

# Southern African Feline Focus (SAFF)

## Quarterly Briefing



Richard Peirce

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### Welcome

Welcome to the second issue of SAFF (Southern African Feline Focus). We are pleased to report that we had very positive feedback when we launched the first SAFF Quarterly Briefing in October.

British politicians Rab Butler and Harold Wilson are both said to have declared “a week is a long time in politics”. They were right, and history is now proving that three months can also be a long time when it comes to feline topics in southern Africa!

When we launched we made clear that SAFF would be apolitical and would be a chronology of events rather than a campaigning platform. We don’t believe we are breaking those commitments if we open this Briefing by referring to a political event which could have a major impact in the southern African feline sector.

In mid-November John Steenhuisen asked President Ramaphosa to dismiss Dr Dion George from his role as Minister of Forestry, Fisheries and Environment. It is not our role to comment on policy, we record fact. Whatever the political shenanigans behind George’s removal the fact is that he was moving towards putting legislation to parliament which would have affected the breeding of wildlife species in captivity, and in particular would have banned the captive breeding of lions. If passed this legislation would have a major impact on captive populations which would also spill over to wild populations. It appears that George’s removal may have been aimed at derailing this legislation, and there was instant speculation that the dismissal may have been engineered to appease vested interests in the hunting and lion breeding industry. Whether passed or ditched the impact of such legislation would be profound.

Southern African Feline Focus (SAFF) is a quarterly chronological briefing of events for commentators, journalists, NGOs, politicians, and other stakeholders interested in feline issues in southern Africa. If you have a colleague or associate who you think would like to receive SAFF please ask them to email us and register provided they genuinely fit into one of the aforementioned interest groups. You may be assured that email addresses are only used to send SAFF and will not be passed to, or shared with, any third parties.

To access the information sources referred to readers should click on the orange headlines for each entry.

#### October 19<sup>th</sup> 2025: LEOPARD ROAD KILL

It was reported that a breeding age adult male leopard known to researchers as Selati LMO025 had been killed in the early hours of Sunday October 19<sup>th</sup> on the R40 road about 2 kilometres from the Oliphants West Gate. This was the sixth leopard to be killed on this road in less than 2 years, and the cat's death was yet another example of wildlife losing to humans in the ever-increasing incidence of human wildlife conflict (HWC) in Africa and around the world.

#### October 20<sup>th</sup> 2025: LION IN TRANSIT ESCAPES ON THE ROAD

A video of a large male lion seen escaping through the roof of the closed trailer in which it was being transported went viral around the world in a matter of hours. The animal was being moved from the Free State to a farm in the North West Province, and the escape happened near the town of Bakerville. Despite having been sedated for the journey the lion managed to escape before making its unsteady way to the roadside and lying down before a vet was able to sedate him again. The lion had been sold to Pat Loots who, in a Daily Maverick article in March, was mentioned as holding lion bone stockpiles on his farm. The lion reportedly came from Riaan Crous and quite possibly was one of the lions sold at the 2nd Royal Castle Game Auction on October 11<sup>th</sup> as posted by African Wildlife Auctions on their [Facebook page](#). Riaan Crous is a permit holding lion breeder and seller. SAFF has not been able to confirm reports that the lion was being taken to the Northwest Province to be shot in a canned hunt. Crous brother David is listed in the SAPA et al vs DFFE documents filed in December 2024. Pat Loots also appears in those documents as having a stockpile of 176 sets of lion bones in 2023 and 227 in 2024.



Image: video screenshots by Letaba Herald

#### October 22<sup>nd</sup> 2025: DIVERSE THREATS TO BIG CATS

Mongabay published an article by Charles Mpaka in which he discussed a study recently issued by the research organisation, Panthera ([panthera.org](http://panthera.org)). Mpaka zeroed in on the threat from cultural demands to lions, leopards, servals and cheetahs. He refers to the Panthera study which highlights that while habitat loss, direct persecution, and human wildlife conflict (HWC) are well documented threats, cultural demand is also a serious threat that is only poorly understood. The IUCN Red List lists servals being of "Least Concern" while lions, leopards and cheetahs are all listed as 'Vulnerable'.

#### October 27<sup>th</sup> 2025: MINISTER DION GEORGE IN THE MAIL AND GUARDIAN

In an article under the unequivocal headline declaring 'Killing of Captive Bred Lions Is not Hunting' Dion George made his clearest statement up to that point, condemning canned hunting. Campaigners against canned hunting immediately applauded George and supported his position, while lion breeders and providers of canned hunts condemned the article.

#### October 29<sup>th</sup> 2025: SAFARI CLUB INTERNATIONAL FUNDING GRANT TO PHASA

Safari Club International (SCI) made funding grants to 11 organisations around the world to promote and support the hunting industry. One of the receivers of a grant was the Professional Hunters Association of South Africa (PHASA). In October PHASA also announced that it had been made a full member of the UN body the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN). Several respected voices in the conservation sector condemned the IUCN move, and questioned how the conservation of species listed as *Endangered* or *Vulnerable* could be assisted by an organisation dedicated to hunting them.

