



# PRIDE OF PLACE

Lions are undoubtedly the most revered and iconic animals in the natural world. For most of us, no safari would be complete without a sighting of the big cats. Yet, their future is threatened by growing pressure on their habitats from burgeoning human populations.

With the publication of ***Remembering Lions***, Margot Raggett aims to celebrate the lion's place in nature and in our hearts, while encouraging an urgent and sustained effort to conserve them.

"We must realise that collective will is the only thing that will save the situation," she writes in her introduction to the book. "What brings me hope is that it can be done... I've seen for myself that when lion conservation leads to improved education, healthcare, food security and skills training, communities become true champions of wildlife presence."

In this feature, we profile several of the images featured in ***Remembering Lions***, and Morgan Trimble explores our fascination with the king of the beasts. →





**Chris Schmid** *Remembering Lions*  
Serengeti National Park, Tanzania





**Andy Rouse** *Remembering Lions*  
Maasai Mara National Reserve, Kenya





WILDLIFE

**Phil McFadden** *Remembering Lions*  
Ndutu, Serengeti, Tanzania

**Below, from left:**

**Hannes Lochner** *Remembering Lions*  
Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park, Botswana

**Andy Biggs** *Remembering Lions*  
Okavango Delta, Botswana

**Margot Raggett** *Remembering Lions*  
Maasai Mara, Kenya







## REMEMBERING LIONS

The images in this gallery are taken from *Remembering Lions*, with permission. The book is the fourth to be published in the Remembering Wildlife series put together by Margot Raggett with the support of wildlife photographers across the globe who have donated their images.

Profits from the sale of *Remembering Lions* will be shared among projects working to protect lions and their habitats across Africa. To date, the total amount raised for conservation by all four books in the series is over half a million pounds.

*Remembering Lions* is a stunning celebration of the big cats, with 76 images displayed over the 148 large format pages. The accompanying text, including a foreword by Jonathan and Angie Scott

and contributions from Dr Amy Dickson, Brent Stapelkamp and Dr Luke Hunter, provides useful insight to the plight and importance of lions.

Over the years, we have seen thousands of images of lions. So to be able to flick through such a wide range of the more powerful, striking images from such talented photographers in one collection is very special. We urge you to get a copy. The lions will thank you for it.

To order, go to [buyrememberingwildlife.com](http://buyrememberingwildlife.com) →







# OUR LOVE FOR LiONS

Why are we so fascinated by lions? What's the point of them, anyway? And what can a healthy lion population tell us about the wider landscape? Here we explore our deep-rooted love for the king of the beasts, for it is this passion that holds the key to their survival.

WORDS AND PHOTOGRAPHS: MORGAN TRIMBLE



Two heads are better than one  
Princess and Scarface

Not long after leaving Busanga Bush Camp, guide Isaac Kalio slowed the vehicle to a crawl. He'd spotted a powerful lion and lioness to the right of the sun-baked dirt track we'd been bumping along. Another male's shaggy head popped up to the left. The cats' manes fluttered in the wind, their coats the exact buffy tan of the dried grass, shimmying on the floodplains. Two Americans on their first trip to Africa gasped with delight and fumbled with a new camera.

What luck to find lions on the first sighting of the first day! As top predators, lions are scarcer than many species. Safari psychology dictates that a rare sighting is especially exciting. Bonus points for danger and cultural cachet, of which lions have plenty. In a study comparing the number of photos per species shared on Flickr, lions, of course, crushed the global competition.

Isaac cut the engine and introduced the lions by the names he'd given them. Maggie and Nervous lay side-by-side while Scarface

lechwe and puku are easy to appreciate with open views for miles. It's a similar effect to the famed plains of the Serengeti.

In the mythic teak forests and riverine woodlands of South Luangwa; or the bushy savannahs of Kruger; or even the miombo woodlands in southern Kafue, a big cat can slink in and out of view in seconds. But here, guides like Wilderness Safaris' Isaac Kalio can follow resident lions all day, allowing guests an intimate view of their lives. Isaac likes nothing better. He knows the lions by name and personality as if they were his own family. "My heart just beats when I see a lion," he told me. "I love them!" And he's not alone.

**Mankind's respect for lions stretches to** early art and the dawn of civilisation. Some 40,000 years ago, a hunter-gatherer sat around a cave carving at a mammoth tusk with stone tools. An estimated 400 hours of work later, the artist had created a 30cm-tall figurine – part man and part lion. This earliest known sculpture of either creature resurfaced in 1939

*Lions play an important ecological role. They keep prey and competing predators in check and target the weak and sick, strengthening the gene pool. They even shape landscapes by influencing where herbivores eat and spread nutrients*

remained aloof. Maggie got up and circled Nervous, swishing her tail in his face. He followed her, nuzzling and pawing at her flank. They started mating, then, after 15 seconds of drama, sprawled out again, yawning. Lions as a first sighting is lucky. To spend time with lions actually doing something, I thought, "These first-timers don't know how lucky they are."

