

Trophy Hunting

House of Commons – Westminster Hall – 15 May 2019

4.29 pm

This content has already been edited and is awaiting review.

Zac Goldsmith (Richmond Park) (Con)

I beg to move,

That this House has considered trophy hunting.

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Christopher. This debate about trophy hunting takes place within a much wider context. For example, we learned from a recent International Partnership of Business Schools report published just a few days ago that humanity threatens a million species with extinction—species that cover the full range of biodiversity. Although extinctions have always occurred, the report makes it clear that we are witnessing a man-made tragedy on an unprecedented scale. Since 1970, the world's human population has doubled. The global economy has quadrupled in size and international trade has grown tenfold, and yet as the human footprint has expanded, nature has suffered dramatically. In that same timeframe, we have lost half of the world's wild animals. We continue to lose around 20 million hectares of forest a year. Only 13% of the world's wetlands that existed in 1700 still survive today. A third of fish stocks are now harvested at unsustainable levels and live coral cover has more than halved. Perhaps most starkly of all, a quarter of all animal and plant species are now threatened with extinction. That is a rate of destruction hundreds of times higher than the average of the past 10 million years.

Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi (Slough) (Lab)

I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on securing this important debate. The world's pre-eminent experts have highlighted that we as humans have wiped out more than 60% of mammals, birds, fish and reptiles just within the past 50 years, implying that the annihilation of wildlife is an emergency that threatens civilisation itself. On top of that, we have pathetic, reckless, foolish individuals engaged in trophy hunting. Does he agree that a lot more needs to be done by the Government to tackle the evil wildlife trade and to clamp down on trophy hunting? I hope we will hear some concrete measures from the Minister today.

Zac Goldsmith

I thank the hon. Gentleman for his intervention. The statistics he cites are absolutely right. That is a mere blink in evolutionary terms; another blink of inaction, and we could wipe out what remains. I will come to the point about trophy hunting soon.

We are exhausting the planet, and we need radical and immediate action to reverse that. I will not claim today that tackling trophy hunting will reverse this mass extinction—far from it—but I put the debate in that context to remind us all of what is at stake and the situation we find ourselves in.

Mr Jim Cunningham (Coventry South) (Lab)

Trophy hunting has become an industry in Africa. They see people coming from the United States and just killing tigers, for no apparent reason other than that they think they are getting a thrill out of killing the animal and can post it back to the United States or wherever they come from. I know that the British Government are doing a bit of work on that. We had a good example of that with the ban on animals being used in circuses. The exploitation of animals and the rainforest are going to have a major impact on climate change in the world before long.

Zac Goldsmith

I thank the hon. Gentleman for his intervention, and I will come to the points he raised later. Despite the appalling background that I and others have already described, we do care about nature in this country. It is often rightly said that we are a nation of animal lovers. I am proud of things that have happened even on this Government's watch. We have banned microbeads and ensured that CCTV is required in every slaughterhouse. We are finally prohibiting the use of wild animals in circuses. That took a while to happen, but it is happening. We have banned the ivory trade. We have world-leading legislation. We have extended the blue belt to protect vast swathes of the world's oceans. We have done much more besides that, but the need to protect animal welfare does not stop at our borders, and that is why I want to highlight the issue of trophy hunting today.

Kerry McCarthy (Bristol East) (Lab)

No one is in any doubt as to the hon. Gentleman's commitment to these issues. He just mentioned things outside our borders. I apologise if I pre-empt what the hon. Member for Mid Bedfordshire (Ms Dorries) is here to say, but there is also real concern about what is happening in Woburn on the estate owned by the Duke of Bedford. Tourists are paying up to £7,000 to shoot deer there. That is another form of canned trophy hunting, but it is happening in this country, not very far from where we are now. Does the hon. Gentleman agree that that also should be prohibited?

Zac Goldsmith

I think that issue will be raised later in the debate. It is not an issue that I know a huge amount about, but from what I do know, I very much share the hon. Lady's concerns, and I thank her for raising them.

On a personal level, I believe that shooting beautiful endangered wild animals purely for sport is barbaric and perverse. I think the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs spoke for many when he said recently that he had an “emotional problem” with trophy hunting. It is no surprise that a poll found 93% of the public opposed to trophy hunting. Earlier this week, the Commons digital engagement team kindly asked members of the public for their views in advance of this debate, and there was a huge response. Many thousands of people responded and, unsurprisingly, the vast majority were opposed to the practice, describing it as “abhorrent,” “appalling”, “barbaric”, and more besides.

Members will remember the tragic story of Cecil the lion, a beautiful and much celebrated animal, shot dead by a trophy hunter in Zimbabwe in 2015. I remember feeling sickened by the sight of celebrity hunter Melissa Bachman gloating on Twitter and Facebook, smirking alongside dead bears, crocodiles, lions and so many other beautiful animals, but the issue goes far wider than the stories that occasionally make it into the mainstream media or even social media. A 2016 report by the International Fund for Animal Welfare revealed that as many as 1.7 million hunting trophies crossed borders between 2004 and 2014, at least 200,000 of which were from threatened species. The US accounts for a staggering 71% of them. In 2016, 1,203 trophies were taken from the most endangered species of all—those listed on appendix I of the convention on international trade in endangered species.

Some of those species are in real trouble. Wild lion numbers, for example, may now be as low as 15,000, which is a 43% decline in just 21 years. Only 415,000 African elephants remain, when there were more than 3 million a century ago. The black rhino population has recovered a bit, but there are still just 5,000. It therefore seems perverse that the hunting continues, and in many cases is all perfectly legal. We sometimes hear from the hunters when they are pushed, charged or challenged that they do it for the love of the animal or for the love of nature, but could anyone who loves and respects the noble lion or the gentle giraffe even entertain the idea of paying thousands of pounds to butcher them?

