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**NSPCA's FORMAL STANCE ON THE SELECTIVE BREEDING OF WILD ANIMALS FOR COLOUR MUTATIONS:**

In South Africa there is an exploding trend of intensively breeding certain wild animals, mainly antelope and to a lesser degree lions for unnatural colour mutations or morphs.

This is done for profit as the novelty of these colours has created a demand all on its own. This type of breeding or management of wildlife has absolutely no benefit to the individual animal, the species, biodiversity or conservation as a whole.

Selective breeding is the deliberate selection of and breeding for selected animal traits, usually in controlled conditions.

This has been practiced extensively with domestic species and has caused numerous animal welfare concerns.

"40% (10/26) of commonly traded antelope species have colour morphs and 69% (18/26) commonly traded antelope have been genetically manipulated" Rushworth, I. SAWMA. 2014

In terms of animal welfare the main concerns are:

1. **Intensive Farming:**

As colour mutants and hybrids are selectively bred, manipulated and are worth a large sum of money they are farmed intensively as opposed to the usual extensive farming that is done with most antelope in South Africa.

As soon as wild animals become intensively managed farmed animals, serious welfare concerns arise and cruelty occurs.

Farming of animals is a profit based industry and as with all profit based businesses a successful operation involves decreased costs and increased production.

When this is translated to live animals very unethical practices are used to increase profits. This includes confining animals to the smallest spaces possible, feeding animals unnatural feeds (often containing enhancement drugs or antibiotics to combat stress related illnesses) to increase production or size, removing young animals before they are weaned in order to bring the mothers back into oestrus so that they may be mated again to produce more offspring, and physically altering or maiming animals to prevent them from injuring one another when confined to small spaces.

Coupled to all of these concerns, antelope and lions remain wild animals that are not domesticated. They do not seek solace from being near to humans, and captivity, confinement and manipulation are foreign and very stressful to wild animals.

Animals are housed in small camps that are securely fenced. These camps are often too small to sustain the animals naturally without human intervention.

These camps/cages are often barren with the bare minimum provided in terms of shelter and grazing.

Often overgrazing and soil erosion is found, and this type of farming is just as damaging to the ecosystem as domestic farming.

## 2. Inbreeding and loss of genetic diversity:

Inbreeding is actively practiced and used to create these colour mutations and species are intentionally hybridized to create oddities.

The ultimate result of continued inbreeding is terminal lack of vigour and probable extinction as the gene pool contracts, fertility decreases, abnormalities increase and mortality rates rise.

The physical effects of this inbreeding is clearly visible and we have seen the following physical ailments at predator farms: blunted and shortened faces, corkscrew tails, leg deformities, cubs born with missing limbs and cleft palates, eye and heart defects and neurological problems.

Colour mutant antelope are well known for being prone to skin cancers, heart and eye complications along with others.

Inbreeding causes a variety of ailments including sickness, deformities, sterility and infant deaths.

## 3. Loss of Disease and Parasite resistance.

With intensive farming of animals comes associated chronic stress and distress which leads to decreased production and illness.

To counteract this farmers often resort to supplementing feed with antibiotics and other growth supplements.

Parasite burdens are greatly increased when animals are confined and farmed intensively, so anti-parasiticides are used continuously.

The use of the above mentioned substances is not closely monitored, controlled nor used as per the manufacturer's instructions.

This leads to the creation of resistant bacteria and viruses, and "super" parasites.

With captive animals there is a hugely increased risk of disease outbreak, this affects the welfare of the captive animals, and wild animals that may contract the diseases.

With wild, free ranging animals they have natural immunities that make them able to cope with parasites and some diseases, but once in captivity or farmed intensively these animals are very prone to disease and illness.

#### 4. Persecution of predators and Injury to other wild animals.

Due to the high financial value of these colour morph antelope farmers take extreme measures to protect them from their natural predators, including lethal control methods.

It is morally reprehensible that wild predators are being persecuted for preying on their natural food sources.

The extensive fencing that is used to keep these antelope contained causes untold injuries and deaths to smaller animals like tortoises, pangolin, pythons, small mammals and birds.

These fences also prevent natural distribution of small terrestrial species.

#### 5. Lack of suitability to environment

Wild animals with abnormal coat colours are not suited to their natural environments. These animals do not survive in the wild.

Wild animals have specifically evolved coat colours and patterns that enable them to survive in their environments.

Black animals suffer more in high temperatures *Hetem et al 2009,2011*

#### 6. Animals treated as commodities

Due to the inflated prices of these animals there is fraud occurring with normal animals being sold for high prices as guaranteed to throw split colours etc... We have received complaints regarding this as the animals purchased have never sired colour animals.

People are buying colour mutants as investments, some of these people do not even own land to keep the animals on, or know anything about animals. This leads to welfare concerns as the animals are not properly monitored and often the agreements to house the animals is withdrawn.

#### 7. Lack of contribution to bona fide conservation, education and research therefore an unjustifiable use of wild animals in captivity:

Intensively farmed antelope and predators should be seen as completely separate to their wild counterparts, they have absolutely no benefit to the conservation and protection of their kind in the wild.

The genetics of these animals are of no value to the wild populations due to the unscientific and uncontrolled manner in which they are bred. Introducing these inbred animals (accidentally or intentionally) to our wild populations will compromise the genetic integrity of our wild populations.

In an ideal world, facilities that house wild animals in captivity or intensive conditions should not be able to breed these animals unless the animal is endangered and the progeny form part of an ex situ population base to ensure the return of surplus progeny back to the wild. Merely breeding for profit is unethical and is a welfare and conservation disaster.

#### 8. Inhumane and unregulated slaughter methods:

Other commercially farmed production animals are subject to regulations and strict controls regarding slaughter methods and processes. Farmed wild animal slaughter is unregulated and often inhumane methods are used. When an animal is hunted there is no way of ensuring a quick, humane death, nor are there stunning methods that are used to render the animal insensitive to pain. There is ample evidence of inhumane hunting methods, we have tried to prosecute on these cases but this type of cruelty is accepted by our courts as routine hunting methods, and therefore not prosecutable.

Even in canned lion hunts when the lion is engaged in a small are, lured into one position and obviously not scared or wary of humans with no chance of escape or evasion it is exceptionally rare that a hunter will kill a lion outright with one shot. Often these animals need multiple shots to finally kill them. Hunters make use of a shot to the lung area in the hopes of severing the aorta, this is very rarely achieved and majority of the shots are lung shots which lead the animal to choke on its own blood over an extended period of time. Novel methods of hunting such as the use of bow and arrows add even further cruelty.

#### 9. Meat Processing:

The game meat act is not finalised and these intensively farmed animals put people at risk if they are consumed as they do not go through the meat safety act.

Other intensively farmed livestock used for ingestion are controlled by rigorous standards and conditions abattoir, meat safety inspections etc...

Intensively farmed wild animals are not subjected to this even though the disease risk is just as high.

These animals remain wild and cannot be processed via abattoirs, and there are no legal standards or monitoring regarding the slaughter and processing methods.

In the interest of human safety, animal welfare and biodiversity we appeal to our government to ban the intensive and selective breeding of wild animals in South Africa.



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