In South Africa, there are between 6,000 and 8,000 lions in captivity. Most live in appalling conditions, with inadequate protocols in place to protect them or regulate their welfare, or the genetic integrity of their blood lines. The breeders of these animals state that they’re breeding lions to preserve the species, to protect them for conservation purposes. The bloody truth is that almost all the male lions become victims of the “canned” (captive) hunting industry, a sport where hand reared, domesticated lions become targets in the sites of lazy hunters, who pay thousands of dollars for the dubious privilege of shooting the king of beasts, in circumstances which are anything but sporting. Cubs are ripped away from their mothers just days after birth to force the lionesses into rapidly repetitive reproductive cycle…. they are simply used as breeding machines, after which their bones are shipped to the Far East to supplement the "tiger wine" industry.
Outline:

There are approximately 6,000 to 8,000 lions in captivity, in cramped conditions with little regard for proper welfare, breeding protocols or genetics. These lions are fast-bred for trophy hunting and the burgeoning lion-bone industry. The South African Government does little to address the situation and legislation is implemented at provincial level where corruption is rife.

Canned lion-hunting has become a brutal commercial enterprise and it is escalating rapidly due to demand for trophies from the West and lion bones from the East. Breeders claim that the industry has conservation value and is of economic benefit to their communities. They publicly state that they will be "saving wild populations" by continuing captive breeding.

This documentary will focus on captive lion breeding which has become an intense battery farming situation where lions are mostly genetically compromised. They are often severely inbred and many species are cross-bred. “Rarities”, such as “ligers” and white lions, can cost the hunter up to four times what he would pay for tawny lions. Few, if any, of these enterprises keep breeding records, and wild lions are being taken to support dwindling gene pools.

This film will also focus on young “volunteers”, most of whom come from abroad and who pay handsomely to work on these farms. They are duped by international agencies into believing that they will be saving “orphaned” cubs, and that these cubs will eventually “restock” wildlife reserves. Most believe that they will be supporting bona fide conservation projects, but when they arrive, they find that they are to nurse lion cubs which have been removed from their mothers’ immediately after birth solely to increase the lioness’ breeding cycles. They are not properly trained, and there is little concern for correct veterinary care or welfare.

We will look at the legislative, conservation and welfare issues, and draw on professional opinion on whether or not it is possible to re-introduce hand-reared domestic lions back into the wild.

Then we will focus on the phenomenon called “canned” hunting. These are guaranteed hunts, where lions are often pre-bought on the internet. We will explain what is meant by “put and take" hunting, and how the hunt is set up.

Also included in the compass of this film is the burgeoning lion bone trade. This trade supplements the "tiger bone" industry to the East and is a relatively new, rapidly growing and unregulated offshoot of the captive lion industry as tiger numbers in Asia dwindle.

We will also examine the vast profits derived by lion breeding: lion cubs sold/rented to tourist facilities for petting; young volunteers charged vast sums to work in these facilities; hunting and trophy fees; the prices of lion carcass’ exported to the East.

Finally we will examine, together with professionals close to the industry, whether these practices are, in fact… “conservation or con”....
Documentary Synopsis in brief:

This investigative documentary will follow the story of a renowned wildlife journalist, and his 15-year long journey to uncover the truth behind canned lion hunting in South Africa. In his brave and tenacious attempts to re-trace his footsteps, he is confronted with his own emotions about this horrific industry.

Film Style/Techniques:

There is a loudly ticking clock in this film: will canned lion hunting be banned before there are no more lions in the wild? Although this film will have a dark edge of tension throughout, the tone will remain calm and composed, avoiding any form of sensationalism or heightened anger. The shocking nature of the dark side of lion farming will speak for itself. Emotion will be carefully balanced with fact in order to be revealing and quietly moving. Apart from brief archival sequences, all material will be delivered in HD.

Project Status:

The film has already interviewed a range of key players in the industry: young volunteers from South Africa and abroad; owners and managers of predator breeding farms; professional hunters; lion ecologists; government officials: lion sanctuary owners and an internationally renowned wildlife filmmaker. Some of these people have chosen to remain anonymous.

A ten-minute fundraising promotional reel was completed in July 2013, and approximately 85% off the filming has now been concluded.

The trailer of the documentary will be completed by the end of July 2014, and the rough cut of the film by the October 2014.

Budget:

Production Budget: US$150,000
(Approximately US$85,000 has been raised to date)