David Hanson (Delyn) (Lab)

Given what the hon. Gentleman has said, will he clarify something for me? I am mystified as to why the UK Government’s position, according to the Secretary of State, is that the UK will not yet be banning imports from trophy hunting. That is the central point of the debate where I want to put pressure on the Government, but I genuinely want to know the hon. Gentleman’s understanding of why that is the case.

Zac Goldsmith

I cannot speak for the Government, but I will attempt to answer that question in the remaining minutes of my speech. I suspect that the right hon. Gentleman and I are largely on the same page.

Having said what I have said about the moral conundrum or the moral case for or against trophy hunting, it is important for the sake of this debate—the Government certainly have to

do this—to separate the moral arguments from the conservation arguments. Morally, the issue is largely black and white. We are either comfortable with endangered wild animals being killed for fun or we are not, but from a conservation point of view, I have to acknowledge, not least because I have just been in a big discussion with conservation groups arguing about the issue, that the issue is at least more nuanced than that. I will explain why, but before I do, I will give way.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP)

First, I congratulate the hon. Gentleman for what he does on conservation work across the world. We are much indebted to him for his leadership. He referred to conservation. When we have any conversations about animals or animal welfare, we must always be sure to discuss conservation, because it is so important. How can we do better at conserving wildlife and ensuring that the habitat is still there to sustain the animals? Some of the reasons for the decreasing numbers are habitat loss and poor management. He has secured this debate, and I know he wants to add hippopotamuses to the Ivory Act 2018. I fully support him in that.

Zac Goldsmith

The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right to point to habitat loss, which is the biggest cause of extinction. I have an idea—I will mention it right at the end of the debate, if that is okay—that would help to address that problem.

It would be wrong if I failed to acknowledge the live debate between experts, NGOs and even conservation charities about hunting. There are those who argue that it can contribute to conservation. Those in favour of trophy hunting say, for example, that it is nothing compared to the threat of habitat loss, illegal poaching, human and animal conflict and so on, which contribute a great deal more to the decline in species, and that we should focus on them instead. The first part of that is true, but it does not strike me as an argument against taking action to tackle trophy hunting. We could say, but I do not think we would, that we should not worry about deforestation because it is not as big a part of the climate change problem as transport, for instance.

Those in favour of trophy hunting also say that it can generate important revenue for deprived areas of the world—revenue that can be spent on preserving habitat and protecting endangered species more widely. That is an important argument, which needs to be examined properly. The problem—the Minister will probably make the same point—is that there is simply not enough evidence or data to back up that assertion. I am struck by the way in which pro-conservation arguments in favour of trophy hunting are always phrased. Trophy hunting is okay if it is properly regulated, if the fees go to local communities and if it is sustainable. I suspect that advocates of those arguments are arguing for something that, although it is undoubtedly done to a higher standard occasionally, just does not exist on a wide scale.

The Government use a similar argument. In explaining the Government's position, Ministers have said that sustainable trophy hunting can play a part in species conservation efforts,

including providing funding for conservation. I have three questions about that approach. First, are Ministers confident that the large fees charged for trophy hunting are actually being spent on conservation, rather than going to those organising the hunts? There is very little evidence that the money is genuinely reinvested in protecting habitats or helping local communities.

Secondly, do Ministers really believe that the money generated from hunting is preferable to the much larger sums that could be generated, where appropriate, from such things as wildlife tourism and sustainable land use? The Wildlife Trusts estimates that a live elephant is worth 76 times more than a dead elephant.

Sir Oliver Heald (North East Hertfordshire) (Con)

Is it not rather hard to create the right culture and educative environment if we say, “Oh yes, if you’re rich you can go and shoot a few elephants or whatever, but if you’re some poor poacher, that’s terrible—you mustn’t do that”? We have to say that it is completely unacceptable behaviour whether someone is rich or poor.

Zac Goldsmith

I share my right hon. and learned Friend’s view, and I will come to that shortly. I thank him for his intervention.

The third question for Ministers is: can we be confident that the legal hunting trade is not acting as a cover for the illegal trade in animal products, which the UK has been a world leader in fighting? We banned the legal ivory trade in the UK precisely because it often incentivised, and provided cover for, the illegal trade. Surely the same logic applies.

Sir Roger Gale (North Thanet) (Con)

I apologise for interrupting my hon. Friend, but, as he knows, I am about to go and give his apologies to IFAW for his absence from its celebrations. He mentioned the ban on the ivory trade—there is probably nobody in the Chamber who has not welcomed that—and he used the word “perverse” several times. Is it not perverse that although the Government have banned the ivory trade and justly claimed credit for doing so, they are permitting and almost encouraging the killing of animals for trophies other than ivory, such as skins? Does it not make it even worse, and kick the bottom out of the conservation argument, that in South Africa lions are being bred as cubs to be released into the wild for no purpose other than to be shot? There is no conservation in that, is there?

Zac Goldsmith

My right hon. Friend is right that there is no conservation value in that whatever. Colleagues will raise that issue in more detail, but I will touch on it shortly.

My fear is that the existence of some small-scale examples of better practice is driving our policy generally on trophy hunting, without recourse to the wider evidence, which suggests

that the real story of trophy hunting is a lot less rosy than those advocates would have us believe. Indeed, on almost every level there is reason to doubt the arguments in favour of trophy hunting.

When it comes to the claim that sustainable hunting supports local people, a report prepared for—not written by—the International Union for Conservation of Nature, which is the global authority on nature, said that hunting

“serves individual interests, but not those of conservation, governments or local communities.”