#### **November 4<sup>th</sup> 2025: INDIAN MEGA ZOO IMPORTS BIG CATS FROM SOUTH AFRICA**

In an article published in Patrol Dr Daniel Stiles identified Nazeer Cajee's Akwaaba businesses as being the largest South African exporter of big cats to a mega zoo in India's Gujarat Province. A total of 558 big cats were imported mostly from Africa by the zoo project Vantara including lions, cheetahs and leopards. Bizarrely this total also included jaguars and tigers which are not indigenous African species. Cajee's Akwaaba Predator Park and Sweet Water Properties, trading as Akwaaba Lodge, were the largest South African exporters accounting for 286 big cats which was 49% of the total.



Prime Minister Modi at Vantara. Source: Vantara Facebook page

#### **November 4<sup>th</sup> 2025: MINISTER DION GEORGE IN BRAZIL**

South Africa's Minister of Forestry, Fisheries & the Environment, Dr Dion George, delivered a very well received address at the United for Wildlife Global Summit in Rio De Janeiro. George reaffirmed his intention to ban the captive breeding of lions in South Africa and confirmed South Africa's commitment to being a responsible guardian of the many iconic African species found within his country's borders. This summit preceded COP 30 which was also attended by George and held in Belem in Brazil between November 10<sup>th</sup> – 21<sup>st</sup>.

#### **November 7<sup>th</sup> 2025: FORESTRY, FISHERIES & ENVIRONMENT MINISTER DISMISSAL REQUEST**

The leader of South Africa's Democratic Alliance Party (DA) asked South African President Cyril Ramaphosa to remove Dr Dion George from his post as Minister of Forestry, Fisheries & the Environment and appoint Mr Willie Aucamp as his replacement.

#### **November 8<sup>th</sup> 2025: AFRICAN/INDIAN CHEETAH CO-OPERATION**

Over 70 years after Asiatic cheetahs were officially declared extinct in India in 1952, Project Cheetah at the Kuno National Park in Madhya Pradesh hopes to re-introduce cheetahs to the sub-continent. This is a co-operative project involving the governments of South Africa, Botswana and Namibia. The Hindustan Times reported that a delegation from South Africa had visited the Kuno National Park on November 7<sup>th</sup>. The team assessed the progress of the project so far and reviewed various aspects going forward of what is being called the intercontinental cheetah translocation project. The Hindustan Times had earlier reported in August that a team from South Africa would visit India later in the year to review the MOU signed in January between the two countries. The MOU envisaged South Africa sending ten cheetahs every year to India for ten years. **Editor's Note: As of late 2025/early 2026, around 15 cheetahs have died at India's Kuno National Park since the reintroduction project began, with reports indicating 10 adult/cub deaths by January 2024, and more deaths occurring through 2025, including some cubs, bringing the total casualty count to at least 15 or more. Causes have varied, including infections, injuries from territorial fights, radio collar complications, and even vehicle strikes for cubs, with some deaths attributed to monsoon-related issues like maggot infestations.**

#### November 8<sup>th</sup> 2025: WILDLIFE PARTS SEIZED AT SINGAPORE'S CHANGI AIRPORT

Twenty horns from white rhinos weighing approximately 35.7 kg and worth approximately \$USD 870,000 together with 150 kg of bones and other body parts on route from South Africa to Vientiane in Laos were seized by officials at Changi airport. Also refer to 3 & 30 December entries.



#### November 10 th 2025: DRC LION CUB HEARINGS CONTINUE

Hearings continued in the southern DRC city of Lubumbashi of three offenders charged with trafficking lion cubs. An acquittal with a fine for complicity was recommended for defendant Baraka, while the other two, Loty and Seydou, were each fined one hundred million Congolese francs and sentenced to ten years in jail.

#### November 12<sup>th</sup> 2025: DFFE MINISTERS REMOVED AND APPOINTED

It was officially confirmed that President Ramaphosa had accepted the recommendation of the leader of the Democratic Alliance to dismiss Dr Dion George as Minister of Forestry, Fisheries & the Environment. At the same time President Ramaphosa announced that Mr. Willem Abraham Stephanus Aucamp would take up the post.

#### November 13<sup>th</sup> 2025: RARE AND WELCOME LEOPARD SIGHTING

A camera trap photo of a leopard in South Africa's West Coast National Park has been hailed as historic and a huge biodiversity and conservation success. Leopards had been absent from the park for 170 years, and the confirmed presence of this individual is regarded as a powerful sign of ecological recovery in the area and proof that collaborative conservation efforts pay dividends.

#### November 17<sup>th</sup> 2025: NEW FORESTRY, FISHERIES & ENVIRONMENT MINISTER SWORN IN

Mr Willie Aucamp was sworn in as the new South African Minister of Forestry, Fisheries & the Environment. **Editor's Note:** Several South African and international commentators and journalists observed that the timing and manner of Dr George's dismissal was both unfortunate and a public relations 'own goal', because at the time the news first broke Dr George was on the world stage in Brazil where his comments and statements were being widely applauded and supported.

