



The South African Lion Park (Pty) Ltd  
Cnr. Malibongwe & R114 Roads Honeydew 2040  
Company Reg. No.: 66/10782/07  
Tel: 087 1500 100 Fax: (011) 691 9904  
Email: [info@lionpark.com](mailto:info@lionpark.com) Website: [www.lionpark.com](http://www.lionpark.com)

**TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN,**

**On the 18<sup>th</sup> August 2014 I had an interview on behalf of the Lion Park near Lanseria, Johannesburg with CBS's 60 Minutes America. The interview was witnessed by Mr Whin Booysen, General Manager of the Lion Park and Mr Andre La Cock, Photographic manager.**

**I was misled from the start. Prior to the interview I requested to know the intended content. I received the following email:**

**From:** Nicky Parkin [<mailto:nickyparkin@icon.co.za>]  
**Sent:** 08 July 2014 12:32 PM  
**To:** 'Whin Booysen'  
**Subject:** CBS News

Good Morning Whin

Our Joburg producer Sarah Carter has sent the issues which Randall Joyce hopes to discuss with you:

- The importance of bringing average people into close contact with lions and how that fits into conservation efforts.
- The growth in the number of lions in South Africa and the way lions are preserved and in some case re-introduced into the wild.
- The recruitment and training of volunteers to take care of lion cubs and their impact on awareness of lions.
- The need for lions around the world in terms of absolute numbers.
- The controversy over having wild animals in close contact with people. Some say it's unnatural.
- The issue of balance between conservation of wild populations and breeding of lions.

Please let us know if you have any other queries?

Thank you kindly

Nicky

CBS 011 4821761

**Directors:** R.G. Fuhr; I.T. Fuhr; E.A. Patel; W.M.L. Booysen; K.R.A. Patel; A.A.K. Patel



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As you can see from the above, very few of these questions were aired on the programme 60 Minutes, and in the absence of any reference to the subject in the questions I certainly was not expecting to be grilled about cubs and canned hunting. Instead, the programme featured Kevin Richardson with sensational scenes of him playing with his lions and a vicious attack together with Chris Mercer on the issue of lion cubs being sent for canned hunting. No physical evidence was given that any of the lions from the Lion Park had been killed in such a fashion. The programme was even called "The Lion Whisperer". In this programme my interview lasted 1 minute 50 seconds whereas Richardson and Mercer lasted 12 minutes 12 seconds.

I was assured before the interview that the programme would be balanced with people from both sides of the debate being interviewed and Ward mentioned another organisation. This interview was never shown.

My queries with the programme:

Ward says she was given names of people to whom we ALLEGEDLY sold lions to, all of whom were ASSOCIATED with hunting operations.

These transactions were done a couple of years ago when I was living in our predator research camp in the Okavango, Botswana. At this time I was not involved in the running of the Lion Park.

The policy at the time was that staff had to ask the buyer if he intended to sell to hunters. Unfortunately the Lion Park staff did not always meticulously follow this practice and through their naivety some of the lions sold in the past did end up on hunting farms.

I deeply regret this practice in the past and on behalf of the Lion Park staff, I offer our most sincere apologies for not being more meticulous in these transactions.

Ward says ***the reality is that some of our lions have ended up in hunting operations and it is difficult for us to guarantee that more of our Lions won't end up in hunting operations.***

This is completely untrue! It has never been our policy, nor will it ever be in the future, to raise lion cubs that may end up being hunted.

Why was I not given the chance to answer the questions myself instead of Ward quoting me? **She was implying that our lions are still being sold for hunting**



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**which is totally incorrect and which we are fully prepared to defend in a court of law.**

Let me explain:

I had been living at our predator research camp when we decided to move the Lion Park to a new location near Hartbeespoort Dam as this is a substantially bigger and far more natural location for our animals.

This is a 3 year project and an enormous undertaking so I made the decision to be involved first hand and moved back to Johannesburg.

I was asked how long ago this was and I said about 2 years. Ward then said within the last 18 months the Lion Park has sold one batch of Lions to Nazeer Cajee and another batch to Joanne Hulley who resells lions to hunting operations. (I was in Botswana at the time and moving back to Johannesburg was a process. We had to pack up the entire camp and wind down the operation).

I was told by the Lion Park that the lions being sold to Mr Cajee were going to his predator park near Rustenburg and that some of the lions going to Joanne Hulley were going to be exported and that she would keep the balance.

Both have proved to be correct. All the lions are very much ALIVE! This has been confirmed by Shandor Larenty, one of our trainers and guides. He has visited Nazeer Cajee and the lions he previously worked with immediately recognised him and ran to the fence to greet him.

See below:



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A video was taken at the same time and is available for viewing.

My actual interview lasted about 30 minutes, mainly on air and some off air. Most of the questions that I answered were omitted from the programme. The implication from 60 Minutes was clear: **our lions are still ending up with hunters, despite my numerous denials. No proper evidence was produced to prove that this is indeed true.**

We have 6 lions over 15 years old and many approaching that age. These lions are very valuable to hunters and would obviously fetch high prices on the open market. However, our lions remain at the Lion Park where they will in all probability live almost twice as long as lions in the wild.

At the end of the interview I was asked by the CBS 60 Minutes America to see the cubs. I was pleased about this as they could then see for themselves how relaxed the cubs were. Instead the impression was given that these lovely cubs would one day end up at the mercy of hunters, **thus implying that the Lion Park deliberately raises lion cubs to be sold for slaughter. CBS's inclusion of dramatic footage of canned lion hunting just reinforces this implication.**

In September 2013 we decided to tighten our policy with cubs even further. We took the decision that only donations would be made to reputable institutions which we would thoroughly vet before any transfers took place.