Little did I know, I would soon discover a renewed respect for the world's favourite animal. With Isaac's insightful guiding in an environment like Busanga, this nice sighting would unfurl into an epic drama to rival *The Lion King*.

Busanga Plains occupies the remote northwest corner of Zambia's sprawling Kafue National Park. Enriched by seasonal floods, the plains draw the park's highest densities of wildlife and a wealth of birds. Heaving herds of

in Germany. What must lions have meant to prehistoric man to invest such effort?

Lions are among the most recognised motifs of ancient art. They feature in cave paintings, then works of early civilisation from Egypt to Mesopotamia to Greece and beyond. They're symbolic across the major religions and even in the stars, in the constellation Leo. Rulers and kings have co-opted "Lionheart" or "Lion of" as a label of fierceness.

Lions wave from flags and emblazon family crests, heralding power, leadership and nobility. They promise athletic prowess for sports teams and guard monuments and buildings. Lion logos help sell cars, films, hotel rooms, financial services, beers and more.

Perhaps no other animal has been so revered for so long. Yet, following such cultural build up, the reality of lions might disappoint. Lions sleep up to 20 hours a

day. The most common lion sighting involves looking in on an indulgent catnap. Still, lions are opportunistic; there's always hope that something might happen.

Among the most sacrosanct of safari sightings is watching lions bring down prey. But don't hold your breath. Hunting lions are twice as likely to fail as succeed. The odds are even worse during daylight hours. Lions are most active at night when evocative roars reverberating through tent walls can only hint at the action. These facts do little to dampen our love for lions. They still top the list of desired sighting for most safari-goers, even among veterans.

**As we left Maggie, Nervous and Scarface,** news of a sighting near Shumba Camp crackled over the radio. There, we found Queen doing what lions do best – sleeping – while three cubs wrestled. Isaac explained that Queen is Maggie's mother and matriarch of Papyrus Pride. Two of Queen's other grown daughters, Killing Machine and Princess, round out the pride.

In the cubs' antics, one of the guests recognised parallels to her beloved pet cat's behaviour back in New York. As Queen awoke and raised her huge, golden, killer eyes to mine, the hairs on my neck stood on end. I felt the thrill of a much deeper familiarity, inherited from prehistoric hunter-gatherer ancestors. They faced these mighty predators with little but wits for security. Today, merely finding a lion's pawprint evokes a tantalising aura of wilderness, signalling that the dominion of man is not absolute. Do we love lions so much because they awaken a connection to our wilder past?

Of the three cubs pouncing on Queen's head, only the larger was hers. The other two were year-old grandcubs, Maggie's son and daughter. Isaac felt relief to find Queen taking care of the cubs. Seeing Maggie alone with Nervous and Scarface had worried him. This coalition only recently supplanted the previous pride males, so the cubs were in mortal danger. When new males take over a pride, they often kill their predecessors' offspring to make way for their own.

Lest we think Maggie was a deadbeat mom, abandoning her cubs to cavort with handsome brutes, Isaac explained pseudo-oestrus. Lionesses with cubs sometimes mate with new males even though pregnancy is impossible. Maggie's escapades with Nervous and Scarface were a life-or-death ruse that might save the cubs. If she could →





## PORTRAIT OF A PRIDE

At its core, the Papyrus Pride had six lions, all featured in this article. Lions each have a unique pattern of whisker spots, which remain unchanged throughout life. The reference row is the top complete row of spots. The identification spots form an incomplete row above. Additional methods to aid identification include mane length, the nose (if it is pink spotted, patchy or black), the ears and other unusual features.



SCARFACE



NERVOUS



MAGGIE



KILLING MACHINE



PRINCESS



QUEEN



SHORT TAIL (f)



BUSANI (m)



MANYANA (f)

**Below:** Maggie leaps a stream to show her male cub to a lechwe kill she had made the previous night; Scarface looking regal



## THE LION RECOVERY FUND

has granted US\$5.5-million to 59 projects across 18 countries since 2017 and is set to expand with a growing donor base including support from Disney's Protect the Pride campaign. Donations to the fund go 100 per cent to lion conservation projects. [LionRecoveryFund.org](http://LionRecoveryFund.org)

keep them hidden, she might confuse the coalition's genetic accounting and blunt their murderous instinct.

