

# Conclusion: Elite Hunting in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century – Conservation or Destruction?

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## Elite Hunting Today

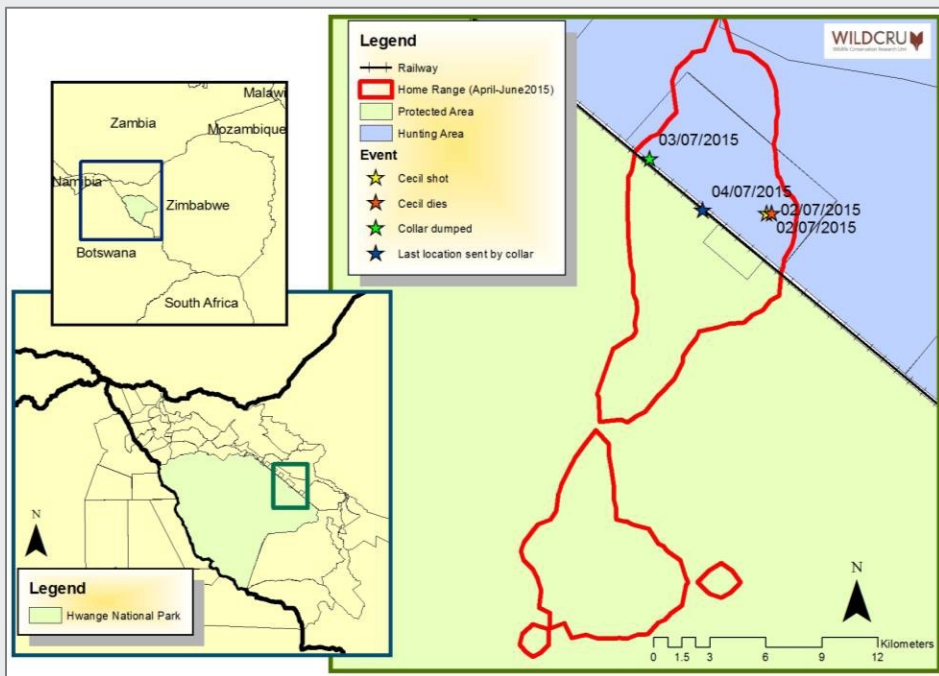
In Zimbabwe in July of 2015, a lion nicknamed Cecil was shot and killed by a white male dentist from Minneapolis, Minnesota. For approximately a month following the event, news, television, and social media outlets in Europe and the United States showcased an outpouring of public grief for this lion. American late-night talk show host Jimmy Kimmel cried on national television while talking about Cecil. Social media posts on the subject reached nearly 90,000 daily mentions. A petition to Robert Mugabe, then president of Zimbabwe, to stop of sale of hunting licenses quickly gathered 300,000 signatures.

## CONCLUSION

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ELITE HUNTING TODAY

CONCLUSIONS



### Map of Cecil's movement through protected and hunting areas

When Cecil was killed he was 13 years old; the average lifespan of a male lion in the wild is 12-16 years. The territory of this lion and his pride encompassed the Hwange National Park, Antoinette Farm, and the Gwaai River Conservancy in Zimbabwe. While hunting is illegal in the national park, it is legal on the surrounding farm and conservancy if one purchases a license from a very limited annual quota.

The lion had gotten his nickname from researchers at the Wildlife Conservation Research Unit of Oxford University. This group had been collaring and tracking lions in and around Hwange National Park since 1999 to understand and develop best practices for allowing lions and local human communities to live side by side. Between 1999 and 2015, forty-five collared lions that were part of the Oxford study had been legally shot by elite hunters. The only difference between shooting a collared or a non-collared lion was that the collar had to be returned to the research team. None of the deaths of these other collared lions caused a public stir, much less the media frenzy that accompanied Cecil's killing.

Why do you think the death of Cecil the lion caused such a public outcry in Europe and North America? What role, if any, should elite hunting play in the twenty-first century?

Watch these two short clips on YouTube:

- The first one is produced by *National Geographic* magazine. The host visits a big game park in Zimbabwe and asks a hunter and the owner of the park about wildlife conservation and trophy hunting in Africa. [https://youtu.be/nIL2VGFAY\\_k](https://youtu.be/nIL2VGFAY_k)
- This second clip is produced by National Public Radio and it talks about the role hunting plays in conserving and managing wildlife in the United States. <https://youtu.be/GOvCpxjr0h0>

### Young elephants in Hwange National Park, Zimbabwe







***Whitetail deer in snowy North American landscape***

## Conclusions

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In the twenty-first century, elite hunting continues to be a source of controversy. In the United States, approximately 5 per cent of the population hunts for leisure, primarily white tail deer. Many of these hunters also eat their kill, but, arguably, subsistence is not their main motivation. There is also a subset of elite hunters who spend tens, if not hundreds of thousands of dollars to engage in trophy hunting. Shooting large animals for their tusks, horns, heads, or skins takes place around the world, but most contemporary trophy hunting takes place in eastern and southern Africa and focuses on the “big five” trophy animals: lions, elephants, leopards, rhinos, and Cape buffalo.



