

Southern African Feline Focus (SAFF)

Quarterly Briefing



Issue 5 – October 2026

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Welcome

SAFF (Southern African Feline Focus) No. 5 October 2026

To access the information sources referred to readers should click on the **orange headlines** for each entry. To those who have recently registered to receive the Southern African Feline Focus (SAFF) we would point out that the aim of our on-line publication is to provide an ever-building reference file for journalists, campaigners, researchers, policy makers and others interested in this sector.

This the fifth issue of SAFF (Southern African Feline Focus) and marks the one-year point since we launched the publication last October. I don't know if lions find that time goes faster as they get older but for humans it certainly seems to do so!

When we started SAFF, we hoped it would be a useful 'tool' for those interested in this field. From what we hear it appears that our aim is being achieved so thank you everyone for your positive comments. We try to not miss any major developments, but we are sure that we miss some. If we have not mentioned an important event in one issue it can always be placed in the next with a suitable qualifying comment, so we will always welcome notice of possible omissions. Final editorial and content decisions will however always remain with our board.

It is not southern African therefore, strictly speaking, not relevant to SAFF, however we believe the discovery of a new feline species is worthy of mention, and it is good to start an issue with positive news. It is over 100 years since a new cat species was described. The Tilcayo (*Leopardus tilcayo*) was recently added as a new species. This tiny spotted wild cat, sometimes described as a small spotted tiger cat, mostly ranges in the Yungas forests of the Central Andes mountains of Bolivia. Being called a 'tiger cat' seems to be slightly misleading for this animal which is covered in leopard-like spots! Relevant to southern Africa or not we couldn't resist starting with some good news.

<https://www.smithsonianmag.com/smart-news/meet-the-adorable-and-tiny-tilcayo-the-first-brand-new-cat-species-identified-in-more-than-a-century-180989528/>

July 5th 2026 – [NEW LEOPARD POPULATION STUDY](#)

A new study by Nottingham Trent University estimates that between 45,000 and 143,000 leopards remain in the wild in sub-Saharan Africa. The upper figure is lower than previous estimates and researchers believe the continent could potentially support a population of up to 176,000 leopards if effective conservation measures are put in place. Leopards do best in areas of high prey density and low human numbers, and the study also points out that current hunting quotas are unsustainable.

July 10th 2026 – [CARACALS, CAPE ROAD KILL VICTIMS](#) (Facebook account required to open link)

The Overstrand Herald reported on a caracal hit by a car on the R43 near the Caledon turn, this was at least the fifth to be killed on roads in the area in the last two years. While listed as 'Least Concern' on the IUCN Red List habitat loss, increased road traffic, construction activity and other factors increasingly threaten this species.

July 10th 2026 – [LION BRANDING?!](#)

In KZN lions escaping from private reserves and state protected areas into community and cattle grazing areas are a cause of increasing concern. To identify from where lions have escaped Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife will discuss the branding of lions to establish the area of origin. The idea was greeted with disbelief in many quarters because any form of identification branding would indicate the need for mass darting sedation which could be a huge logistical challenge, and any form of branding that caused pain or irritation could trigger licking, biting and scratching of the affected area.

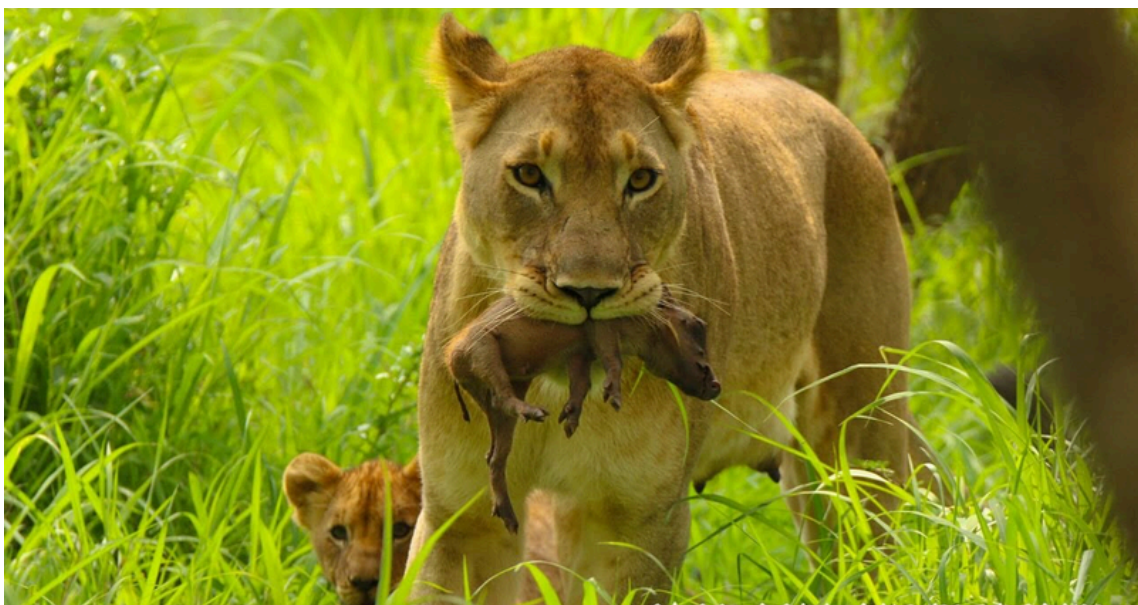
July 23rd 2026 – [SOUTH AFRICAN CHEETAHS MOVED TO ZAMBIA](#)