The next day, emotions were tense on Isaac's vehicle when we checked the spot where we'd left Queen and the cubs. Instead, we found all six adult members of Papyrus Pride engaged in an uneasy reunion. The three cubs were missing. Had something terrible happened?

**At the sighting, we met ecologist Ben Goodheart**, who monitors predators for the Zambian Carnivore Programme. As we discussed the recent dynamics in Papyrus Pride, one of the tourists asked the name of Maggie's male cub.

"We have a name, but it's not as interesting as yours," he said, grinning at Isaac. "The name is 959." Ben knows Maggie better as 265.

Scientists condemn assigning human names to animal research subjects. The practice courts bias and a tendency to anthropomorphise behaviour. Admittedly, I've scoffed at cutesy names for wild animals. Now, I recognise the power of names to benefit wildlife whose fate depends on the fickle whims of humanity. Through Isaac's eyes, I'd grown incredibly attached to the Busanga lions in a short time. Finding out what happened to those cubs became a prime concern. (For a similar effect, watch David Attenborough's powerful *Dynasties* series.)

Would Cecil's killing in Zimbabwe have captured the world's attention without a name? Would Elsa's *Born Free* story be so famous? Probably not. If names and stories can intensify passion for the animal kingdom's biggest star, imagine what they could do for other creatures. Even science is starting to come around. Research suggests that lab animals and livestock fare better when they're named. It's not that they appreciate the honour. Names help humans see animals as individuals and treat them better.

If everyone could have an experience with a guide like Isaac, getting to know the personalities and challenges of individual animals, would they form deeper connections to nature? Could it invite greater empathy for wildlife struggling to survive in a changing world? Might it inspire action?

### Lions urgently need empathy and action.

Since 1994's *The Lion King* release, the world has lost half its lions. It's a sobering statistic. While my generation grew a

quarter-century older, *hakuna matata*-ing into adulthood, lion populations plummeted to around 22,500 individuals. A century ago, ten times more lions roamed the continent. They've vanished from more than 90 per cent of their historic range.

Perhaps the lion's pride of place in our collective consciousness has allowed us to overlook the decline. Would it surprise you that drastically fewer lions survive in Africa than orangutans in Borneo? The number of polar bears in the Arctic is about on par with the number of lions remaining. The same goes for white rhinos under a continued onslaught of poaching. If these figures surprise you, you're not alone. The king of beast's reputation for power and ferocity masks its vulnerability.

Amy Dickman and Amy Hinks, WildCRU researchers at Oxford University, recently delineated 56 lion populations remaining across 25 lion range countries. Their assessment found few lion strongholds. Worryingly, nearly half of the populations are flirting with extinction, with 50 or fewer individuals.

"Lions are doing best in southern Africa and particularly badly in West and Central Africa, where very few remain," Dickman said. "Lions have declined fast in East Africa, but that region still remains the stronghold." Tanzania alone holds over a third of the world's remaining lions. In West and Central Africa, lions are barely hanging on. The West African subspecies is critically endangered, enduring in a few holdouts including the W-Arly-Pendjari Complex.

**As top predators, lions play an important ecological role.** They keep prey and competing predators in check and target the weak and sick, strengthening the gene pool. They even shape landscapes by influencing where herbivores eat and spread nutrients.

Lions are also a bellwether for healthy ecosystems. "With limited funds and resources, you study carnivores," explained Arnold Tshipa, Wilderness Safaris' ecologist. "If you find the carnivores are doing well, you can assume the prey is doing well. It's the umbrella concept."

On a continental scale, with lion range contracting and populations vanishing, the umbrella is collapsing. What else are we losing? A thriving ecosystem is more than just a pleasant place to visit and a base for tourism economies. Healthy ecosystems provide food and water, store carbon, cycle nutrients and

provide a host of other benefits for people.

"We're failing to translate the immense global value of this species meaningfully to a local level," said Dickman. "The vast majority of value is accrued internationally, while all the costs are borne locally, often by some of the poorest and most vulnerable communities in the world."

The challenges are many, and lions can be less than charming to people living with them. People kill lions to protect communities and livestock, which compete with lions for space. Habitat is disappearing. Bushmeat snaring depletes prey but also indiscriminately traps lions. Some poachers purposely target lions to sell body parts for traditional medicine in Asia.

"Lion conservation cannot be solved through ecology and conservation biology alone," Dickman said. "We need to consider how to deal with development, security and governance issues as well as environmental ones."