#### November 22<sup>nd</sup> 2025: ONLINE ILLEGAL WILDLIFE TRADE

A report published by the Global Initiative Against Transnational Organised Crime highlighted the increase in the use of social media as a sales avenue. The report also noted that South Africa was still one of the world's largest exporters of tigers and tiger parts despite these big cats not being indigenous to the country, and South Africa remained a leading exporter of lion bones and other wildlife parts in which trade is forbidden under CITES agreements.

#### December 2<sup>nd</sup> 2025: POSITIVE LEOPARD NEWS FROM THE BOLAND MOUNTAIN AREA

The Cape Leopard Trust made public the results of their extensive survey of the leopard population in the Cape's Boland mountains. The survey indicated an encouraging picture for the leopard population and the biodiversity of the region as a whole.

**December 3<sup>rd</sup> 2025: NIGERIAN WILDLIFE SMUGGLERS IN COURT**

A joint operation by various South African law enforcement agencies resulted in the confiscation of rhino horns, and lion and tiger claws, bones, skulls and teeth from a storage facility in Kempton Park in Gauteng. Two Nigerian men, Tunji Koyi and Koyode Ongundele were arrested and appeared in court on December 3<sup>rd</sup>. The court decided their next appearance would be on December 18<sup>th</sup>. Also refer to 8 Nov & 30 December entries.

**December 9<sup>th</sup> 2025: LION BREEDING SET FOR CROSS BORDER EXPANSION?**

In Early December a delegation from the Zimbabwe Parks and Wildlife Management Authority (ZimParks) visited a private lion breeding farm in South Africa's Limpopo province. The delegation toured the Mabula Pro Safaris Farm owned by Cristo Gomes which breeds lions for canned hunting. The tour was led by Stephen Palos of the Sustainable Use Coalition (SUCO) and the Confederation of Hunters Associations of South Africa (CHASA).

**December 10<sup>th</sup> 2025: LION BONES BURNED**

Nearly half a tonne of lion bones owned by trader Kobus Steyn were burned at a secret location in Gauteng at 10.00 am on Wednesday December 10<sup>th</sup>. Provincial government officials and representatives from NGOs along with Lord Ashcroft from the UK and Mr Steyn all stepped back from the fierce heat when the incinerator roared into action turning the bones to ash.



Photo Credit: Don Pinnock

**December 28<sup>th</sup> 2025: MINISTER AUCAMP'S OFFICIAL COMPLAINT TO THE PUBLIC PROTECTOR**

Soon after being dismissed from his position as Minister of Forestry, Fisheries & the Environment Dr Dion George announced he would be responding to various aspects of his dismissal with a legal challenge. On December 28<sup>th</sup> Minister Aucamp, George's successor, made an official complaint to the Public Protector requesting an investigation into George's alleged misuse of state resources. On Aucamp's appointment campaigners against hunting and the trade in wildlife questioned to what degree Aucamp would be able to fulfil his role neutrally given the obvious conflicts of interest due to his being both a game farmer and a supporter of hunting.

**December 30<sup>th</sup> 2025: WILDLIFE SMUGGLERS**

Two Nigerian men were arrested, and a total of 55.4kg of rhinoceros horns and 26.2kg of big cat parts were seized in Johannesburg following a joint operation between the National Parks Board (NParks) and South African authorities. Also refer to 8 November and 3 December entries.

#### December 31<sup>st</sup> 2025: END OF YEAR GOOD NEWS

The majority of people in the world abhor cruelty to animals, and the deliberate, sustained, and painful abuse of any animal is universally condemned. The link in this briefing item will take readers to a story that has no direct cat connections, either to African or to any other felines, however we couldn't resist the last briefing entry for 2025 being good and positive news, and South Korea finally ending its bear bile industry from January 1<sup>st</sup> ticks the boxes. Bears fall into the same category as lions, tigers, and other wild species which are bred in captivity for profit. At the year-end it is a sad and sobering reflection on humanity that all over the world wild species are bred in captivity for various reasons to gratify humans. The hope now for South Korea's 200 plus bears is that places will be found where they can live out their lives free of pain and abuse.

#### January 1<sup>st</sup> 2026: MINISTER AUCAMP AWAITS REPORT AMID ALLEGATIONS OF HIS VESTED INTEREST BIAS.

DFA published a piece by on January 1st by Nicola Mawson which strongly indicated that the tit- for-tat allegations following the dismissal of Minister Dion George and his replacement by Willie Aucamp will run for some time. Aucamp stated he was awaiting a report from The Ministerial Task Team before deciding how to proceed with previous Minister George's intention to ban captive lion breeding. Aucamp's decision will be made against the background of various allegations that he has connections to the lion breeding industry which will influence him. Indeed, there are also allegations that vested lion breeding interests were behind George's dismissal and replacement with someone likely to be sympathetic to the lion breeding industry.

## Exit this Way



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