



LION GUARDIANS QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER OCTOBER 2010

INTRODUCTION

Welcome to the first Lion Guardians Quarterly Newsletter. After starting the project in Mbirikani Group Ranch three years ago, and seeing it expand to Eselenkei and Olgulului Group Ranches, we thought it was about time we started a newsletter to update our donors and partners. The newsletter will cover interesting stories and updates on our lions, our Lion Guardians, our communities, and the Lion Guardians program. It is our sincere hope that you will enjoy reading our newsletter with exciting updates from the field.

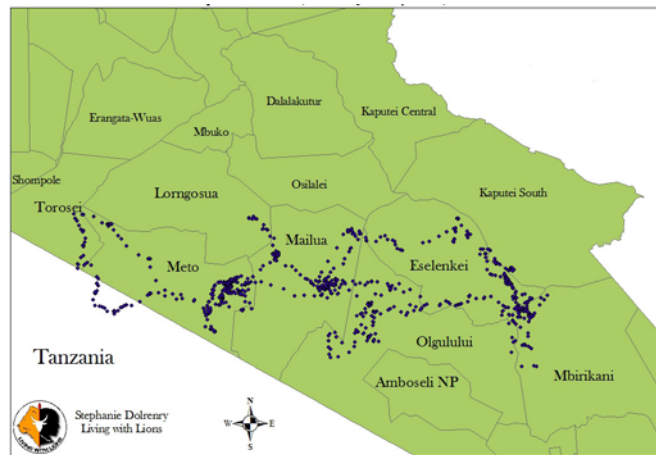


THE LIONS

The Mysterious Sikiria

All lions have their individual backgrounds and characteristics. But some of them have traits that really stand out! Take Sikiria, for example. This lion has continued to baffle our Lion Guardians team time and time again. He was collared in Eselenkei Group Ranch last year after a spree of livestock killing. He got his name (meaning Donkey) after killing more than seven donkeys, along with other livestock during that particular night of terror. After being collared, it seemed he had disappeared into thin air! We conducted ground and aerial searches for him but to no avail, and had almost given up hope, until one day when he resurfaced in Mbirikani Group Ranch, when he was least expected. Upon downloading his movements from his GPS collar we were left speechless.

As you can see from the map made by head biologist Stephanie Dolrenry, over 4 months he had covered an area of approximately 4000 km², going all the way to Magadi and even spending time in Tanzania!



The following day he went back to Selenkay Conservancy and stayed there for several months. He had us believe that he would stay put and carve out his territory there. However, a month ago, our Lion Guardians once again picked up his signal in Mbirikani. For about one week, he and his male companion Oyayai patrolled several zones in Mbirikani before pulling yet another disappearing act. They went all the way to the Chyulu Hills before returning to Mbirikani. For the past week, several members of the public in temporary settlements have reported a pair of male lions who have been roaring until the early hours of the morning. Sikiria's signal has been picked up several times by our Mbirikani Guardians. Clearly this lion and his companion continue to amaze everybody with their movement patterns that know no limits! Though he likes communal land, we are pleased to report that Sikiria has not killed any more livestock since he was collared.



Selenkay and Cubs Doing Well

Since the day when our team found male lions Kasaiyo, Lormanie and Ndelie together with the females Nemasi and Elikan on a zebra kill, things have never been the same again for a few of these individuals. Kasaiyo, Lormanie and Nemasi had always been one inseparable group, but this was a day like no other. Nemasi, who used to be an old friend of Ndelie, re-united with him for the day, while Kasaiyo befriended Elikan, leaving Lormanie to play the third wheel! When the trio of Kasaiyo, Lormanie and Nemasi headed back to their hideout the next day, Elikan and Ndelie remained together. Here is the lovely lioness Elikan.



Selenkay, who is usually Elikan's constant companion, was in the meantime looking after her three cubs and babysitting Elikan's one surviving cub. In anticipation of the murderous actions that Kasaiyo, Lormanie or Ndelie could potentially take on the cubs, she stayed away from the zebra party and moved back to her former territory. Selenkay left Elikan behind with the males, and I feared that although she is certainly motherly enough, she might not be a good enough hunter to find enough food for herself in addition to the cubs, and that the cubs might find it difficult to survive.