According to the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organisation and the International Council for Game and Wildlife Conservation, around 97% of hunting revenues stay within the hunting industry. Incidentally, just 0.03% of African GDP derives from hunting, when the prospects for expanding tourism are clearly far greater, and likely far more profitable for local communities. Another report written for the IUCN noted that 40% of the big game hunting zones in Zambia, and 72% in Tanzania, are now classified as depleted because the big game has simply been hunted out of those areas.

Richard Benyon (Newbury) (Con)

Does my hon. Friend agree that one of the greatest threats to some of those species is the growth of populations in continents such as Africa? Will he applaud work done by non-governmental organisations, such as one I have seen for myself at Amboseli, where IFAW has put people in place to co-ordinate the interface between wildlife and human beings, which has caused threats particularly to species such as lions? It is really important that that is where resources go.

Zac Goldsmith

I could not agree more strongly. The best conservation projects harness the power of people at the grassroots—people who then directly benefit from an emerging economy in conservation. There are so many examples—not enough to buck the trends that I mentioned at the beginning, but some really inspiring ones that I could spend hours relaying. However, I will not do that, as I am going to allow another intervention.

Ms Nadine Dorries (Mid Bedfordshire) (Con)

I have applied to speak, but in case there is not time, I could not let the point about Zambia go. I lived in that country many years ago, in the Luangwa Valley, which was a game reserve and which, as my hon. Friend pointed out, is now totally depleted of the richness that it had years ago. Does he agree that, were we to ban—as Ségolène Royal has done in France, and as has been done in Australia and the Netherlands—the importing of what are regarded as prize trophies, such a ban would deplete the hunger for trophies and their magical status? Perhaps other countries would follow suit, and the appetite for barbaric trophy hunting would begin to die down.

Zac Goldsmith

I strongly agree, and I will come to that. On the claims about the conservation value of trophy hunting, I will make one other point. The findings that I described were echoed by a US congressional report, which was damning in its conclusion. It stated:

“Claiming that trophy hunting benefits imperiled species is significantly easier than finding evidence to substantiate it.”

It added that

“it is difficult to confidently conclude that any particular trophy import would enhance the survival of a species.”

There are other problems with trophy hunting. For instance, the idea that all the animals are killed quickly and cleanly is a myth. Cecil, the lion I mentioned earlier, took 11 hours to die, and it is reported that 50% of animals that are hunted are wounded rather than killed straight away. In addition, hunters invariably prize the rarer species, meaning that the most endangered species—lions, giraffes, elephants and so on—are disproportionately targeted. In addition to that, hunters prize the biggest and most impressive of those animals—the elephants with the largest tusks or lions with the largest manes. Trophy hunting therefore risks weakening the gene pool as well.

Finally, there is the revolting practice that has already been mentioned of canned hunting, in which animals are bred to be hunted and then shot like fish in a bowl. It has been widely covered recently in the UK press, thanks largely to investigative work by Lord Ashcroft. It is not reflective of all trophy hunting, but it is on the increase, especially with lion farms in South Africa. As well as the ethical horror of breeding animals simply to shoot them for fun, such farms supply the trade in lion bones, which in turn fuels, and provides cover for, illegal trade in the same products.

I received letters in the run-up to the debate saying that we must be conscious of so-called “conservation colonialism”. Clearly that is right, and I do not disagree with that. Whatever we think about trophy hunting, we cannot dictate laws for African countries. However, we can focus on our domestic responsibilities. Between 2007 and 2016, UK hunters brought home 2,638 trophies, of which 15% were from the most endangered species. The flow of trophy imports into the UK is increasing, with 12 times as many trophies taken between 2010 and 2017 as were taken in the decade from 1981 to 1990.

It seems particularly perverse, as my right hon. Friend the Member for North Thanet (Sir Roger Gale) said, that even though we have taken a leading role in banning the ivory trade, elephants remain by far the most popular trophy of choice for British game hunters. Clearly, we cannot ban trophy hunting overseas, and it is not our place to do so, but we can reduce demand for it. Australia and France have banned the import of lion trophies, and the Netherlands has gone further and banned trophies from several threatened species.

I want the UK to take the lead and introduce a ban, or even, for now, a moratorium, on the import of hunting trophies, in particular from those species listed as threatened or endangered. My early-day motion 1829 calling for that has attracted the support of 166 colleagues, making it the third most signed early-day motion this Session.

In 2015, the then Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, whom I am very pleased to see as the new Secretary of State for International Development, promised that

“the Government will ban lion trophy imports by the end of 2017 unless there are improvements in the way hunting takes place in certain countries, judged against strict criteria.”

Is the Minister going to tell us that those improvements have been made? I cannot find any evidence of that whatever.

The Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, for whom I have huge admiration and respect, has explained his refusal to act immediately on trophy hunting by saying that he wants to be “cautious”. He is right to be cautious, and he is right that there is a genuine debate on the issue, but surely the cautious thing would be to introduce a moratorium on trophy imports now until robust scientific evidence shows that they are a clear net positive for conservation. We should also use our international role to argue for trophy hunting to be removed as an exception to trade under CITES appendix I, because it is absurd that CITES recognises species as endangered but permits trophy hunting as an exception to the ban on trading them.

I will finish where I began. Global nature is in crisis, and we must act. Banning imports of hunting trophies will not, on its own, save species; I have spoken before about the need to divert more of our aid spending towards protecting and restoring nature, not least as a means of tackling and alleviating poverty. However, by supporting trophy hunting and allowing its proceeds into the UK, we are actively supporting an activity whose conservation benefits are dubious at best. The evidence suggests that it is actually causing harm to endangered species and that its proceeds rarely, if ever, reach local communities.

