



Publication: Weekend Witness - Main

Title: First a tiger in the suburbs and now lions for sale online

Publish date: 28 Sep 2024

Page: 3

Reach: 5394

AVE: R 21752.12

Author: AKHEELSEWSUNKER

First a tiger in the suburbs and now lions for sale online

AKHEEL SEWSUNKER

First, there was a tiger in the suburbs, and now a Pretoria resident has been caught selling lion cubs on WhatsApp. This week's shocking incidents — the sale of white lion cubs and the confiscation of a tiger cub from a Pietermaritzburg home — have reignited concerns about the growing and alarming trend of big cats being kept as pets in residential areas.

In a video shared on WhatsApp, three white lion cubs can be seen wandering around on the wooden floors of what appears to be the seller's home. The cubs were advertised with a price tag of R35 000 each.

The Animal Welfare Society of South Africa confirmed that it had reported the incident to the Gauteng Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (GDARD).

"We reported the matter to GDARD, which has the authority to act. So far, we can confirm we have the

alleged seller's name and contact details," said Animal Welfare Society spokesperson Allan Perrins.

Perrins added that the department had assured the organisation that it was handling the situation, with hopes that the lion cubs would be returned to the wild.

However, according to Isabel Wentzel, curator of the South African Animal Sanctuary Alliance (SAASA), rewilding lion cubs is rarely an option.

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

"They've already imprinted on humans. Their only future would be in a zoo or sanctuary if they are confiscated," Wentzel said.

The regulations regarding the ownership of exotic big cats differ by province. Douglas Wolhuter, national chief inspector manager of the wildlife protection unit at NSPCA, said some provinces require permits.

"In the Western Cape, for exam-

ple, getting hold of a tiger to keep as a pet would be quite difficult as a permit is required to bring the animal into the province and there are strict rules, policies and regulations, which organisations such as Panthera have to adhere to, in terms of keeping these animals."

Wolhuter added that a permit is not required to own exotic animals in Gauteng, North West, Mpumalanga and Limpopo, so effectively, one could keep a non-indigenous apex predator in an agricultural zone without any paperwork. Northern Cape, Eastern Cape, Western Cape, KwaZulu-Natal and Free State all require permits for the import, export and transport of exotic animals, as well as for possession.

All nine provinces also require that an owner provide the safe enclosure of exotic animals.

Meanwhile, in Pietermaritzburg, a tiger cub was rescued from a residential home. The cub was being illegally kept in an enclosure at a property

in Northern Park, Chase Valley, according to Ezemvelo spokesperson Musa Mntambo.

Mntambo said that Ezemvelo's Pietermaritzburg Honorary Officers visited the property after receiving reports of the tiger cub spotted in the backyard.

"In collaboration with the South African Police Service (SAPS) Stock Theft Unit and the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (SPCA), Ezemvelo Wildlife officials went to the property. They found a male tiger cub, estimated to be between four and six months old. The animal was immediately confiscated," Mntambo said.

These incidents have drawn attention to the inadequate enforcement of laws meant to regulate the keeping of big cats in private homes, raising questions about public safety and the welfare of the animals involved.

• Additional reporting by Cornelia Le Roux.