# Animal rights activists demand removal of King George V’s stuffed Bengal tiger from Bristol Museum



Animal rights activists are intensifying their calls for the removal of a stuffed eight-foot Bengal tiger from Bristol Museum, a relic of big-game hunting that dates back over a century. This tiger, among the many creatures killed during King George V's notorious ten-day hunting expedition to Nepal in 1911, was part of a larger list of trophies that the King gleefully reported; he boasted of killing 21 tigers, eight rhinos, and a bear during the trip. The museum exhibit features the tiger crouching in front of a mural painted by wildlife artist Stanley Lloyd, which depicts George V in full safari regalia.

Campaigners from organisations such as People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) argue it is time to confront this dark chapter in history. Elisa Allen of PETA stated that these specimens represent a “shameful past behaviour,” and advocates for the tiger to be returned to its homeland for a respectful burial. She suggests that if that is not feasible, at the very least, the museum should amend the accompanying display to reflect the violent realities of how these animals met their demise.

In addition to the tiger, Bristol Museum has exhibited exhibits of various endangered and extinct species. Highlighting the plight of these species, the museum draped its displays in black mourning veils in August 2019, following a UN report warning that a million species face extinction primarily due to human actions. This initiative was inspired by local schoolchildren, demonstrating a growing awareness and activism among younger generations concerning conservation and ethical treatment of animals.

The effects of trophy hunting, as highlighted by Dr Mark Jones from the Born Free Foundation, have been devastating for numerous species. This sentiment echoes growing global concerns about wildlife conservation, amplified by recent exhibitions aimed at raising awareness about the plight of big cats. The Born Free charity, for example, launched an exhibition featuring life-sized bronze sculptures of lions in Bristol to bring attention to the sharp decline in lion populations, which have plummeted from approximately 200,000 in the 1960s to around 20,000 today.

Such displays serve as grim reminders of the consequences of past practices. The historical context of trophy hunting, particularly during the colonial era, reveals a troubling relationship between power and wildlife. According to various historical records, over 80,000 tigers were killed in British India between 1875 and 1925, underscoring the need for continued dialogue about ethical treatment and conservation efforts today.

This growing awareness also intersects with a shift in public sentiment; taxidermy displays, once seen merely as curiosities, are now scrutinised for their ethical implications. Museums are beginning to recognise their role in shaping narratives around such specimens. Some exhibits have undergone symbolic transformations—coated in red paint or adorned with manacles—as a form of protest against their origins and treatment. These changes aim to foster a deeper understanding of and responsibility towards wildlife conservation.

In light of ongoing discussions regarding the moral implications of keeping trophies, Bristol Museum’s approach illustrates a broader trend in museum practices that prioritises ethical considerations alongside historical preservation. The fate of the Bengal tiger remains uncertain, but the chorus of voices demanding respect for both the creature and the narratives of suffering that surround it continues to grow louder. Conversations about our past are increasingly informing our approach to wildlife today, prompting a necessary reckoning with the legacies we choose to exhibit and commemorate.

**Reference Map:**- Paragraph 1:   
[[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/tvshowbiz/article-14705011/EDEN-CONFIDENTIAL-Animal-rights-campaigners-roaring-rage-royal-exhibit-stuffed-8ft-Bengal-tiger.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490)- Paragraph 2:   
[[2]](https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2019/aug/14/museum-shrouds-endangered-wildlife-exhibits-in-mourning-veil)- Paragraph 3:   
[[3]](https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-bristol-62013633)- Paragraph 4:   
[[7]](https://www.navrangindia.in/2021/08/king-george-v-of-britain-savage-tiger.html)- Paragraph 5:   
[[5]](https://collections.bristolmuseums.org.uk/stories/lions-and-tigers-and-ligers-oh-my/)- Paragraph 6: [[6]](https://www.smithsonianmag.com/science-nature/the-object-at-hand-2-104715747/)

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## Bibliography

1. <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/tvshowbiz/article-14705011/EDEN-CONFIDENTIAL-Animal-rights-campaigners-roaring-rage-royal-exhibit-stuffed-8ft-Bengal-tiger.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2019/aug/14/museum-shrouds-endangered-wildlife-exhibits-in-mourning-veil> - In August 2019, Bristol Museum draped its exhibits of extinct and endangered species, including a Bengal tiger shot by King George V in Nepal in 1911, in black mourning veils. This initiative aimed to highlight the global biodiversity crisis and was inspired by children from Freshford primary school, who urged the museum to tell the true stories behind such specimens. The tiger was one of 39 killed during the expedition, with 18 rhinos and 4 bears also slain. The museum's intervention responded to a UN report revealing that one million species are threatened with extinction due to human activities.
3. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-bristol-62013633> - In 2022, the Born Free charity unveiled 25 life-sized bronze lion sculptures on The Downs in Bristol as part of a campaign to raise awareness about the threats facing big cats both in captivity and in the wild. The exhibition featured a centerpiece of Elsa the lioness, depicted as in the 1966 film 'Born Free'. The charity aimed to highlight the decline in wild lion populations, which have decreased from about 200,000 in the 1960s to only 20,000 remaining today. Proceeds from the exhibition supported the Forever Lions Fund, established in memory of the charity's founder, Bill Travers.
4. <https://www.bridgemanimages.com/en-US/english-photographer/king-george-v-at-a-tiger-hunt-in-nepal-1911-b-w-photo/black-and-white-photograph/asset/440612> - A black-and-white photograph from 1911 captures King George V during a tiger hunting expedition in Nepal. The image shows the king with Lt. Col. John Manners Smith, the British Resident in Nepal at the time. During this hunt, King George V and his team killed 39 tigers, 18 rhinos, and 4 bears over ten days. The photograph provides a historical visual reference to the royal hunting practices of the early 20th century, highlighting the scale and nature of such expeditions.
5. <https://collections.bristolmuseums.org.uk/stories/lions-and-tigers-and-ligers-oh-my/> - An article from Bristol Museums Collections discusses the museum's extensive collection of mounted birds and animals, including a tiger specimen. The piece reflects on the historical context of taxidermy, which became popular in Victorian times as a form of interior design. The article also touches upon the changing perceptions of such exhibits, noting that the tiger specimen has been subject to symbolic acts like the application of red paint and manacles to raise awareness about the origins of these animals and the ethics of their display.
6. <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/science-nature/the-object-at-hand-2-104715747/> - This article from the Smithsonian Magazine discusses the history and significance of a Bengal tiger specimen in the museum's collection. The piece highlights the decline in tiger populations, noting that by the early 1970s, the tiger population in India had dwindled from 40,000 at the turn of the century to less than 2,000. It also touches upon the factors contributing to this decline, including overhunting, deforestation, and poaching for pelts and body parts. The article underscores the importance of such specimens in raising awareness about conservation issues.
7. <https://www.navrangindia.in/2021/08/king-george-v-of-britain-savage-tiger.html> - An article from Navrang India delves into King George V's tiger hunting expeditions in India and Nepal during the early 20th century. It discusses the popularity of big-game hunting among British officials and Maharajahs, noting that between 1875 and 1925, 80,000 tigers were killed and became trophies for hunters. The piece also highlights the impact of such hunting on tiger populations, leading to a significant decline in numbers over time. The article provides historical context to the practices of trophy hunting and its consequences on wildlife.