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VIRAL VIDEO. An advert on a Pretoria WhatsApp group for white lion cubs has caused an uproar. Picture: iStock

# Claws out over lion sale

**LITTER:** VIRAL VIDEO SHOWS CUBS WANDERING AROUND SELLER'S HOME

→ **Department official 'dealing' with matter, says animal welfare society.**

**Cornelia le Roux**

**T**he discovery of a Pretoria resident marketing a litter of white lion cubs on WhatsApp and the confiscation of a tiger cub from a Pietermaritzburg home made headlines this week.

These incidents have cast a renewed spotlight on legislation to regulate the alarming trend of big cats being kept as pets in residential areas.

In the video shared on a WhatsApp group, three mewling lion cubs can be seen wandering on the wooden floors of what appears to be the seller's private home.

The cubs were advertised with a price tag of R35 000 each.

The Animal Welfare Society of South Africa said it had alerted the Gauteng department of agriculture and rural development.

"It has been reported to the Gauteng department of agriculture and rural development, who have the mandate and authority to act. Thus far, we can confirm that we know the alleged seller's name and contact details."

Animal Welfare Society of South Africa spokesperson Allan Perrins said the department assured the organisation that an official had been tasked with deal-

ing with the matter.

"It is our sincere hope that the lion cubs will be confiscated and ultimately returned to the wild."

But Isabel Wentzel, curator of the award-winning South African Animal Sanctuary Alliance, consisting of Monkeyland, Birds of Eden, the Jukani Wildlife Sanctuary and the Hidden Forest Wildlife Sanctuary, told *The Citizen* that rehoming of lion cubs was not an option.

The former senior inspector and manager of the NSPCA's Wildlife Protection Unit said the reality was that such cubs had not been given the chance to bond with their mother.

"Humans can't teach cubs how to be a true lion and adult lions won't adopt them."

"They have also already imprinted on a human. Their only future would be a zoo or a sanctuary if they can be confiscated," Wentzel said.

Speaking on potential action that could be taken against the Pretoria man, she said it was illegal to keep lions in a house.

"It is highly likely that the Gauteng Green Scorpions will be roped in to probe the matter and embark on a sting operation."

"The man would need to be in the possession of more than one permit – one which allows him to keep lions and one for the right to sell wild animals," Wentzel said.

A potential buyer is also required to have a permit to keep a lion. Such permits state the required size of the area in which the animals will be kept.

Whoever will be transporting them could also be fined if they

are not in possession of a permit to do so.

"Gauteng's permit conditions are the department's way to prevent people from breeding and keeping lions," Wentzel said.

"When someone is caught and fined without a driving licence, their vehicle is not confiscated. The same goes when it comes to the transport of lions. The person will be fined for transporting lions without a permit, but they won't be confiscated in Gauteng."

Meanwhile, *TimesLIVE* reported on Monday that a male tiger cub was confiscated for being kept illegally in an enclosure at a property in Northern Park, Chase Valley, in Pietermaritzburg.

According to Ezemvelo KwaZulu-Natal Wildlife's Musa Mntambo, the cub – believed to be between four and six months old – was taken to the Free Me Wildlife Rehabilitation Centre for temporary care and rehabilitation.

"After securing the required permits, it was transported to the Pretoria Zoo where it will receive specialised care and long-term accommodation."

Commenting on the tiger cub, Wentzel said although legislation provided some protection to indigenous big cats, the same did not apply to exotic animals.

It is legal and seems terrifyingly simple to keep a tiger as a pet in some provinces.

"The main reason, currently, for the lack of protection for tigers is that they are not

indigenous to South Africa and do not hold the same protective rights as other native big cats, such as lions, leopards or cheetahs," she said.

"Indigenous species have a special designation within the law. They are referred to as threatened or protected species and thereby given several layers of protection under national law."

"However, regulations for exotic animals are determined by provincial ordinances and they are not given that special protection – they can essentially be owned as property and that drastically changes the way they can be handled."

"In Gauteng, North West, Mpumalanga and Limpopo, no permit is required for the legal possession or keeping of an exotic wild animal, such as tigers," Wentzel said.

"In the Western Cape, for example, getting hold of a tiger to keep as a pet would be almost impossible. You'd need a permit to bring the animal into the province and strict rules, policies and regulations are in place which organisations such as Panthera have to adhere to in terms of keeping these animals."

Hence, it seems easy to get a pet tiger in provinces like Gauteng. All you need to do is complete the application form, attach proof of payment and wait 15 working days for the application to be processed.

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**Tigers not protected because they're not indigenous**