I hope that the practice of trophy hunting will stop; I recognise that that will work only if it is replaced by other sources of income, which will not happen overnight, but we should be so much more ambitious for conservation. After all, is it not dispiriting to argue that the best that we can do for endangered species is allow wealthy people to come in and shoot them? Surely we can do better than that.

Chris Evans (Islwyn) (Lab/Co-op)

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Christopher. I congratulate the hon. Member for Richmond Park (Zac Goldsmith) on securing this debate. He is one of the foremost experts on ecology and conservation, not only in this Chamber but in Parliament, and he

always speaks with passion and love for the environment. I congratulate him on another outstanding speech.

Most level-headed people are disgusted and outraged by the trophy hunting trade. As the hon. Gentleman said, clients—mostly from Europe and the USA—pay thousands of pounds to take part in hunts and keep trophies such as an animal's head or skin. The worst thing about this horrible trade is how proponents and apologists make an utter nonsense to justify such brutal acts. One trophy hunter said that he hunts mostly because he enjoys it, but also because he wants

“to try and preserve those wild places in Africa”—

what a patronising view of the African continent!—

“but the only way they get preserved is if there's money. If it doesn't pay, it doesn't stay—it's as simple as that.”

It seems to me that trophy hunting is a trade that deals in killing animals.

Sir Oliver Heald

Surely they are not preserved—they are stuffed.

Chris Evans

That is exactly the point: they are not preserved. Common sense dictates that if people go around shooting every animal in sight, there will soon be none left to kill, so there will be no trade anyway. What is the point?

The hon. Member for Richmond Park spoke about fantastic things that the Government have done with the Opposition's wholehearted support, such as banning the ivory trade. However, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Delyn (David Hanson) pointed out, the essential question is why they have not banned trophy hunting. The hon. Member for Richmond Park has already cited the commitment that the International Development Secretary made as an Environment Minister in November 2015 that

“the Government will ban lion trophy imports by the end of 2017”.

That has not happened.

The hon. Member for Richmond Park spoke about the death of Cecil the lion in Zimbabwe in 2015. Australia, France and the Netherlands underlined their outrage by banning the import of lion trophies. At the time, the UK pledged to do the same

“unless there are improvements in the way hunting takes place”.

That has yet to happen.

I have been a Member of this House for nine years, and I know that a lot of people attack early-day motions as parliamentary graffiti or as a waste of time. In debates like this, however, I

sometimes wish that the Government would take action on sensible early-day motions such as the hon. Gentleman's, which

“calls on the Government to commit to halting imports of hunting trophies”.

The Government should adopt its eminently sensible suggestion

“that nature tourism is a humane and more effective means of conserving wildlife and supporting local communities”.

Nature tourism is more accessible financially and for families. It has a wider pool of customers, clients and tourists, which means more money. It is also more sustainable, because it does not involve the threat that endangered species will eventually run out because they have all been killed. By supporting it, we could end the trophy hunting industry at a stroke, allowing animals to live out their lives and be observed from afar. It is more sustainable and long-lasting, as well as more educational and humane; it would be a more compassionate way of supporting rural communities.

The export and import of hunting trophies from endangered species must be licensed under the convention on international trade in endangered species of wild fauna and flora. CITES is implemented across the EU, but EU regulations go beyond its requirements. I did not want to mention the B-word, because I am sure that we are all fed up with it, but Brexit really is involved. The Government should look at what the EU is doing. In February 2016, it launched an action plan to tackle illegal wildlife trafficking, including 32 measures that must be carried out by 2020. Assuming that we have left the EU by 2020, will we still commit to that action plan?

I have known the Minister for a long time. I am not sure whether she remembers this, but many years ago she gave her maiden speech just before I gave mine. Since then, her career has flown up to the top, while mine—well, that is another story.

[The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs \(Dr Thérèse Coffey\)](#)

You have a lovely wife, though.

[Chris Evans](#)

Thank you very much—I will pass that on to her tonight.

There are three main areas of the EU action plan that I hope the Minister will adopt:

“Prevent trafficking and reduce supply and demand of illegal wildlife products...Enhance implementation of existing rules and combat organised crime more effectively by increasing cooperation between competent enforcement agencies...Strengthen cooperation between source, destination and transit countries...and provide long term sources of income to rural communities living in wildlife-rich areas.”

Another issue that we have to look at is the involvement of criminal gangs. The trophy hunting trade is greatly abused, with gangs increasingly using the system to traffic wildlife and items such as rhino horns, which are fraudulently exported to places such as Vietnam. In its 2016 report on EU trade policy and the wildlife trade, the European Parliament's Committee on International Trade found that most common offences relate to corruption, the fraudulent obtaining or forgery of licences, money laundering, and drug trafficking.

Simply put, trophy hunting brings misery to communities all over the world and should be stamped out. The Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs says that his ambition is to regulate wildlife as much as possible. However, between 2013 and 2017—under this Government's watch—global trophy imports increased by 23%. Why anybody would want an animal on their wall or fur on their floor is beyond me, but in 2017 there were 16 recorded trophy imports to the UK—a reduction from the 46 in 2016. If there is not much appetite for trophy imports in the UK, surely we should ban them anyway. We should ban them on moral grounds, on legal grounds and above all because, as a nation of animal lovers, it is our duty. I hope that the Minister will have some good news for us this afternoon.

4.58 pm

Tracey Crouch (Chatham and Aylesford) (Con)

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Christopher, and to follow the hon. Member for Islwyn (Chris Evans)—not least because he has spent a long time teaching me how to pronounce his constituency. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Richmond Park (Zac Goldsmith) on securing this important debate and on his excellent speech, which was characteristically passionate about our natural environment.

