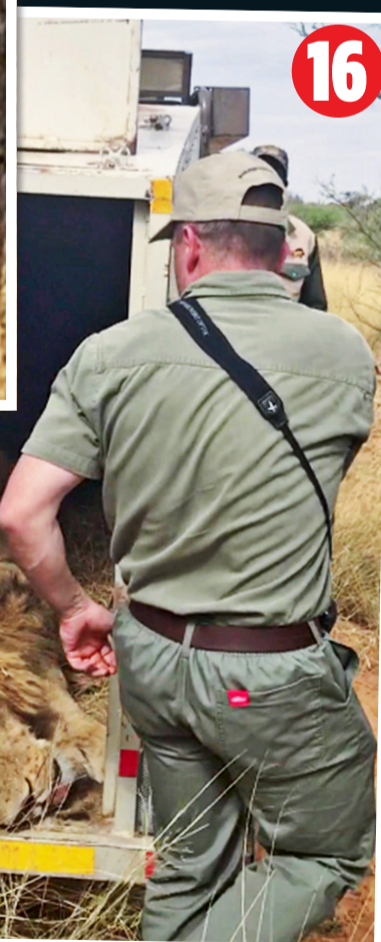
As a defeated Simba collapses again near a large bush, Wakefield callously fires a second dart – circled as it leaves his gun – from around ten yards away.

Wakefield poses for his 'trophy shot' beside the semi-conscious lion. Simba looks into the camera with dazed eyes and his tongue lolls from his mouth. As the lion moves, Wakefield laughs and exclaims: 'He is turning his head and there's no fighting it!'

Wakefield helps the hunting party lift the now unconscious 400lb lion on to a tarpaulin and move him towards the waiting vehicle.



The powerful dart strikes the lion hard in the right leg again, circled. Shocked, he leaps to his feet and stumbles away.



Once the king of the jungle, Simba is unceremoniously shoved into the back of a trailer. This, however, is no conservation rescue mission. The lion is simply being moved to an unknown location to wait for another hunt to take place, during which he would certainly have been killed if it had not been for a daring rescue mission.

54 lions killed at

Horried animal inspector reveals carnage she found in slaughterhouse

IT WAS the overpowering stench and the thick swarm of flies that told Reinet Meyer she had stumbled upon something truly horrific.

Ms Meyer, a senior inspector at the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, had been tipped off that lions were being left in tiny cages at the Wag-'n-Bietjie farm, 20 miles outside Bloemfontein in South Africa's Free State Province.

Knowing that her country's controversial lion breeding industry supplies the appalling international trade in lion bones meant she was expecting the worse. But nothing could prepare her for the grotesque and macabre scene she found inside an anonymous-looking farm shed.

The building was being used as a lion slaughterhouse, and a supervisor and eight workers were stripping the skin and flesh from the fresh carcasses of a group of recently killed lions.

Dead lions, some skinned and others waiting to be skinned, littered the blood-stained floor. A pile of innards and skeletons lay elsewhere inside, while discarded internal body parts were piled high

'You could smell the blood... it was deplorable'

in overflowing black plastic bags on a trailer outside.

Photographs taken by investigators showed a squalid scene of gore. Many are too horrific to be shown in a family newspaper.

'It was shocking,' Ms Meyer said. 'We couldn't believe what was happening. You could smell the blood. The lions got shot in the camp and then were all brought into this one room. The flies were terrible.'

'For me, a lion is a stately animal, a kingly animal. Here he is butchered for people just to make money, it's absolutely disgusting.'

About 200 yards from the abattoir, two lions were housed in steel transport crates that were too small for them to stand up or turn around in. Ms Meyer said they had been left in the crates without food or water for three days.

She initially thought that one of them was dead because it was not moving. 'The lion was so depressed that it did not move at all.'

'It was totally disgusting that they were kept like this.'

'A lion is a wild animal, it wants its freedom but now it's kept in a small cage for three days. It's absolutely deplorable.'

A total of 54 lions had been killed at the farm in just two days. They were first shot with tranquiliser darts before being shot dead with a

**All reports by
LORD ASHCROFT**

.22-calibre rifle. It is understood the bullets were shot through the ear and directly into the brains because overseas buyers will not pay for damaged skulls.

Some of the lions are believed to have been trucked about 250 miles to the farm from a 'safari park' near Johannesburg.

Remarkably, the workers at Wag-'n-Bietjie are allowed to kill lions. The site, owned by lion breeder Andre Steyn, is one of a series of licensed lion slaughterhouses in South Africa which supply the huge demand for lion bones from South East Asia. South Africa allows 800 captive-bred lion skeletons to be exported each year, but campaigners believe many more are illegally slaughtered to feed the disgusting, but lucrative, trade.

