

Glorification of killing wild animals on display at Safari Club International Convention

An HSUS/HSI undercover investigation exposes the sale of potentially illegal wildlife products, captive-bred lion hunts, kangaroo and giraffe skins, and hunting trips to kill giraffes, primates, wolves and more.



Taxidermy display of lion heads. Photo by: The HSUS

Overview

Elephants, giraffes, bears, captive-bred lions and many more animals were offered for sale to people who delight in killing them. Safari Club International,¹ the ringleader of the global trophy hunting industry, held its annual convention in Reno, Nevada, Feb. 5 - 8, 2020. Undercover investigators from the Humane Society of the United States and Humane Society International were on the scene. The SCI convention is one of the largest annual gatherings in the world of trophy hunters, hunting outfitters and other businesses – people who encourage and profit from killing imperiled wild animals.

About 870 exhibitors from 34 countries offered trophy hunts of elephants, lions, leopards, giraffes, grizzly bears, hippos and many other wild animals to more than 10,000 convention attendees. Some vendors selling wildlife products appeared to violate Nevada's anti-wildlife trafficking law. Others were found to violate SCI's own rules by selling captive-bred lion hunts.

In addition, outfitters who exhibited at the event donated more than 300 trophy hunts around the world to SCI. The organization auctioned these donated hunts, generating more than \$5 million for SCI the killing of at least 860 animals of more than 50 species.

Among the donated auctions was a 7-day “dream hunt”² with Donald Trump Jr. in Alaska on a luxury yacht to kill Sitka black-tailed deer and sea ducks. The Alaska hunt with Trump Jr. generated \$340,000 for SCI from two winning bids. The first winning bid was \$190,000, and the hunt was auctioned again to a second bidder for \$150,000. In addition to Trump Jr.'s attendance, the Beach Boys headlined entertainment at the convention.

Next year, SCI will celebrate its 50th anniversary, holding its convention in Las Vegas from Feb. 3 to 6, 2021.

Key investigation findings

Between Feb. 5 and 8, 2020, HSUS/HSI investigators visited the SCI convention held at the Reno-Sparks Convention Center. Findings included:

- Three vendors openly offered to sell captive-bred lion hunts. One vendor in South Africa admitted that the lions were born in captivity and had been in captivity before being released to be hunted. “It is what it is,” he said. He further commented that any SCI vendor who said otherwise was “bull sh**ing.”
- Many vendors made it clear that setting up bait for lions, leopards, bears and other animals is common practice for an easier kill.



A giraffe taxidermy. Photo by: The HSUS

- To encourage the sale of a lion hunt, a vendor bragged that he has sold hunts of the “five of the top ten lions” listed in SCI's Record Book.
- A South Africa-based vendor claimed to have a “giraffe problem,” with “too many giraffes” and offered a giraffe hunt for only \$1,200 – “a giveaway,” he said.
- An elephant hunt vendor claimed to be doing brisk business. Of his 20 elephant hunting permits in Botswana this year, the vendor said he'd already sold 12 so far at the convention.

- Hunts of hippos and Cape buffalos were widely promoted by outfitters in Africa. Outfitters explained that the easy way to hunt hippos is to shoot them while they are in the water. After shooting a hippo in the water, the

¹ SCI is registered with Internal Revenue Service as a 501 (c)4 corporation. <https://www.safariclub.org/sites/default/files/2019-05/SCI%202021%20990%20Public%20Disclosure%20Copy.pdf>

² <https://www.showsci.org/auctions/evening-auction-guide/saturday/> (accessed and downloaded on February 5, 2020)

shooter must wait until gases in the dead hippo's body cause it to rise to the surface so it can be dragged out of the water. This means that hippos who are only wounded may drown and suffer greatly before dying.

- One outfitter advertising trophy hunting trips in Mozambique commented that if a hunter shoots and wounds a leopard, he or she is “not required to follow the wounded leopard at all,” leaving the wounded animal to suffer in agony.
- Exhibitors also offered trophy hunts for polar bears, Asiatic black bears, mountain lions, grizzly bears, wild mountain goats and monkeys.
- Numerous vendors promoted hyena trophy hunting. To lure the hyena for an easy kill, some vendors said they use devices which play digitally-recorded animal distress calls. These devices are also used in wildlife killing contests in the U.S.
- Four vendors offered to sell or possessed with intent to sell wildlife products that appear to violate Nevada's anti-wildlife trafficking law. These items included belts made of elephant and hippo skins, as well as shoes and boots made of elephant, hippo or stingray skins.



An ibex mountain goat killed by Trump, Jr. Photo by: The HSUS

- Other products for sale included boots made of giraffe (\$1,390) and kangaroo skins (\$1,080).

- The taxidermy of an ibex mountain goat that Donald Trump Jr killed was on display at the convention.

- The vendor who organized Trump Jr's hunt of a rare argali sheep in Mongolia last year also had a booth at the convention and confirmed to HSUS/HSI that they arranged the argali sheep hunt. They told investigators it only took a few days to find and kill the threatened sheep.