I would like to focus on the trophy hunting of lions. More than 15 years ago, I was privileged to see lions, along with many other incredible animals, in the Tanzanian wild, where I could appreciate at first hand the beauty of those creatures in their natural habitat. I remember to this day my sense of awe at the vibrancy and diversity of animals in a national park that stretched further than the eye could see. I thought how incredibly lucky I was to be sharing that part of the planet with them at that very moment.

On Saturday, I took my three-year-old son to Port Lympne, where the Aspinall Foundation is doing some amazing work. We got to see a little bit behind the scenes, including meeting—behind secure fencing, I hasten to add—two Barbary lions. One roared, and I could see the same awe in Freddie's eyes that was in mine when I heard a different type of lion roar in Africa. However, the Barbary lion is extinct in the wild, and it suddenly became very clear that my son's experience last weekend might be, if we are not careful, the closest he will come to seeing a lion if the current rate of hunting is allowed to continue. As the Aspinall Foundation says on its website:

“All subspecies of lion are now threatened in the wild mainly due to conflict with people.”

The Library's briefing paper on trophy hunting from March 2017 talks about the "sport" of hunting lions. As someone with a clear interest in sport, I would say it is not a sport. I struggle to see the difference between illegal poachers, who hunt animals to sell valuable assets such as rhino tusks and who are rightly condemned by the majority of the world, and the privileged businesspeople from this country and others who travel to Africa and kill these beautiful creatures for the personal gratification. There is a clear difference between bringing a lion's head home to place on the mantelpiece and real conservation of these animals. I believe that Government policy of carefully managed hunting playing a part in species preservation is disappointing, unfounded and potentially dangerous going forward.

The UK has a duty to support the establishment of new national parks, and the protection of existing ones, where lions and other animals can live freely without the threat of hunting or poaching. The tourism industry in such countries clearly relies on the visibility of these animals, so their numbers must be protected and increased through careful conservationism, which would be of greater benefit to national economies than the money brought in by hunting. In fact, there are rather criminal figures showing that communities in sub-Saharan Africa that give up land to hunters receive just 50 cents per head each year. Hunting areas provide just 37 cents per square kilometre to the Government of Tanzania, whereas maize cultivation can provide up to \$25,000 per square kilometre. In fact, using land for hunting generates the least amount of money for Governments out of all forms of land use in Africa. It is clear that the past argument for hunting as providing support for conservation efforts is untrue, and many former parks where animals have been hunted to near extinction have become wildlife deserts, as my hon. Friend the Member for Richmond Park noted.

I supported the Prime Minister on her visit to Africa last year, where she outlined her ambition for a closer relationship between Britain and African Commonwealth nations that would benefit both. This new relationship with Africa should have both cross-party and cross-departmental support, and the new International Development Secretary spoke recently of African prosperity and good, old British values such as humility and innovation. However, there is nothing innovative in allowing this dated and inhumane trade in hunting trophies from the African continent to the UK.

The UK had an opportunity to be a global leader in preventing trophy hunting imports, a move that has overwhelming public support. Instead, we have sat on our hands while countries such as France and Australia have introduced outright bans and the USA has made it increasingly difficult to import by making individuals prove that the killing of the animal led to greater conservation of the species. Frankly, we should be ashamed of ourselves for missing out on the opportunity to take the lead. It does not mean that public pressure has disappeared: a petition by LionAid to ban lion trophy hunting imports into the UK has reached over 370,000 signatures and continues to accumulate further support. The disdain for stories of trophy hunting is real, and I hope the Minister recognises that there is public appetite for changing the law.

If anyone is in any doubt about why the Government's current position is wrong, I encourage them to meet Peter and Christine from LionAid. Even without their briefing, and at a time when we have the opportunity in an ever-changing geopolitical world to showcase ourselves as

animal welfare and environmental champions, we need to ask ourselves whether we in Britain want to allow trophies from hunting lions and other endangered species to adorn our walls as the only reminder for the next generation of what they could have seen if we, the current crop of politicians, had taken action.

Sir Christopher Chope (in the Chair)

We will start the wind-ups at 5.10 pm. I call Nadine Dorries.

5.04 pm

Ms Nadine Dorries (Mid Bedfordshire) (Con)

Thank you, Mr Chope. I had no intention of speaking today as I came to listen and learn, but I feel compelled to respond to the comments about Woburn Safari Park and make some other points. The hon. Member for Bristol East (Kerry McCarthy) is no longer in her place, but she said concerns were raised about Woburn. Woburn is in my constituency. As the local MP, I have not heard about or been contacted by email or in any other way about such concerns with Woburn Safari Park or Woburn Abbey Deer Park.

I am passionate about animal welfare, as anybody who follows me on Twitter or knows me will be aware. It was important to me that I got to know both the safari park and the staff who worked there, and that I did my own appraisal of the conditions the animals were kept in and how they lived. I am in awe of both the research and the conservation work that takes place at Woburn in order to contribute to the preservation of various species. In fact, at Woburn—if I had known I was going to speak about this today, I would have got a list before I came—there are not only endangered species, but species that are extinct in the wild, ranging from insects to big game and other animals. They are looked after incredibly well, so I support Woburn Safari Park in its work.

On the deer park and culling, I was reassured on Friday that deer have to be culled, because an old deer left to die in a pack in a park does not have a pleasant death. No deer takes longer than three seconds to die. They are shot, and a marksman rides on the wing with the person doing the shooting. If the deer is not shot instantly, a second shot is fired almost immediately. That has to happen.