Wag-'n-Bietjie, which calls itself an 'eco-farm' that puts 'nature first', appears to have been issued the relevant permits by the Free State.

Steyn, who is a former council member of the South African Predator Association, a trade organisation for the captive breeding industry, gave Meyer unfettered access to his property.

But along with his foreman Johan van Dyke, he now faces animal welfare charges related to the two lions kept in small cages, and may face further charges related to the way lions were being killed and the squalid condition of the abattoir.

What will happen to the 246 lions found at the farm remains unclear. About 100 were reportedly marked for slaughter, but the farm's permits have been revoked. Their fate will not be decided until Steyn and Van Dyke's court case concludes.



RESTRICTED: Stuffed lions in the US

UNNATURAL: Tigers and lionesses lie together in one wildlife park



Hybrid cats defy nature

LIONS and tigers are being cross-bred in captivity in a sickening bid to squeeze even greater profits from South Africa's barbaric bone trade, conservationists claim.

My undercover investigators have learned that bizarre hybrid animals are being created that are even bigger and more imposing than the big cats found naturally in the wild.

This makes them even more valuable when they are slaughtered and their skeletons sold to South East Asia and China to satisfy the huge demand for medicines made from lion and tiger bones.

In a sinister twist to South Africa's 'lion farming' trade, some operators have imported tigers, which have no place on the African continent, to breed with lions and

produce 'ligers' (when the father is a lion) or 'tigons' (when the father is a tiger).

Remarkably, a three-year-old liger or tigon can be the same size of a nine-year-old lion, thereby producing more bone weight – and greater profits – once slaughtered.

Ligers have the greatest financial value: they weigh an average of 71 stone and would stand nearly 12ft tall on their hind legs.

Experts say the abusive breeding process often results in birth defects and the early death of cubs, as well as complications for mothers because they have to give birth to super-sized cubs.

A report four years ago estimated that there were 280 tigers in South Africa at 44 sites. My investigation,

however, suggests this is a dramatic underestimate, with around 50 tigers believed to be at just one location.

At another wildlife facility in Free State Province, my investigators made a disturbing discovery. In a fenced enclosure a group of three tigers and five lions were laying down together in the shade. In the same enclosure, another lion and tiger were found together near the perimeter fence.

One of the investigators described the experience as 'unsettling', adding: 'It's not something you expect to see. We were thinking, "what are they here for, where are they going to go?"'

Staff at the park told my investigators that the lions and tigers

Why WON'T Britain ban import of lion trophies?

BRITAIN has failed to slap an import ban on lion skins – despite public outcry and the demands of campaigners.

There was international outrage four years ago when American dentist Walter Palmer tracked and killed a 13-year-old lion called Cecil with a bow and arrow in Zimbabwe.

Australia, France and the Netherlands have all banned the importation of any lion trophies amid growing public fury, while America banned hunters bringing in trophies from

captive-bred lions. Britain, however, has continued to offer permits to hunters to import lion skins and heads as long as the trophy has been obtained from a 'sustainable' hunting operation.

Last December, this newspaper revealed how the number of lion body parts shipped into Britain had soared. And today I can reveal how this loophole can be exploited by hunters determined to flout the US ban. One of my undercover investigators recorded Adrian Sailor, a UK representative for Settlers Safaris in South Africa,

explaining how a lion skin could be smuggled into the US via Britain by hiding it in a deer skin.

Sailor admitted the issue was 'so hot, in the press and everything else,' adding: 'They want all the stuff done right.'

But to sidestep the US controls, Sailor suggested legally importing the skin via the UK, shooting a red stag in Scotland, then 'you stick the lion skin inside the bloody stag... you just roll it all up, and just export it as a red stag. It's a bit dodgy, but you know. It's all folded over, rock hard, you can't

farm in 2 days



LORD ASHCROFT / ALAMY

in lust for profit

were only kept together until they reached breeding age at around two years old. The park last week did not respond when asked whether it was cross-breeding.

At another wildlife park near Johannesburg, one of my team

Many cubs will be born with terrible defects

found a large tiger that was pregnant and expecting a litter of cubs.

Without carrying out DNA tests, my investigators were unable to prove cross-breeding at any individual centre but conservationists

believe inbreeding in South Africa is 'rampant'. Meanwhile, tourists are unwittingly fuelling both the bone trade and trophy hunting by paying to either pet lion cubs or for 'walking with lions' experiences.