HSUS/HSI have submitted the evidence of the violations of state law to the Reno Police

Department.

The director of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Aurelia Skipwith, addressed the convention attendees at the same event where Trump Jr spoke and where the auction of his Alaska hunt took place. Skipwith spoke about “the need to educate the non-hunter” according to reports by SCI.³

Further information on wildlife products in potential violation of Nevada's wildlife trafficking law

State law in Nevada strictly prohibits the sale,⁴ offer for sale or possession with intent to sell products made from leather, skin, hair, bone or teeth of covered species unless such products are over 100 years old and meet the definition of antique under the law.⁵

³ <https://huntforever.org/2020/02/10/donald-trump-jr-helps-sci-top-its-48th-annual-convention-with-a-record-auction-to-benefit-education/>

⁴ N.R.S. 597.905 § 5(b) (“‘Sale’ or ‘sell’ means any act of selling, trading or bartering, for monetary or nonmonetary consideration, and includes any transfer of ownership that occurs in the course of a commercial transaction, but does not include a nonmonetary transfer of ownership to a legal beneficiary of a trust or to a person by way of gift, donation, inheritance or bequest.”).

⁵ N.R.S. 597.905 § 2(b) (“An antique that contains a de minimis quantity of an animal part or byproduct derived from any species listed in subsection 1, provided that the animal part or byproduct is a fixed component of the antique and the owner or seller of the antique establishes with documentation evidencing provenance of the antique that the antique is at least 100 years old.”); *id.* § 5(a) (“‘De minimis quantity’ means: (1) Less than 20 percent of an item by volume; (2) Less than 200 grams in weight when examined as a separate component; and (3) Less than 20 percent of the fair market value of an item or of the actual price paid for the item, whichever is greater.”).

Investigators found the following vendors offering for sale and possessing with intent to sell such items without proper documentation showing the provenance of an antique:

- J.B. Hill Custom Handmade Boots: Elephant leather belts, elephant and stingray custom boots
- Meyer Ranch Boot Makers: Elephant, hippo and stingray skins for custom boots
- Lucchese Bootmaker: Stingray skin boots
- Tag Safari: Hippo skin belts

Further information on captive-bred lion hunts

The following vendors offered to sell or broker trophy hunts of captive-bred lions or hunting of lions:

- Bush Africa Safaris
- Shaun Keeny Safaris
- Quagga Safaris

Conservation law and hunting ethics

Below are the Nevada statutes on wildlife trafficking and SCI's policy on advertisements of captive-bred lion hunts. The documentation collected demonstrates that SCI appears to fail in requiring compliance with conservation laws and does not abide by recognized hunting standards.

Nevada's wildlife trafficking law (N.R.S. 597.905)

Effective Jan. 1, 2018, a Nevada statute made it unlawful, with limited exceptions, for any person to "purchase, sell, offer for sale or possess with intent to sell any items that is, wholly or partially, made of an animal part or byproduct derived from a shark fin, a lion of the species *Panthera leo* or any species of elephant, rhinoceros, tiger, leopard, cheetah, jaguar, pangolin, sea turtle, ray, mammoth, narwhal, walrus or hippopotamus."

Any person who violates N.R.S. 597.905 is guilty of a gross misdemeanor for the first offense, a category E felony for a second offense, and a category D felony for a third offense, in addition to civil penalties up to \$6,500.

The Nevada State Senate, in introducing the legislation (S.B. 194), found that wildlife "trafficking results in unsustainable declines in population...Nevada has a long tradition of conservation. Senate Bill 194 will give authorities better tools to help combat the intrastate illegal wildlife trade."⁶

Canned lion hunts and SCI's policy

In South Africa, between 6,000 and 8,000 lions are kept in captivity, bred and sold to be killed by trophy hunters in "canned or captive-bred" lion hunts (the practice of shooting captive-bred lions in a fenced area from which they cannot escape).

In February 2018, SCI issued a policy⁷ opposing hunting of captive-bred lions and claimed that it would not accept advertising from any operator of such hunts, nor allow operators to sell hunts for lions bred in captivity at the SCI annual convention.

The Dallas Safari Club adopted a similar policy⁸ opposing captive-bred lion hunting.

⁶ <https://www.leg.state.nv.us/Session/79th2017/Minutes/Senate/CLE/Final/499.pdf>

⁷ <https://www.safariclub.org/news/sci-adopts-policy-captive-bred-lions>

⁸ <http://dscnewscenter.org/2018/01/dsc-position-on-captive-bred-lion-hunting/>

Botswana president received SCI “2020 International Legislator of the Year Award”



While the SCI convention was taking place, the Botswanan government held its first elephant hunting auctions in Gaborone since President Mokgweetsi Masisi lifted a five-year ban on such hunts last May. The trophy hunting ban was lifted despite reports that elephants in Botswana are being increasingly targeted by poachers.⁹

The government has issued a quota for the killing of 272 elephants in 2020. It was reported¹⁰ that seven packages of 10 elephants each were sold at the February 7 auction, generating \$2.1 million in revenue, with the money going directly to the government.