I want to follow on from the comments made by my hon. Friend the Member for Chatham and Aylesford (Tracey Crouch). I lived in Zambia 35 years ago. I spent part of my time in the Luangwa Valley, which was a beautiful, rich and vibrant game reserve. People would walk instead of going in jeeps; I spent time there on walking safaris. I recently spoke to friends who live out there, in what was a beautiful, lush and incredible place. I will never forget being stuck on a riverbed when we were in a jeep and about to be chased by a bull elephant. I will never forget coming across a pride of lions at night, with a light and a halogen lamp. Slowly, one by one, little cubs came out from under the bushes, and the female lions licked them and patted them back into bed again. It was incredible to watch. The behaviour was so like our

behaviour—the behaviour of a mother with her young replicated in those animals. It is so sad to hear that people are now going out there to trophy hunt and shoot those animals illegally.

I also wanted to make a point about what the Government should be doing about rhino horn. Anyone who has seen a rhino left for dead after having its horn removed by poachers will know it is a sight that cannot be unseen—it is there in our brains. We should be looking at how we can ban trophy hunting in this country. I see no reason why we cannot do that immediately, out of pure compassion and a desire to stop this behaviour from being normalised, and to prevent it from having any kind of credibility. By allowing it in this country, we almost give it a stamp of credibility. The UK is the fifth-richest nation in the world, and one of the most civilised—if we think it is okay, we rubber stamp trophy hunting. Surely we should dispel the impression that it is something we approve of. Out of compassion, if nothing else, why not ban it immediately in the UK?

We should be engaging with our international partners. Rhino horn, which has the same composition as compressed fingernails and toenails, is exported illegally to countries such as China and Vietnam. We should have conversations with our international partners and try our utmost to prevent them from claiming these awful, dreadful prizes and from believing that rhino horn possesses qualities that it does not. We cannot do that unless we take a stand. Unless we say, “We ban the import of these trophies,” we cannot have those conversations with other countries and ask them to ban or limit the import of rhino horns, lion heads and other dreadful trophies.

5.10 pm

Martyn Day (Linlithgow and East Falkirk) (SNP)

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Christopher. I thank the hon. Member for Richmond Park (Zac Goldsmith) for securing the debate and for his thorough summary of this issue and the wider one of the risk of extinction. I agree with very much of what he said. He and others cited some sobering statistics, but one of the positive, encouraging stats was that 93% of the public oppose trophy hunting. That tells us that there is very little risk to banning it: the public would support it.

Across our nations, we are all animal lovers. I myself am a big cat fan; the pun is intended. I have a small—well, not so small—tabby cat who thinks he is a lion. If he saw the danger lions are in, he might change his mind.

The practice of trophy hunting is abhorrent to many, including me. I fail to see its attraction. It deprives endangered species of healthy individuals, and perhaps as many as half of the animals are wounded, rather than killed, with some taking days to die. In fact, I worry about the mindset of those who find pleasure in the practice. I just do not get it. I say that irrespective of whether it relates to endangered or non-protected species, and whether it takes place abroad or at home.

It is important that we do not confuse this issue with legitimate pest control, the management of habitats and conservation issues. The SNP takes the welfare of domestic and wild animals very seriously. We are committed to protecting the welfare of animals. Our manifesto promised to support more animal welfare measures with a global focus. My colleagues and I supported the passage of the Ivory Bill in the Commons, and we welcome the UK Government's progress in tackling the illegal ivory trade. I hope we will see a total ban on ivory sales as a result.

The Scottish Government will continue to legislate to improve animal welfare and will establish a Scottish animal welfare commission to advise on the welfare of both wild and domestic animals, and how it should be improved. They will introduce new legislation and issue Scottish Government guidance. Last year, the First Minister noted concerns about the current rules, which permit the stalking and hunting of animals. She has confirmed that a review of current hunting laws will be carried out. The Scottish Government are therefore reviewing trophy hunting in Scotland and considering whether changes in the law are required.

Although there is much we can do in our nations, many of the endangered species under threat from trophy hunting are to be found abroad. In the European Parliament, Alyn Smith, who was our MEP and is heading up our list for Scotland at the moment, has been very active on this issue. He signed a letter to President Trump, expressing concern about the US Administration's decision to lift the ban on elephant trophy imports from Zimbabwe.

A number of countries have introduced positive bans on trophy imports; Australia, the Netherlands and France have all banned lion trophy imports. I would welcome action from the UK Government on that and would certainly support such a move here.

It is estimated that there are now about 20,000 lions left in the wild, and some figures suggest far fewer; the hon. Member for Richmond Park suggested that it is 15,000. That certainly shows that we have a real problem. The hon. Member for Chatham and Aylesford (Tracey Crouch) covered much of the lion issue. I will not repeat what she said—I agree with it entirely—but I want to highlight her point that all sub-species of lion are now threatened in the wild. That is a very sobering, frightening fact.

I am grateful to the briefing from LionAid, which was circulated in advance of this debate. It contains many good points in support of a ban on the import of lion trophies. I particularly agree that, at the very least, requiring evidence that an imported lion trophy has benefited conservation of the species and that hunting profits have benefited local communities would be desirable if a full ban is not introduced.

John Mc Nally (Falkirk) (SNP)

Obviously, killing animals for sport is totally unacceptable. Does my hon. Friend agree that hunting lions does not benefit conservation in any way? That is the presumption of the recent change in US regulations. Why cannot the UK do exactly the same? If the US can do it, we should be able to.

Martyn Day

I agree entirely. Indeed, the US ban led to a reduction of 90% in imports of such trophies. We would all benefit from that. There is very little financial benefit from trophy hunting to local communities. The Campaign to Ban Trophy Hunting has highlighted that it amounts to 0.3% of GDP in African nations, while photographic safaris generate 40 times as much. The hon. Member for Islwyn (Chris Evans) spoke about the benefits of nature tourism. Those nations could gain much more financial benefit from that.

