

U.S. trophy hunting by the numbers

Import and export of CITES-listed mammals between 2014 and 2018

Report preview

Trophy hunting is an extractive enterprise that harms animal welfare, biodiversity and species' survival across the globe. This report is a result of a comprehensive desktop analysis of international trade data contained in the CITES (Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species) trade database. The result of this study demonstrates the influence of American trophy hunters on wildlife worldwide by examining the number and species of CITES-listed mammals exported from and imported to the U.S. as trophies from 2014–2018. Because the U.S. has not reported trade data to the CITES database for 2019–2021, that data is not reflected in this summary. The full report will be released later in 2022.



WHAT ARE HUNTING TROPHIES

A hunting trophy is the dead animal, or the parts of an animal such as the head or skin, that the hunter keeps as a souvenir or displays to represent the success of his or her hunt. An important distinction between trophy hunting and subsistence hunting is that a primary purpose of the hunt for trophy hunters is to obtain bragging rights and animal parts as trophies; these hunters are not the same as those who hunt for food.

From 2014 to 2018

75%

of global trophy imports were imported by the U.S.

72,617

wild mammal trophies were imported to the U.S.

8,000+

trophies are of species listed as threatened or endangered (ESA)

COUNTRIES OF ORIGIN OF TROPHY IMPORTS TO THE U.S.

The majority of trophies imported to the U.S. originated in Canada followed by South Africa, but other top countries of origin included Namibia, Zimbabwe and Argentina. The following summarizes the findings on the top countries of origin of trophies of the four CITES-listed “Africa Big Five” species imported to the U.S. during the years examined:

- **African lion:** South Africa, Zimbabwe, Tanzania, Mozambique, Namibia with South Africa as the origin of almost every captive-sourced African lion imported to the U.S.
- **African elephant:** Zimbabwe, Namibia, South Africa, Botswana, Tanzania
- **African leopard:** Zimbabwe, Tanzania, Namibia, South Africa, Mozambique
- **Southern white rhino:** South Africa and Namibia

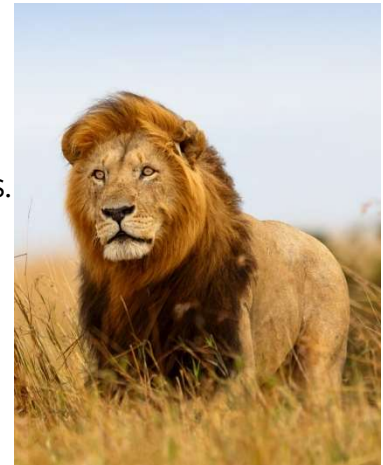


Photo by iStock.com

Fig. 1. Trophies imported to the U.S. between 2014 and 2018



Table 1. Top countries of origin of U.S. trophy imports.

Country of origin	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	Avg. per year	Total	% of Total
Canada	7,966	9,592	9,483	9,351	12,762	9,831	49,154	68%
South Africa	1,944	2,369	2,113	1,577	1,945	1,990	9,948	14%
Namibia	711	812	901	711	724	772	3,859	5%
Zimbabwe	751	589	407	304	337	478	2,388	3%
Argentina	152	237	270	286	246	239	1,191	2%
Tanzania	282	246	177	162	88	191	955	1%
Mexico	124	179	176	237	235	191	951	1%
Zambia	41	39	70	116	227	99	493	1%
Russia	36	58	93	130	174	99	491	1%
Tajikistan	59	105	89	110	117	96	480	1%
Kyrgyzstan	71	91	92	67	80	81	401	1%
Mozambique	92	104	67	72	66	81	401	1%
Other (47 countries)	454	372	388	382	309	381	1,905	3%
Total	12,683	14,793	14,326	13,505	17,310		72,617	

Table based on importer reported quantities.