After one week with Ndelie, Elikan started on a mission to try and find Selenkay and the cubs. She looked for them all over but to no avail. It was therefore with a lot of satisfaction that we eventually found Selenkay with all four cubs feeding on a zebra she had killed that morning. She might be a good hunter after all, but we are still looking forward to the day when we find Selenkay and Elikan back together. For the moment it seems that Selenkay has adopted Elikan's cub!



Maringa's Collar

Male lion Maringa, who usually resides in Olgulului Group Ranch, had a special type of collar, which stores all the GPS data about the lion's movements on it, and is programmed to drop off the lion on a particular date. As the date of 'drop off' became closer, it was critical to monitor him closely so as to be able to retrieve the precious collar, which contained all the GPS data from his travels.

However, two weeks before the deadline, Maringa, along with his companion Pua, disappeared into thin air! There was no signal from his collar, and no tracks were reported. The search team looked for him day and night to no avail. We were staring failure in the face, and were desperate to find him so we could retrieve his all-important collar once it dropped off. The day before the deadline, we put in motion a search team that focused on one particular area called Osewan, where Maringa had been found numerous times in the past, and where he had last been seen. The search team was divided into three; one to track by car, one on motorbike and one on foot using traditional skills and knowledge of the area.



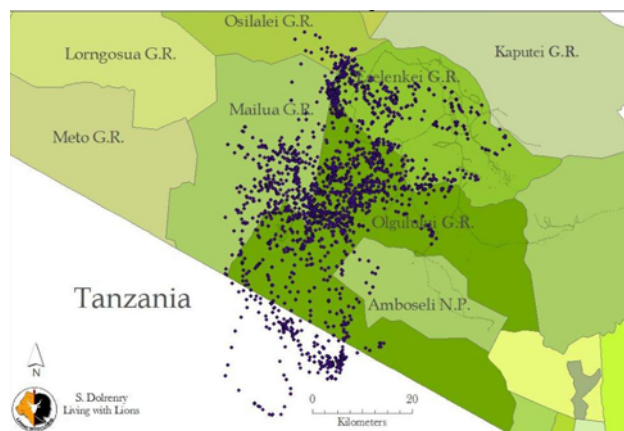
On the day that the collar was to come off, all teams were out very early in the morning in a desperate attempt to find the lion. And our hard work was

finally rewarded! Before long, Maringa's signal was picked up from a distance by the motorbike team. Coordination took centre stage and within no time all team members were notified. The three teams met and laid down a final strategy, excited that there was now hope in sight. We narrowed the signal down to a very thick area of bush that was almost impassable.

Within a few minutes of a precautionary approach, we came out in an open area of ground and suddenly we saw it! The collar was lying on the ground all by itself. The only thing that attested to Maringa's presence before we arrived was his unmistakable tracks on the ground. Filled with joy, excitement and a sense of satisfaction, our team picked up Maringa's collar, happy that the information it carried had not been lost. Here is the team with the collar!



We owe great thanks to Lion Guardian Sionik who has been monitoring Maringa and Pua diligently. He has also been instrumental in finding Nosioki's pride, a group that had been eluding our radar for months! Here is Stephanie Dolrenry's map of the data we downloaded from Maringa's collar. He moved a lot further than we had expected - well into Tanzania!



THE LION GUARDIANS

Measures of Effectiveness

For the past year the Lion Guardians have worked extremely hard despite overwhelming challenges brought by a devastating drought. The drought, which created an imbalance between plains game and carnivores, tested the Lion Guardians to the limit. But in collaboration with the other stakeholders within the ecosystem, notably Kenya Wildlife Service, Maasailand Preservation Trust and Selenkay Conservancy Game Scouts, our Guardians have helped stop over 42 lion hunts since the beginning of the year!

During the climax of the drought, they helped find over 4,800 of the 5,635 lost livestock reported to them, most of which would have been killed by carnivores had they not been found. This translates to an 85% success rate - an impressive figure by any standard! They also helped enforce the fences of over 300 bomas visited by carnivores as a way to increase community tolerance towards predators.