Conservationists recognise that while lions, elephants, and rhinos dominate conservation headlines cheetahs are hardly being noticed as disappearing from many of southern Africa's landscapes. Against this backdrop comes the news that six cheetahs from South Africa have been moved to Zambia's Greater Luangwa Ecosystem where the species disappeared about thirty years ago.

The IUCN lists cheetahs as vulnerable with populations having declined by 37% in the last fifteen years.

July 28th 2026 – [FAMOUS FELINES SYLVESTER AND KAMBRO](#)

Sylvester, a Kalahari origin lion, made headlines in 2015 when he escaped from the Karoo National Park and evaded capture for twenty-eight days. After having been captured he then escaped again in 2016, and was moved to Kuzuko Private Game Reserve in the Eastern Cape where he fathered Kambro. Kambro was transferred to the Kariega Private Game Reserve in November 2021 and in order to avoid inbreeding in that home and promote genetic diversity in a new home, he has now been whisked by private jet to a reserve in KZN.



July 29th 2026 – [FOUR PAWS RENEWS TIGER CALL](#)

The Animal Welfare Organisation Four Paws has renewed its call to end commercial breeding and trading of captive bred tigers in South Africa. The Department of Forestry, Fisheries, and Environment confirmed to Rekord that 734 captive tigers had been recorded during inspections since the 2023/24 financial year. Four Paws and other welfare and conservation organisations remain concerned by the captive breeding of several large cat species, but the rapid increase in captive bred tiger numbers has become an area of specific concern.

July 31st – [STRAY LION SEARCH, KOMATIEPOORT AREA](#)

On July 31st the Lowvelder reported that the Mpumalanga Tourism and Parks Agency (MPPA) had launched a search for 4 lions which had been seen on the Ngwenya and Crocodile roads in Komatipoort area. An MPPA spokesperson reported that agency rangers had been searching the area since July 28th.

July 31st – [FIVE KZN CHEETAHS COLLARED](#)

In a large-scale operation mounted by Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife and the Forever Wildlife Foundation in Hluhluwe IMfolozi Park five cheetahs were fitted with collars.

August 1st – [KGALAGADI LION MONITORING](#)

Between August 1st and October 31st, the Endangered Wildlife Trust (EWT) working alongside SAN Parks will conduct a three-month census study of lions on the south African side of the park. These lions are part of one of the most important free roaming lion populations left in southern Africa. Photographs and camera trap footage will identify individual lions through their unique whisker patterns.

August 10th 2026 – [WORLD LION DAY \(No article linked\)](#)

Most of the world's iconic species have specific dates when, each year, their existence is celebrated and for interested parties all over the world that species becomes the focus of global attention. In the case of lions there are those who celebrate their existence for the money that can be made out of them..... canned hunts, cub petting, voluntourism, and their bones. Sometimes a single lion is used to fuel all of these income streams. The majority however don't value the lion for its financial worth, its earning power, they understand that the true value of a lion is its role as an apex predator and the awe they inspire simply by existing and being wild.

August 11th 2026 – [THE CAPTIVE LION BREEDING BATTLE](#)

In a detailed leading article, the influential Mail and Guardian newspaper examines the history of captive lion breeding in South Africa, and the government's failure thus far to implement legislation to bring an end to this controversial 'farming' activity. Animal welfare and conservation groups point to a two-day colloquium held in 2018 which led to various reports and decisions that a breeding ban be put into place. Campaigners are dismayed and dissatisfied at what they see as a lack of legislation due to those with financial interests in captive breeding working against the process.

Editor's Note: In fact, the 2018 colloquium came 19 years after U.K.'s ITV channel aired a programme called *Making a Killing* which was part of the Cook Reports series. This report was the first exposé which brought canned hunting and captive lion breeding to global attention and resulted in calls for bans. For older campaigners this is not a battle that has been only going on for 9 years, it has been going on for nearly 30 years and legislation has still not been passed.

August 11th 2026 – [VIETNAMESE PAPER MARKS WORLD LION DAY](#)

The day after World Lion Day Vietnam-VM (it's Vietnam) published an article detailing the plight of Africa's wildlife populations. Full of facts this piece will help raise awareness of the challenges facing Africa's lions. Although not polemic the piece clearly identifies illegal hunting and the trafficking of bones and other body parts as being increasing threats causing poaching and illegal trafficking.

Editor's Note: Historically Vietnam has long been a major importer of lion body parts and other African wildlife 'products'.