MAMMAL SPECIES TRADED AS TROPHIES

The top 10 most common CITES-listed mammal species imported as trophies to the U.S. were American black bears, chacma baboons, Hartmann’s mountain zebras, gray wolves, African lions, red lechwe, leopards, vervet monkeys, blackbucks and brown bears.

The top 10 most common CITES-listed mammal species exported as trophies from the U.S. were American black bears, brown bears, cougars, barbary sheep, blackbucks and gray wolves.



Photo by Alamy Stock Photo

Table 2. U.S. trophy imports by species.

Species	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	Avg. per year	Total	% of total
American black bear	7,159	8,715	8,684	8,545	11,945	9,010	45,048	62%
Chacma baboon	587	631	647	513	615	599	2,993	4%
Hartmann’s mountain zebra	546	599	594	502	521	553	2,762	4%
Gray wolf	409	491	420	449	411	436	2,180	3%
Lion	741	790	483	95	60	434	2,169	3%
Red lechwe	271	313	343	318	444	338	1,689	2%
Leopard	334	402	338	272	294	328	1,640	2%
Vervet monkey	172	194	222	198	411	240	1,197	2%
Blackbuck	148	243	282	271	252	240	1,196	2%
Brown bear	205	230	238	272	250	239	1,195	2%
Hippopotamus	194	192	220	214	242	213	1,062	1%
African elephant	473	186	151	136	61	202	1,007	1%
Caracal	197	243	209	167	170	198	986	1%
Bighorn sheep	109	155	139	160	175	148	738	1%
Cougar	145	129	132	157	146	142	709	1%
Siberian ibex	88	136	153	120	168	133	665	1%
Canada lynx	93	102	110	91	164	112	560	1%
Blue duiker	63	89	65	135	88	88	440	1%
African civet	78	89	89	73	91	84	420	1%
Yellow baboon	92	90	58	83	63	78	386	1%
Black rhinoceros	0	3	0	0	1	1	4	<1%
Other (78 species)	579	771	749	734	738	715	3,571	5%
Total	12,683	14,793	14,326	13,505	17,310		72,617	

Table based on importer reported quantities. Species who represent less than 1% of grand total are collapsed into “Other.”

Table 3. U.S. trophy exports by species.

Species	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	Avg. per year	Total	% of total
American black bear	71	68	25	63	109	68	336	29%
Brown bear	76	84	32	31	49	55	272	23%
Cougar	35	37	12	16	17	24	117	10%
Barbary sheep	15	15	8	14	35	18	87	7%
Blackbuck	17	22	11	12	7	14	69	6%
Gray wolf	13	11	4	7	4	8	39	3%
Lion	2	11	2	10	4	6	29	2%
Bobcat	5	5	1	5	9	5	25	2%
Bighorn sheep	4	1	3	14	2	5	24	2%
Addax	8	0	7	4	2	5	21	2%
Scimitar oryx	6	2	7	5	1	5	21	2%
Red lechwe	0	5	3	1	1	2	10	1%
Nilgai	0	3	3	2	1	2	9	1%
Markhor	4	1	1	2	1	2	9	1%
Canada lynx	4	1	0	2	2	2	9	1%
Leopard	3	6	0	0	0	2	9	1%
Hippopotamus	0	3	0	4	0	2	7	1%
Arabian oryx	2	0	3	0	1	2	6	1%
African elephant	1	2	1	0	0	1	4	<1%
Other (38 species)	11	10	14	12	19	14	66	6%
Total	277	287	137	204	264		1,169	



U.S. TROPHY IMPORTS OF MAMMALS LISTED ON THE ENDANGERED SPECIES ACT



Table 4. U.S. trophy imports of species listed on the Endangered Species Act and/or IUCN Red List.