In conclusion, I hope the UK Government will consider a full ban on trophy hunting. I welcome the consensual nature of this debate, and I am grateful to have had the opportunity to participate.

Sandy Martin (Ipswich) (Lab)

I congratulate the hon. Member for Richmond Park (Zac Goldsmith) on securing this debate. We have heard several useful interventions from Members of all parties—I would especially like to mention those of my hon. Friend the Member for Bristol East (Kerry McCarthy) and my right hon. Friend the Member for Delyn (David Hanson). Not only was my hon. Friend the Member for Islwyn (Chris Evans) passionate, but he showed identifiable ways forward to help to bring this horrible trade to an end. We also heard passionate speeches from the hon. Members for Mid Bedfordshire (Ms Dorries) and for Chatham and Aylesford (Tracey Crouch), who exposed the spurious financial arguments for hunting.

When I spoke for Labour to support the Ivory Bill, which the Government were taking through the House, we debated the extent to which sales of old ivory could disguise the continuation of the slaughter of elephants in pursuit of the trade in ivory. Clearly, selling an ivory-handled hairbrush made in the 1950s would not in itself cause the death of any more elephants, but the very fact that the trade in ivory was still legal gave merchants dealing in fresh ivory a market for their goods. I am very pleased and proud of what this House decided to do, with unanimous, cross-party support.

Having taken such a firm line on the ivory trade, how can we possibly support the importation of hunting trophies, which can include parts of those self-same elephants? We have heard the appalling statistics from the hon. Member for Richmond Park: 1.7 million dead animals, or bits of dead animals, were imported over the previous decade, according to an International Fund for Animal Welfare report from 2016, including 10,000 lions. Britain is one of the world's 12 most prolific countries for killing lions and elephants, and bringing bits of their dead bodies back. Even with the National Rifle Association supporting international trophy hunters, the US does not allow the import of bits of dead cheetah, but the UK does. The CITES statistics show a 23% increase in the number of trophies imported globally over the four years from 2013 to 2017, amounting to 20,846 in 2017 alone.

Imports of some trophies have reduced in recent years. The number of southern white rhinos shot for their trophies went down from 75 in 2016 to 72 in 2017, but that is probably because there are so few left to shoot. How can we be so concerned about the possible extinction of

rhino and still let people go out with the intention of shooting them and return with a bit of the animal to prove their action?

The word “trophy” suggests that there was a contest, in which the brave hunter managed against the odds to defeat the ferocious beast against which he was pitted and took part of the animal to remind himself of his accomplishment. In reality, so-called canned lions are bred in enclosures and factory farmed, and then released to be shot like clay pigeons. Even if such blatant preparation were stopped, there is no genuine contest involved in trophy hunting; the activity is just plain slaughter.

When we debated the Wild Animals in Circuses Bill last week, I made the point that it is not the number of animals that is at issue, but the degrading treatment and the inhumanity of taking pleasure in making them perform. How much more cruel, pointless and inhumane is it for a person to go out to another country and deliberately kill an animal just so they can put a bit of its dead body on the wall of their house? In this case, it is about not just the inhumanity but the numbers. Of the 1.7 million so-called trophies taken over the past decade, 200,000 were from endangered species.

We do not have to allow this preposterous practice to go on just because it is allowed by CITES. CITES is clearly not adequate for the preservation of international wildlife. It allows trophy hunters to shoot even species listed as critically endangered. It would not be helpful for this country to withdraw from CITES, but it is time for us to join with other nations in creating a framework for the genuine protection of wildlife around the world.

Trophy hunting does not protect against poaching. There is good evidence that poachers use the activity of legally sanctioned hunters as smokescreen for their own killing. Permits for hunting have been used by poachers to trade rhino horns. Two-thirds of hunting trophy export records are inaccurate, and there is no reason to suppose that some are not being used to cover poaching. In any case, what difference does it make whether a species is wiped out by poachers or by trophy hunters?

Hunting does not support the economies of the world’s poorest countries in any meaningful way. Photographic safaris in African nations generate 40 times as much revenue as hunting, as revealed by this week’s report from the Campaign to Ban Trophy Hunting, which is based on United Nations figures. How much of that tourism income will be retained if all the animals that tourists come to see and photograph have been wiped out?

It is time for this country to act. Labour has already committed, in its animal welfare plan, to ending the import of all wild animal trophies from species classified as critically endangered by the International Union for the Conservation of Nature, and to extending that ban to species listed under CITES. There may be good grounds for going further and we would like to hear from those who think that we should explore that option.

Will the Minister tell us whether the Government plan, in the near future, a wide-ranging public consultation on trophy hunting and the import of wild animal parts, with the view to banning all imports of such trophies? We cannot and must not allow the present situation to

continue, and we cannot stand idly by while extraordinary and magnificent creatures are driven to extinction to satisfy the vanity and bloodlust of a tiny number of killers.

5.21 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Dr Thérèse Coffey)

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship for this important debate, Sir Christopher. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Richmond Park (Zac Goldsmith) on securing it. I welcome the contributions that have been made.

I recognise that trophy hunting—some call it big game hunting—brings out strong and deeply held views and passions, as has been evident today. For many people, it is a straightforward ethical issue. Many people do not agree with any form of hunting or of killing animals in that way—by that, I mean not just fox hunting in this country, but deer stalking and shooting, which has been mentioned.