August 20th 2026 – [LIVE TRAPPED LEOPARD LEFT TO DIE](#)

Six years after catching a leopard and deliberately leaving the animal to die of dehydration and starvation Andre Barnard of Toorwater Farm is due to be sentenced on October 7th.

August 21st 2026 – [SPOTS ON THE LINE](#)

In past SAFF briefings we have recorded reports of leopards being killed on roads in the Hoedspruit area. Africa Geographic has released a new documentary "Spots On The Line" which follows the work of the Ingwe Research Programme investigating why this roadkill happens and what can be done to reduce or stop it.

Editor's Note: Clicking the headline will enable you to watch the film

August 28th – [DRAFT DFFE LEOPARD CONSERVATION STRATEGY](#)

The Department of Forestry, Fisheries and The Environment (DFFE) published its draft leopard conservation strategy and Action Plan 2026. Public comment was invited within 30 days.

August 31st 2026 – [ELEPHANT, BLACK RHINO & LEOPARD EXPORT QUOTAS](#)

DFFE Minister Maynier announced new export quotas for elephant, black rhino, and leopard trophies. The move was welcomed by the hunting sector but heavily criticised by conservationists and animal welfare groups.

September 3rd – [BLOOD LIONS MICHLER COMMENTS ON SLOW PROGRESS](#)

In a wide-ranging piece in the Daily Southern and Eastern African Tourism Update Blood Lions protagonist and long-term wildlife campaigner Ian Michler comments on progress, or the lack of it, regarding the final implementation of legislation to properly regulate, limit and ultimately ban captive lion breeding.

Editor's Note: See earlier briefing note on August 11th

September 6th 2026 – [LIONS TEETH SELLER'S GUILTY PLEA](#)

A 37-year-old Zimbabwean man entered a guilty plea involving illegal possession of 8 lion's teeth.

September 6th 2026 – [WHO OWNS SA'S WILDLIFE?](#)

Dr. Bool Smuts writing under the headline as above in the Daily Maverick asks, and attempts to answer, the question "are we watching the transfer of a common biodiversity heritage into a private wildlife economy, one regulation and one policy decision at a time?"

Editor's Note: This timely question must be one of the most important issues relevant to South African wildlife at the present time.

September 9th 2026 – [CHEETAH CITIZEN SCIENCE](#)

The Greater Kruger Cheetah Photographic Census 2026/27 is a collaborative initiative between SAN Parks and the Endangered Wildlife Trust (EWT) in which members of the public visiting the greater Kruger area between September 1st 2026 and August 31st 2027 are invited to assist the project by submitting their photos together with relevant sightings data.

September 9th 2026 – [LION / HYENA BEHAVIOUR REVERSAL](#)

A new study published in Frontiers Ethology challenges long-held beliefs regarding lion and hyena interaction. GPS collars fitted to 17 lions and 14 hyenas indicated that instead of hyenas following lions to kills and leftover food sources, male lions often follow hyenas which retreat.

September 10th 2026 – [SA WHITE LIONS, GUATAMALA ZOO](#)

On September 9th the Reuters news agency reported that a pair of year-old white lions imported from South Africa had made their public debut at a zoo in this central American republic.

September 14th 2026 – [ROAD DEATHS, LEOPARDS](#)

The August 21st briefing note in this SAFF issue referred to leopards being killed on the R40 in the Hoedspruit area. In this piece in the Daily Maverick Tiara Walters asks, "can culverts save greater Kruger leopards on the deadly R40 highway"?

September 19th 2026 – [TEN NGORONGORO LIONS DEAD. POISONED?](#)

Ten lions found dead in a leading wildlife reserve in Tanzania are suspected to have been poisoned.



September 21st 2026 – [SA LEOPARD CONSERVATION STRATEGY](#)

In the Mail and Guardian Sheree Begga discusses the DFFE draft leopard conservation strategy. She notes that published population estimates range from 2185 – 23400 individuals! With such a colossal disparity in population estimates, and increasing leopard roadkill conservationists are concerned that trophy hunting licences are being issued while there remains a significant lack of reliable wild population numbers.

September 21st 2026 – [CHEETAH FROM NAMIBIA DIES IN KUNO](#)

The history of southern African cheetahs imported into India has not been overall successful which is underlined by this latest cheetah death.

September 22nd 2026 – [INDIA'S VANTARA ZOO TO END IMPORTS?](#)

A total of 27 leading global wildlife and animal welfare organisations have united to urge Vantara Zoo to permanently end all wildlife imports. In past SAFF briefings we have noted various occasions when wildlife was exported to Vantara Zoo from South Africa.

September 30th 2026 – [34 CAPTIVE LION TOURISM OPERATORS CAUSE WELFARE CONCERNS](#)

Times Live reports on a study conducted by World Animal Protection and Blood Lions which identifies 34 captive lion tourism operators across South Africa which cause concerns over husbandry and animal welfare standards.

September 30th 2026 – [BONE TRADE RAMIFICATIONS NOT THOUGHT THROUGH BY GOVERNMENT](#)

Writing in the Daily Maverick Adam Cruise concludes that the full consequences of the lion bone trade were never fully considered and thought through by government.