



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Born Free pleads with Zambian President to spare the lives of 2,000 wild hippos

Hippo massacre could be bloody reality if government-approved cull goes ahead

In a shocking and secretive move, Zambian authorities have apparently overturned their 2016 decision to suspend the brutal culling of up to 2,000 hippos in the world-famous Luangwa Valley area over the next five years.

Wildlife charity, Born Free, who led efforts to stop the slaughter in 2016, is calling for the authorities to urgently re-consider and abort this barbaric agreement that only benefits private safari hunting companies and trophy hunters.

Born Free President, Will Travers OBE, stated: *“Our sources reveal that the government has moved swiftly to reinstate the cull, perhaps hoping this would go unnoticed. Far from it! They are, apparently, using the same flawed rationale for the slaughter as last time – a preventative measure to avoid a future outbreak of anthrax, combined with an assertion that low rainfall will exacerbate the situation. They also appear not to have informed key stakeholders in the Luangwa Valley, including the Luangwa Safari Association and the District Commissioner. The negative consequences for thousands of hippo and Zambia’s reputation as a wildlife tourism destination - the proposed cull site can be seen from the internationally-renowned Chichele Lodge - cannot be under-estimated.”*

The Zambian Ministry of Justice has apparently decided that the original and discredited contract between The Department of National Parks & Wildlife (DNPW) and Mabwe Safaris - the Zambian company who were awarded the culling contract last time - should be honoured and that the cull is to start imminently. Hunting camps are already being set up. However, the original contract was, in Born Free’s view, based on false information and should be rescinded.

The DNPW is seeking to justify the cull by claiming it is a ‘wildlife management tool’ to prevent anthrax outbreaks among wildlife due to high populations of hippo, compounded by unusually low rainfall in Luangwa. However, Born Free asserts that this isn’t the case.

Will Travers confirmed: *“Leaving to one side the vitally important moral and ethical arguments, these same justifications attempted last time should be rejected, again, for the following reasons:*

1. DNPW has, to date, failed to provide robust, scientific evidence demonstrating that there is an overpopulation of hippos in the Luangwa River or make public the Government of Zambia report that has previously been cited in their justification
2. DNPW have failed to provide robust, scientific evidence that clearly demonstrates that previous hippo culls in the Luangwa Valley have been successful in reducing the hippo population over the long-term and that the culling methodology that has been proposed – targeting whole pods of hippos in the water – is humane
3. DNPW has failed to provide rainfall and river level data showing that river levels and water flow in the Luangwa River are abnormally low and cannot sustain the current hippo population
4. DNPW has failed to provide credible, scientific evidence to show that such an indiscriminate hippo cull of healthy animals would prevent a future outbreak of anthrax – not prevent the spread of an existing one.
5. Scientific evidence suggests that culling hippos stimulates breeding and ends up increasing the population, potentially establishing a vicious cycle of death and destruction.
6. Wild hippo numbers across Africa are under increasingly pressure with a maximum estimate of just 130,000 animals - about one third of the number of the high-profile African elephant. Furthermore, as efforts increase to end the trade in elephant ivory, hippos are being increasingly targeted for their ivory as a replacement. Latest data confirms that in the decade to 2016, more than 6,000 hippo teeth, 2,048 hippo tusks and a further 1,183 hippo ‘trophies’ were exported to EU Member States alongside thousands of other ‘parts and products’. International trade records show that from 2004-2014 around 60,000 kg of hippo ivory were imported into Hong Kong.”

Travers concluded: *“Born Free is asking national and international wildlife conservation organisations, concerned individuals and those who have a strong affinity with hippos, to join us in calling on the President of Zambia, His Excellency Edgar Chagwa Lungu, to personally intervene and call a permanent halt to this damaging and distressing plan, with immediate effect.”*

-ENDS-

Image: © Blake McGrow

Notes to Editors:

• Hippos

The hippopotamus (*Hippopotamus amphibius*) is listed as ‘vulnerable’ on the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) Red List, with an estimated population of just 115-130,000 animals. The Red List assessment notes that hippo population declines continue to be reported in many countries, and that “The conservation status of Hippos remains precarious and the need for direct conservation action to protect Hippos and Hippo habitat across their range is a priority”.

About Born Free

Born Free’s mission is to ensure that all wild animals, whether living in captivity or in the wild, are treated with compassion and respect and are able to live their lives according to their needs. Born Free opposes the exploitation of wild animals in captivity and campaigns to keep wildlife in the wild.

Born Free promotes Compassionate Conservation to enhance the survival of threatened species in the wild and protect natural habitats while respecting the needs of and safeguarding the welfare of individual animals. Born Free seeks to have a positive impact on animals in the wild and protect their ecosystems in perpetuity, for their own intrinsic value and for the critical roles they play within the natural world. For more information about Born Free please visit: www.bornfree.org.uk

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