Although more people accept the need for culling to manage wildlife, it is not a simple issue and there is certainly no unified position among stakeholders. Many hon. Members will have received briefing packs from different stakeholders. We heard a lot today when we hosted a roundtable on this topic—my hon. Friend the Member for Richmond Park contributed—and listened to views to enhance our understanding and build on the available scientific evidence. I am sure that my hon. Friend will agree that there were very different views on the evidence that was put forward, including a particular report, which he mentioned. An IUCN representative suggested that that was not their policy. We will get strong back and forth in discussions.

I assure Members that the Government take the conservation of species seriously. We should recognise that some countries see big game hunting as an effective conservation tool that can support local livelihoods and be an important source of funding to protect habitats and species, including those being hunted.

Various hon. Members referred to a statement made a couple of years ago by my right hon. Friend the Member for Penrith and The Border (Rory Stewart). He commissioned a study into the impact of hunting on lions. That led to the report by Professor Macdonald of Oxford University called “Lion Conservation with Particular Respect to the Issue of Trophy Hunting”.

That report found little evidence of a negative effect on populations when the operation is sustainable, and found that game hunting can provide benefits to conservation as a financial incentive to protect lion habitats. A lot of the focus was on the practice of captivity breeding for hunting, as my hon. Friend the Member for Richmond Park mentioned. When I was at CITES, I raised the issue of canned hunting and similar approaches with a South African Minister, and I raised tiger hunting with a Chinese Minister, so I can assure the House that we take those issues seriously. The report also highlights a risk that African nations who feel continually imposed upon may opt out of internationally important agreements such as CITES.

There has been a lot of discussion during this debate about species, and I will set out why we should treat countries individually, rather than considering Africa as one nation. I am fully aware that elephants, lions and others do not know geographical boundaries, but different approaches have been taken and we work closely on those.

Our policy on imports starts from the point of EU regulations, which are considered by looking at both the species and the country. That is why there are different import restrictions on species by country or area. Trophies from hippos, for example, can be imported from Tanzania but not Mozambique, and at the moment, imports from Cameroon to the EU are suspended. A regional example is that trophies from African elephants in Tanzania can be imported to the EU only if they are from populations in set areas or reserves, such as the Serengeti. Currently, 10 species-country combinations have import suspensions at EU level, and there are numerous temporary import suspensions while additional evidence is gathered.

The EU wildlife trade regulations that implement CITES in the EU are directly applicable in the UK. When species are listed in annex A of those regulations, they require an import permit that will be issued only if a number of criteria are met, including a valid export permit from the relevant authorities of the exporting country. The applicant must provide that permit as documentary evidence that the specimens have been obtained in accordance with the legislation on the protection of that species from that country.

The Animal and Plant Health Agency is the licensing authority and it receives advice from the Joint Nature Conservation Committee. APHA can refuse entry of the species listed in annex A, as well as of six species listed in annex B. APHA considers entry on a case-by-case basis with advice from the JNCC. On the status of big game imports to the UK in 2017, of the 63 permits requested, 44 were issued by the APHA and 41 were used.

Hon. Members referred to other countries. Australia has made probably the biggest change by making ineligible for import any animal that is listed in CITES appendix I, regardless of the country of origin. France has excluded specific parts of lions: heads, paws and skin. The Netherlands will no longer allow more than 200 species to enter the country. Interestingly, in a domestic situation, the Netherlands has a special place, Oostvaardersplassen, which is known as the Dutch Serengeti, where the policy was to allow nature to evolve. Unfortunately, that led to species starving to death, so while some aspects of culling wildlife may seem uncomfortable, it is sometimes necessary for animal welfare.

We have been discussing the legal wildlife trade, which understandably brings discomfort to many people, but, considering the wider perspective, the UK is showing global leadership in tackling the illegal wildlife trade. We will, of course, continue to take the actions to which the hon. Member for Islwyn (Chris Evans) referred. In fact, we are looking right now for another EU member state to take up the championing that the UK has done on the issue in the European Union for many years.

As with the international wildlife trade conference in London last year, we will continue to work with many countries and partners around the world. That is essential to achieve real change. In Africa, the UK is committed to supporting action in the KAZA, or Kavango-Zambezi,

region to tackle IWT and to enhance biodiversity and the habitats of the wonderful animals there, and I hope to attend a wildlife economy summit next month.

I am very conscious that people see CITES as a way to allow trade. At the most recent CITES, in 2016, we pushed for and were successful in getting tougher controls on species from appendices I and II. The JNCC is doing some work for us on some of these things and on where we could consider potentially taking more action. We do not intend to have a consultation, but we are seeking views and gathering evidence to further our understanding.

It will always be challenging when scientific evidence does not necessarily provide support, which is why this might well come down to being a straightforwardly moral or ethical issue. However, we need to consider the wider impact, recognising the conflict that can happen and the unfortunate developments in parts of some African countries, where increasingly—in human-elephant and, in particular, human-lion conflicts—we see animals being poisoned by local communities as they take away people's livelihoods or go into areas where people live. We are still gathering the evidence—we do not have it yet—and I am interested in working with others on that. I am conscious that my hon. Friend the Member for Richmond Park may wish to respond for the remaining 15 seconds or so.

5.29 pm

Zac Goldsmith

The Minister will not be able to answer now, but I hope that as she gathers the evidence, if it emerges—I believe it will—that the practice of trophy hunting has no net positive effect for conservation, the Government will take the firm position that I think pretty much everyone in the debate has demanded. I thank hon. Members for their contributions, and I thank LionAid, Born Free and the Campaign to Ban Trophy Hunting for all their work to raise the issue right up the political agenda, resulting in this debate and, I hope, more to come.

5.30 pm

Motion lapsed, and sitting adjourned without Question put (Standing Order No. 10(14)).