***Cape Buffalo at Kruger National park, South Africa***

This topic can be emotional for many people. Some people connect with their family and heritage through generations of hunting practices. Other people, such as the hunter in the *National Geographic* clip, see trophy hunting as the culmination of a life-long aspiration. Some dislike all types of hunting and believe that killing wild animals is barbaric. Others take umbrage with trophy hunting in particular, saying it is elitist and depletes already endangered animal populations.

Still others would argue the opposite, that the astronomical fees paid by big game hunters in places like Zimbabwe are what funds the conservation areas needed to support the population as whole. And from this, another argument emerges about whether these conservation funds should go to large-scale, government-led conservation efforts or be distributed to the people who live on the edges of these national parks.





**Leopard in  
Kruger National  
Park, South Africa**

As we have seen throughout this module, there is no simple answer to the questions raised by elite hunting practices. In shooting the lions in Tsavo, Patterson protected the railway workers from future attacks. And yet, all those workers were in the *nyika* and unable to defend themselves because of an imperial railway project and imperial laws that denied Africans access to weapons. Jim Corbett used the privileges conferred on him by an unequal imperial society to protect “his” village from pigs and tigers. East Coast elites in nineteenth-century America preserved millions of acres of forests and fields that we still enjoy today, and in doing so forcibly removed Native Americans from their lands and criminalized the subsistence activities of the rural poor.

Hunting and the “wilderness” in which hunting takes place play an important role in the social and cultural conditions of imperial and neo-imperial societies. Access to appropriate or legal hunting practices is determined by one’s class and race. The same holds true for access to wilderness spaces. Additionally, elite hunters often tie their hunting prowess to ideas of masculinity and use this as justification for their continued imperial rule.

Use these historical trends to further think about the debate over twenty-first century hunting practices that are presented in these videos and in the story of Cecil the lion.

**Black Rhinoceros at Gemsbokvlakte,  
South Africa**



# Further Reading

*Trophy Hunting: Killing or Conservation*. CBS News Originals. 7 June 2019. <https://youtu.be/-NdopGBtb0A>

*Why Trophy Hunting Helps Protect Animals*. The Economist. 29 May 2021. <https://youtu.be/9y7YFjisSTg>

Somerville, Keith. "Cecil the Lion in the British Media: The Pride and Prejudice of the Press." *Journal of African Media Studies* 9:3 (2017), 471-485.

# Image Citations:

## Page 1:

Cecil the lion at Hwange National Park, 2010, CC: BY SA, Daughter#3,  
[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Cecil\\_the\\_lion\\_at\\_Hwange\\_National\\_Park\\_\(4516560206\).jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Cecil_the_lion_at_Hwange_National_Park_(4516560206).jpg)

## Page 2:

Map of Cecil the Lion's movement as captured by GPS collar, 2016, Public Domain,

[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Cecil\\_Movement.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Cecil_Movement.jpg)

Young male elephants at water hold in Hwange National Park, Zimbabwe, 1999, CC: BY SA, JackyR,  
[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Down\\_the\\_water\\_hole.jpg](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Down_the_water_hole.jpg)

## Page 3:

Whitetail deer try to blend in with snowy landscape, Fort McCoy, Wisconsin, 2018, Public Domain,

<https://picryl.com/media/whitetail-deer-try-to-blend-in-with-the-snowy-landscape-4ee13d>

African Buffalo or Cape Buffalo, Syncerus caffer, at Kruger National Park, South Africa, CC: BY SA, Derek Keats,  
[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:African\\_buffalo\\_or\\_Cape\\_buffalo,\\_Syncerus\\_caffer,\\_with\\_Red-billed\\_Oxpecker,\\_Buphagus\\_erythrorhynchus,\\_at\\_Kruger\\_National\\_Park,\\_South\\_Africa\\_\(20952805755\).jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:African_buffalo_or_Cape_buffalo,_Syncerus_caffer,_with_Red-billed_Oxpecker,_Buphagus_erythrorhynchus,_at_Kruger_National_Park,_South_Africa_(20952805755).jpg)

## Page 4:

African leopard (*Panthera pardus*) in a tree in the Kruger National Park, South Africa, 2009, CCC: By SA, Wegmann,

[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Leopard\\_on\\_tree.JPG](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Leopard_on_tree.JPG)

Black Rhinoceros at Gemsbokvlakte, South Africa, 2012, CC: BY SA, Yathin S Krishnappa,

[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:2012\\_Black\\_Rhinoceros\\_Gemsbokvlakte.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:2012_Black_Rhinoceros_Gemsbokvlakte.jpg)