The Lion Recovery Fund wants to help lion numbers double by 2050. It's an ambitious goal for the granting initiative, created by the Wildlife Conservation Network and Leonardo DiCaprio →



**Top:** Ben Goodheart of the Zambia Carnivore Programme, prepares a lion collar **Above:** Guide Isaac Kalia doing what he does best



Foundation. But there is reason for optimism. Some 40 per cent of the current lion range overlaps with protected areas. Most are severely underfunded and lack resources to protect lions as well as they should. A research team led by Peter Lindsey, the fund's director, estimated that parks with lions fall US\$1 billion short on budget each year. With help, lions could bounce back, perhaps up to four times the current total in protected areas alone.

Scores of conservationists, researchers, non-profits, tourism operators and donors

Coalition. Members enlighten guests on lion conservation and contribute yearly to the Lion Recovery Fund. Importantly, half of their donations go to projects supporting recovery in areas beyond tourism hotspots. Coalition members – Singita, andBeyond, Ultimate Safaris, Dazzle Africa, Asilia and Wilderness Safaris – host guests in some of the best places on Earth to watch lions.

#### Lions roared through the night in Busanga.

We set off early towards where we'd heard the last pre-dawn call. The peculiar alarm

loving greetings among all three cats.

Maggie and the cub left Queen and headed towards where we'd seen the ominous gathering of adults. As she approached the spot, she started whining, then roaring. Her heart-rattling bellows became louder and more desperate. Calling for the missing cubs was dangerous. The males might hear from miles away and come investigate. With no response, the lone cub led his mother away – a cliff-hanger ending to our safari. A few weeks later and still ignorant of their fate, Isaac left for the seven-month flood that closes the camps.

Stories, like the Papyrus Pride saga, create connections that modern technology can indulge. Today, it's easy for travellers to maintain relationships with the people and wildlife they meet on safari. A wet-season guard sent Isaac a message, and he passed it along to me: the cubs are alive!

Eventually, the guides chose names – Busani and Short Tail for Maggie's cubs and Manyena for Queen's. Hopefully, they are rising stars in a recovery story for Africa's lions. 🐾

*Since 1994's The Lion King release, the world has lost half its lions. It's a sobering statistic.*

have united behind three goals:

- 1) Stop the loss of lions, prey and habitat;
- 2) Reduce the cost borne by people living with lions; and
- 3) Unlock the value of lions in cultural, economic and ecological terms.

"If we want lions to be conserved," explained Dickman, "the international community needs to do far more – and pay far more – to balance the equation and ensure that lions and other wildlife become a genuine benefit to the countries and communities who maintain them."

To ensure that ecotourism contributes, top safari operators have joined the Lionscape

whistles of puku antelope led us to Queen, traversing the plains alone. "When the Queen walks, everyone whistles," joked Isaac as we followed the lioness's mission.

Radio chatter alerted us to a sighting of Maggie with cubs. Hurray! We left Queen to intercept Maggie. But only her male cub followed behind. Uh oh.

Maggie showed her son to an oxbow in a channel where she'd killed a lechwe in the night. But vultures had found the leftovers first. Maggie bounded into a sprint, leapt the channel and scattered the scavengers. The cub, drenched and muddy after wading the channel, ate a few scraps. Queen arrived to

**Postscript** Shortly before going to print, we learned that Nervous has been killed and two males, 'the Nomads', have been seen in the territory. A new chapter in the story of the Papyrus Pride is set to begin.

## THE LAST LION STRONGOLDS

A 2018 assessment by the IUCN Cat Specialist Group estimates that 11 'Lion Conservation Units' have more than 500 lions, constituting some 70 per cent of the continental total. Lions are difficult to count – these guestimates come from a mix of surveys and expert opinion.

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| 1 3,000 Greater Selous (Tanzania)   | 6 1,400 Maasai Steppe, including Amboseli, Tsavo, Mkomazi and Manyara (Tanzania, Kenya) |
| 2 2,950 Serengeti-Mara (Tanzania, Kenya)  | 7 1,000 Kgalagadi, including Central Kalahari (Botswana)                                |
| 3 2,000 Greater Limpopo, including Kruger and Gonarezhou (South Africa, Zimbabwe, Mozambique) | 8 950 Niassa (Mozambique)   |
| 4 1,950 Ruaha-Rungwa-Katavi (Tanzania)  | 9 700 Hwange (Zimbabwe)   |
| 5 1,700 Okavango-Chobe (Botswana)   | 10 600 Etosha-Kunene (Namibia)  |
|   | 11 550 Luangwa Valley (Zambia)  |