The following lions have since been donated:

1 lioness to Taronga Zoo, Sydney, Australia. 15<sup>th</sup> January 2014.

3 lions to an eco-tourism and filming destination near Polokwane . 3/4/2014.

10 Lions to the Marakela Predator Park. 11/12/2014

We are presently arranging to donate an adult lion to the Uganda Wildlife and Education Centre to replace their 21 year old male that died recently.

(All appropriate documentation is available)

The above can be verified by our records kept at the Lion Park and by Gauteng Nature Conservation.

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The rest of the lions are at our new Lion Park property and unless they can be donated they will remain there for the rest of their lives. (The lions are available for inspection by appointment with the Lion Park).

We also keep a number of lionesses on contraception to enable us to control the number of cubs born.

I told 60 Minutes about my background and my love for lions. Unfortunately this was omitted from the programme. My background is as follows:-

***I have been passionate about lions and other predators since I was 5 years old, and these animals have dominated my life since then.***

***I have personally sponsored major predator research projects in Savute, (Chobe National Park). These projects have been supervised by Prof. Brian Walker and Prof. Norman Owen-Smith of the Wits University. The duration was from 1978 to 1993.***

***I have also partially sponsored predator research in the Okavango under Christiaan Winterbach (2002 – 2005) and Dr Tico McNutt (2005 – 2013). I had also been living in the Okavango for the past 9 years and helped with the research where possible from my predator research camp.***

***We purchased the Johannesburg Lion Park in 1998 where I am the major shareholder. My interest in lions was the main reason for the purchase and I was interested to monitor how lions lived in captivity. Of course the business has had to run profitably.***

The 60 Minutes implication that we still sell to hunters has resulted in a flood of hate mail, which confirms that the impression that viewers have got from the programme is that the Lion Park is still supporting canned hunting. (We have been called murderers and have even received serious threats.)

Many tours have been cancelled and we have had to refund money to visitors as our reputation is being destroyed.

In several articles, blogs and social media sites 'The Lion Whisperer' programme has been quoted several times in both South African and global media, spreading further allegations that Lion Park supports canned hunting.

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An International organisation 'Global March for Lions' is assembling a global march against 'canned hunting'. The organisation is arranging several protests worldwide on 14 March 2015 in front of zoos, embassies and parks. According to the organisation, on 21 March 2015 the main event of this 'global march' will take place in front of SA Lion Park's gate (Johannesburg), thus, Lion Park is now globally the main focus of the march - mainly as a result of the American broadcast by CBS '60 Minutes' which is often being quoted by 'Global March for Lions' on their social media pages and website. This action will have further negative implications and damage to the Lion Park.

If the Lion Park was forced to close, CBS 60 Minutes America, Richardson and Mercer must realise the following consequences:

1. Over 100 members of staff will lose their jobs and struggle to find new ones. AND battle to feed their children.
2. Taxes and foreign exchange will be lost to the Government.
3. Tourists will lose the enjoyment and educational benefit of a very unique experience with no harm to the animals whatsoever.
4. Lions that are not given to zoos will not enjoy the comfort of our "sanctuary" on our farm. Instead they will end up being euthanized.
5. **Most importantly:** Due to their poor economic circumstances, thousands of school children who visit the Lion Park every year as part of our educational programme will be denied possibly their **only** opportunity to see predators. Our qualified guides educate them on these tours and this most definitely stimulated their interest in nature conservation and the understanding of the desperate need in this world for everyone to protect our wildlife. These children are the future.

The perception held by many local people that animal activists care more about animals than they do about our local people will be confirmed by programmes like "The Lion Whisperer". This is obviously not good for nature conservation in the future.

When 60 Minutes next interviews Richardson "The Lion Whisperer" they need to ask him the following questions:

1. According to Ward (CBS reporter) Kevin started his sanctuary to protect his lions from a 'multi-million dollar industry', this implies that Kevin was protecting his Lions from the Lion Park. Did he not buy the lions from Lion

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Park because he needed them for his new business and because they are his 'family'?

2. Did he sell 4 lions to an animal dealer?
3. What happened to the black leopards he sold?
4. Did he sell jaguar cubs to a facility where tourists would be able to pet them?
5. Did he send his volunteers to the Lion Park to play with and touch cubs?
6. Does he still have "no problem" with hunting lions in the wild?
7. What has he done for conservation?
8. How many schools have visited his facility for educational purposes?
9. Has he sponsored research in the wild?
10. Why does he request financial donations when he is running a successful business?

Again, when CBS next interviews Chris Mercer perhaps they need to ask him the following question:-

Does he have any evidence that lion cubs have been sold to hunters since I have taken over the management of the Lion Park?

The Lion Park is currently sponsoring research on Black-backed jackal – this is taking place on the property designated for the large new Lion Park and on neighbouring properties. The research is being undertaken by a Masters student for a Masters Degree at the University of Pretoria. The aim is to establish how jackal fit into the peri-urban environment, their social and territorial behaviour, and any impacts arising from human conflict.

It is sad that the Lion Park has been singled out for such a devastating attack without any physical evidence and without giving me a proper opportunity to explain our position. It seems that the producers of the programme had already made up their minds on the issue of cubs being sold for canned hunting and only included the bits they felt might strengthen their attack on canned hunting. Instead we should be credited for being the only tourist facility pursuing a very costly route in order to look after our lions by donating to credible institutions or keeping them until they die of natural causes.

It seems that the Lion Park, because of its high international profile, has been set up to take the fall so that CBS 60 Minutes America can sell a sensational story.

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Legal proceedings are presently being instituted against CBS.

Rodney Fuhr

CEO SA Lion Park (Pty)Ltd.

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