

# Lion Conservation

## Section 1

### History of lion conservation

Lion conservation in Africa has a rich and complex history, shaped by changing attitudes toward wildlife, habitat loss, and human-wildlife conflict.



#### Pre-1900:

- Lions were common across Africa, and held cultural significance to many cultural groups. Lions were occasionally hunted as part of tradition, for example Masai warriors would hunt a lion solo as a rite of passage.
- the 1880s saw the 'Scramble for Africa', where European countries raced to colonise as much of the continent as they could. For lions, this meant habitat lost to railroads, mining and other industries, as resources were extracted.

#### 1900s:

In this time, the impacts of European colonisation created rapid changes in Africa, socially, economically and environmentally.

- Safari, from the Swahili word for journey, was associated with adventure, exploration and big game hunting and became a popular pursuit for visiting Europeans.
- What is now known as Serengeti National Park was established in 1930 as a game reserve. Sport hunting was permitted until 1937, with hunting being banned entirely in 1940.
- Increasing sport hunting and poaching was resulting in reported declines in lion numbers.
- In 1956 the East African Wildlife Society (EAWLS) was founded by wildlife enthusiasts and focused on wildlife protection, providing anti-poaching support, and research for endangered species.
- In 1972 George Schaller published 'The Serengeti Lion: A Study of Predator-Prey Relations' based on three years of scientific research.
- In 1977 Kenya instigated a ban on trophy hunting, leading to wildlife photography safaris, and the beginnings of an eco-tourism industry.

**Ecotourism** is a type of tourism where tourists help to conserve and protect the places they visit. Ecotourism focuses on appreciating places for their beauty, with tour operators helping tourists create emotional connections to nature that will inspire them to protect those places.

- By 1980 lion numbers had dropped to an estimated 100,00, and by 1990 an estimated 50,000.
- In 1994, Disney's 'The Lion King' was released in cinemas, sparking a new cultural interest and connections with the animals of Africa.

**2000s:**

The 2000s saw an increase in ecotourism opportunities, scientific research into lions and the African ecosystems, and conservation efforts.

- In 2013 the first lions in Serengeti National Park were fitted with GPS collars to help researchers better track and understand their movements.
- The Lion Recovery Fund was established in 2017 with the goal to double the number of lions in the wild.
- In 2019 The Lion King was remade using photorealistic animation, and Disney teamed up with the Lion Recovery Fund to launch the 'Protect the Pride' conservation campaign.
- In 2024, Disney released 'Mufasa: The Lion King', once again using this platform to promote awareness and conservation for lion populations.



**Vocabulary**

**Bushmeat** - animals illegally hunted for their meat including zebras and antelope.

**Conservation** - protecting and restoring animal populations and their habitat.

**Ecotourism** - tourism that works to protect the environment

**GPS collar** - a 'global positioning system' collar, that sends its location to a satellite for tracking.

**Poaching** - illegal killing of animals, either in a protected zone or without a permit.

**Trophy hunting** - hunting for the sake of 'trophies' such as a lion skin or elephant tusks.

What did you discover? Write down the things you found interesting, or any questions you have in the space below.

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## Section 2

### Present and future challenges for lion conservation

Today, conservation efforts continue to use research to work towards a sustainable lion population.



#### Present challenges:

- **Habitat loss:** as human populations continue to grow, habitat is turned into cities, farmland, and industry.
- **Human-wildlife conflict:** where humans and lions live together, opportunities to interact increase. Livestock are easy prey for lions, and humans often work to keep large herbivores away from their crops reducing the available food for lions.
- **Illegal hunting(poaching):** both lions and their food continue to be hunted. Lions are hunted by big game hunters, and poachers for their body parts, and their food is illegally hunted for 'bushmeat.'

#### Future directions:

- **Social sustainability:** Conservation groups such as Conservation South Luangwa continue to work with communities, to make sure local people are educated about their wildlife and are prepared to be the lion guardians of the future. With education programs, people can understand the importance of protecting natural environments and wildlife, and how they can work together to make sure there is a sustainable future.
- **Environmental sustainability:** Communities and local organisations are working together to protect their local environment and wildlife. Governments in many countries across Africa are introducing new legislation and regulations to protect the environment. Climate change is also a growing concern, and many countries and organisations are working together to explore how we can tackle climate change on a global level.
- **Economic sustainability:** Currently, many African countries are largely dependant on mining as a source of income. Many families and communities are dependant on 'subsistence farming', where they grow enough food to feed their family, and a little extra to sell. Many conservation programs and research organisations are currently funded through grants and donations. These sources of income are not very sustainable! In the future, we will need to find new sources of income to make sure both people and wildlife are looked after.