Ukutula game reserve, about 50 miles north-west of Pretoria, charges visitors £46 for a one hour 'enrichment walk' with lions. Visitors must sign an agreement that any photographs taken there are for 'private use only'.

Spokesman Willi Jacobs said: 'Ukutula conducts these walks to enrich the lives of animals who would otherwise be confined to their enclosures. The revenue generated allows us to support research projects that contribute meaningfully to conservation.'



BOOTY: Hunt representative revealed how to smuggle a lion skin like this

open it. It's all salted and rock hard. I mean a lion's a big thing, to get inside, but the [only] thing you can't get in there is a skull.'

When confronted by The Mail on Sunday, Sailor did not deny making the suggestion but

stressed that 'no crime has been committed' and that 'everything is done legally'.

He said that he does not deal with anyone in the US, adding: 'How will a lion fit inside a deer skin? Major size difference.'

THE captive-bred lion industry shames South Africa – indeed it shames us all. By allowing such a barbaric practice, the South African government is harming the reputation of a country that treasures its position on the international stage in the aftermath of apartheid.

A country that until 25 years ago tolerated appalling human rights abuses is now turning a blind eye to cruelty towards Africa's most noble animal on an horrific scale.

Arguments put up by the pro-canned hunting lobby suggesting that captive-lion breeding promotes animal conservation are ludicrous and spurious.

Only a small number of people – the owners of the 200-plus breeding farms and those peddling 'canned' lion hunts – benefit from this unethical and, at times, illegal activity. Labourers involved in the whole process are usually paid rock-bottom wages.

The South African government may resent being told they are wrong by an 'outsider' like me but I feel that I have a moral duty to bring the growing problem of captive-lion breeding – what I prefer to call 'lion farming' – to the attention of the world.

I know that I am far from alone in my concerns over the treatment and hunting of canned lions by trophy hunters. Last month I tweeted a short film of an American 'hunter' – I use the word loosely – shooting and killing a sleeping lion, and it was seen by more than two million people in less than a week.

The captive lion industry is truly barbaric: rarely, if ever, has any species of animal been so exploited. All lions, other than arguably a small number in zoos, should be born, reared and die in a natural environment.

I have compiled a substantial dossier on my findings that I will send to the South African authorities. I hope the South Africa government is shocked and embarrassed into action: that it will eventually pass laws to ban captive lion operations that so damage their country's international reputation.

Today I also call on the UK Government to follow the lead of other nations, notably the US, France and the Netherlands, in banning the importation of captive lion trophies. We must do our bit to stamp out lion farming and show that we are not in any way complicit in it.

Save the King of the Jungle before it's too late



By **LORD ASHCROFT**

However, we should go further, and it should become illegal for individuals or companies to trade, ship or be in possession of these body parts, or to be involved in the handling of the finances involved in this trade.

My comprehensive dossier resulting from Operation Simba will also be sent to Cites – the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species. On May 23, a Cites 'Conference of the Parties' meeting

begins in Sri Lanka. I would like to see moves that eventually lead to the lion being elevated from Appendix II to the higher Appendix 1 level of protection.

Appendix 1 protection, which allows no trade in such animals or their body parts, is restricted to species threatened with extinction but, with only some 20,000 wild lions left in the world, we should act now to safeguard the King of the Jungle – before it is too late.

● Lord Ashcroft has produced a YouTube film on his revelations about lion farming. <https://youtu.be/5IEHYMDGAzs>

Daring mission to rescue drone

IT WAS the dramatic moment when my year-long undercover investigation was almost blown.

My team, which included ex-Special Forces troops, used drones to covertly gather evidence. But during one mission earlier this year, disaster struck when the device developed a technical problem and was forced to land inside an enclosure containing 18 adult lions.

Its discovery could have alerted the ranch to our presence, so despite the terrifying risk of being mauled by the lions, the

team drew up a plan to rescue it. One investigator, an ex-member of the Parachute Regiment, volunteered to sneak into the enclosure that night and rescue the device, which was about 200 yards from the perimeter.

At 1am, and the team quietly placed blankets over the top of the 12ft electric fence. The ex-Para then used a ladder to scale it and, with a GPS device, followed coordinates to the crash site.

'It was a full moon, which wasn't ideal as lions hunt at this time and conditions were

perfect for them,' the investigator said last night.

'I was checking my back at regular intervals to make sure a lion hadn't picked up my scent. The drone was actually located some distance from the coordinates – I caught a glint of its airframe in the moonlight.'

Astonishingly, the ex-soldier managed to infiltrate the ranch and dash back to safety without rousing the lions. With some understatement, he described his mission as 'exciting', adding: 'I've got the best job in the world.'