The Lion Guardian Games

In order to create a network for all the Lion Guardians across the ecosystem, we held the first ever Lion Guardian Games in July. Apart from providing them with an opportunity to compete against each other, the Games provided the Lion Guardians with the opportunity to form the bonds that hold colleagues together. As many of our lions traverse the zones of several Lion Guardians, they got to swap stories and observations about the same lions, and start vital communications that will help to monitor these lions in the future.



The Guardians competed in Spear Throwing Accuracy and Distance, Stick Throwing and Football. Prizes were awarded to the winners of the events as well as to those who had done well over the year in their work. It was a successful event that was praised not just by the Guardians themselves but also by the numerous onlookers who were drawn by the dancing and singing of the '*morans*' (warriors).

Depredation

Depredation has been high in the Oloilalei/Loolakirr stretch of the Osewan area of Eselenkei Group Ranch, and a number of different lions have been identified as livestock killers here. The community is very upset and our Lion Guardians have played a major role in stopping three successive lion hunts in Oloilalei, which were in retaliation for livestock killed.

We owe a lot of gratitude to Lion Guardians Samanya, Sitonik, Gisa and Melita for their good work here. A conflict resolution meeting held in Oloialei recognized them and praised their efforts for the submission of information leading to the verification of the livestock killed. In the name of conservation, we also extend our gratitude and appreciation to them as they endeavour to achieve our principal objective of stopping conflict before it happens!



New Lion Guardian Cub

Lion Guardian Mokoi from Mbirikani Group Ranch was blessed this week for his hard work. His wife gave birth to a beautiful bouncing baby girl, adding a new member to his immediate family - a family that is well known among the community for their generosity. The Lion Guardians team is always welcome at Mokoi's boma for cups of sweet chai after a hard day's work. Congratulations Mokoi!

THE COMMUNITY

Ituati Ceremony

A traditional blessing ceremony for the Ituati age-group was held at the end of September at the foot of the spectacular Mt. Kilimanjaro. This ceremony, which follows last year's circumcision ceremonies, marks the beginning of this age-set's participation in the institution of '*moranism*' or warriorhood. They will first enter the class of junior warriors, and once all the

transitional training and procedures are completed, the junior warriors will take over their roles as the defence unit of the Maasai community.



Morans from every corner of the constituency were present, and the ceremony was also attended by the area's political leaders, the potential aspiring candidates, the traditional and provincial administration chiefs as well as by the local Member of Parliament, the Hon. Katoo Ole Metito.

Several conservation organizations operating within the ecosystem also attended, including the Maasailand Preservation Trust and the Amboseli Trust for Elephants as well as the Lion Guardians team.

PROJECT DEVELOPMENTS

The Expansion into Southern Olgulului

After requests from Group Ranch officials, community leaders and other stakeholders in the Amboseli ecosystem, we are very proud to inform you that we have now expanded the project to Southern Olgulului. This area stretches along the Kenya-Tanzania border, South of Amboseli National Park, and is prone to human-wildlife conflict. In early 2010 at least 22 lions were speared or poisoned in the area. We could not have expanded the project to this area had it not been for our donors' immediate response to our urgent appeal for funds for the expansion earlier this year. We are most grateful for their support.

We have selected our Lion Guardians in the area in a completely transparent manner. We did this by requesting volunteers to report lions to us and show their potential as great Lion Guardians, so that we were able to choose the most hardworking and deserving morans for the roles, bypassing the politics that often gets in the way of hiring the best candidates. The new recruits have been properly trained and issued with the necessary equipment and have started working in their respective zones. We have already verified several lion reports from them, most of which were for lions that were unknown to us but are now being actively monitored.

We have also set up an operation base in the Southern Olgulului area. Kenya Wildlife Service and the Kenya Wildlife Trust are both working closely with us in this endeavour and we would like to thank them for their support, along with Panthera and Ker and Downey, who have also assisted us with the expansion. We would also like to thank Porini camp Amboseli and the Selenkay Conservancy for their continued support of the project, as well as OI Donyo Wuas and the Maasailand Preservation Trust.

With the support of the community, our donors and the other stakeholders within the Amboseli ecosystem, we are sure to overcome every challenge along the way!

Thank you for your support
Eric Ole Kesoi and the entire Lion Guardians Team



www.lionguardians.org
<http://lionguardians.wildlifedirect.org>