At the convention, the Botswanan ambassador to the U.S. accepted SCI’s “2020 International Legislator of the Year Award”¹¹ on behalf of President Masisi.

SCI’s Record Book and killing competitions shatters SCI’s own conservation claim

The trophy hunting industry turns the killing of threatened and endangered species into a status competition, clear evidence that trophy hunting is not about conservation as SCI claims.

Trophy hunters compete to win prizes for killing the most animals of a specific type. SCI sets up nearly 50 competitions and gives out awards to the winning hunters. For instance, the “Bears of the World Grand Slam” award requires a hunter to kill five different bear species. The American trophy hunter who killed Cecil the lion was an SCI member and listed as winning one of SCI’s “Continental Awards” for North American hunting. To win the top prize, the “World Hunting Award,” called the “Super Bowl-ring of hunting” (the award itself is, indeed, a ring), a hunter would have to kill over 300 different types of animals, achieve the multitude of hunting prizes and use “alternative methods,” such as a handgun or bow-and-arrow.

A 2015 analysis¹² of SCI’s Record Book, conducted by the HSUS and HSI, found that between 1959 and 2015, SCI members had killed at least 2,007 African lions, 1,888 African leopards, 791 African elephants, and 572 rhinos, including 93 critically endangered black rhinos. SCI also provides a platform for hunters to compete with one another for prizes for killing elephants, lions, leopards, bears and other animals.

⁹ <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/07/01/science/elephants-poaching-botswana.html>

¹⁰ https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-51413420?ns_campaign=bbcnews&ocid=socialflow_facebook&ns_source=facebook&ns_mchannel=social

¹¹ <https://twitter.com/SafariClubIntl/status/1225996206670614533>

¹² <https://www.hsi.org/wp-content/uploads/assets/pdfs/trophy-madness-report.pdf>

SCI's true agenda = profits and killing

SCI's annual convention is the main funding source for the industry group, earning millions of dollars in revenues from auctions, vendor fees and activities. According to SCI's federal tax filings, the 2016¹³ convention raised more than \$7.7 million in net revenues. In 2017,¹⁴ fundraising events generated close to \$7.5 million.

While SCI generates millions of dollars every year from its convention, these profits are used to dismantle protections for wildlife in the U.S. and abroad so that they can make profits. SCI routinely files lawsuits challenging regulations or policies that give greater protections for wild animals. For example, in 2014 SCI, in partnership with the National Rifle Association, sued the U.S. government over its ban on the import of elephant hunting trophies from Zimbabwe and Tanzania, announced under the then Obama administration.

SCI is also in court in support of the federal delisting of grizzly bears in Yellowstone National Park and opposes New Jersey's ban on black bear hunting on state lands. SCI flexes its legislative muscle in state legislatures across the U.S. and in Congress. SCI vehemently opposes federal wildlife legislation like H.R.2245¹⁵ the Conserving Ecosystems by Ceasing the Importation of Large Animal Trophies Act (CECIL Act), which would prohibit the import of hunting trophies of species listed or proposed to be listed under the Endangered Species Act and the import of elephant and lion trophies from Tanzania, Zimbabwe and Zambia, among other strict measures to reduce the U.S.' prominent role in global trophy hunting.

SCI also opposes the United Kingdom's proposed ban on the import and export of hunting trophies and has mobilized¹⁶ its members to oppose the ban.

Additionally, SCI's political action committee¹⁷ supports pro-trophy hunting elected officials.

Conclusion

SCI and its proponents claim they are conservationists when in reality they make a mockery of conservation laws and hunting ethics by providing a platform to peddle wildlife products (some likely illegal) and hunts of the world's most imperiled species.

Our planet is experiencing an unprecedented level of biodiversity loss driven by direct exploitation. The world is increasingly intolerant of this ghastly industry rooted in the selfish desire to kill rare and charismatic animals for fun and for bragging rights.

¹³ https://www.safariclub.org/sites/default/files/2019-05/SCI%20990%202016_05162018_021431%20-%20Final.pdf (accessed and downloaded on February 5, 2020)

¹⁴ <https://www.safariclub.org/sites/default/files/2019-05/SCI%202017%20990%20Public%20Disclosure%20Copy.pdf> (accessed and downloaded on February 5, 2020)

¹⁵ <https://www.safariclub.org/blog/house-committee-hearing-cecil-act-attacks-hunters-and-undermines-conservation-efforts>

¹⁶ <https://www.safariclub.org/blog/sci-responds-uk-parliament-proposal-ban-trophy-imports>

¹⁷ <https://www.opensecrets.org/pacs/pacgot.php?cycle=2018&cmte=C00122101>