Species	ESA listing	IUCN Red List status	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	Avg. per year	Total	% of total
Hartmann's mountain zebra	T	VU	546	599	594	502	521	553	2,762	34%
Red lechwe	T	NT	271	313	343	318	444	338	1,689	21%
Leopard	EN/T	VU	334	402	338	272	294	328	1,640	20%
African elephant	T	EN	473	186	151	136	61	202	1,007	12%
Canada lynx	T	LC	93	102	110	91	164	112	560	7%
Argali sheep	EN/T	NT	62	102	76	88	25	71	353	4%
Wood bison	T		7	6	14	0	0	6	27	<1%
Scimitar oryx	EN	EW	0	2	0	3	9	3	14	<1%
Gelada baboon	T	LC	1	1	2	3	1	2	8	<1%
Black rhinoceros	EN	CR	0	3	0	0	1	1	4	<1%
Kabul markhor	T	NT	0	0	0	3	0	1	3	<1%
Cape mountain zebra	EN	LC	0	0	0	1	1	1	2	<1%
Sonoran pronghorn	EN		0	0	0	0	1	1	1	<1%
Siberian musk deer	EN	VU	1	0	0	0	0	1	1	<1%
Total			1,788	1,716	1,628	1,417	1,522		8,071	

Table based on importer reported quantities.

LC = Least concern NT = Near threatened T = Threatened VU = Vulnerable EN = Endangered
 CR = Critically endangered EW = Extinct in the Wild

CONCLUSION



The full “U.S. Trophy Hunting by the Numbers: Import and export of CITES-listed mammals between 2014 and 2018” report is forthcoming later in 2022.

Our analysis reveals that the U.S. is still the world’s largest importer of hunting trophies of internationally protected species. American trophy hunters target a wide variety of species including endangered African elephants, endangered leopards, vulnerable African lions, critically endangered black rhinos, and baboons.

The decline in biodiversity across the globe poses a serious environmental threat as noted in the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services’ (IPBES) 2019 global assessment report. Trophy hunting can negatively impact animal populations both as a main threat or in addition to other stressors. The negative impacts of trophy hunting are complex and can occur through direct offtake and indirect effects, which may be far-reaching. Trophy hunting can lead to reduced reproductive output, altered population structures, social disruption, behavioral changes, increased human-wildlife conflict and loss of genetic diversity, all of which must be considered when evaluating the full impacts of trophy hunting.

“Ecosystems, species, wild populations, local varieties and breeds of domesticated plants and animals are shrinking, deteriorating or vanishing. The essential, interconnected web of life on Earth is getting smaller and increasingly frayed. This loss is a direct result of human activity and constitutes a direct threat to human well-being in all regions of the world.”

- Prof. Josef Settele (co-chair of the 2019 IPBES global assessment)

There is also a long history of mismanagement, evidenced by ample peer-reviewed scientific articles and white papers on poorly managed trophy hunting and unsustainable quotas for many different species and continents.

The U.S. cannot be a genuine global leader in halting the loss of biodiversity if it continues to endorse the killing of wild animals for bragging rights and trophy collection by allowing the import of hunting trophies of at-risk species.

As evidenced in the multiple public opinion polls, a high percentage of the U.S. public objects to trophy hunting. The latest poll released by the Humane Society of the United States and Humane Society International in January 2022 shows that over 75% of respondents in the U.S. do not support trophy hunting. A larger proportion of respondents—82%—oppose trophy hunting of African lions and elephants and feel that people should not be allowed to import such hunting trophies into the U.S. They are not alone. The latest polls in Europe—the second largest hunting trophy importer in the world—show that over 80% of respondents in several European countries do not support trophy hunting of wild animals. Many scientists, including the International Union for Conservation of Nature’s Ethics Specialist Group, share that objection and have expressed that values dictate whether society tolerates an activity.

We call on U.S. political leaders, elected officials and policy makers to recognize the growing scientific evidence, ethics and animal welfare concerns regarding trophy hunting and to pursue policies that reflect the moral value of the majority of the public.

We urge the U.S. government to prohibit the import and export of hunting trophies of species listed as threatened or endangered under the U.S. Endangered Species Act.

