

Namibia Desert Lion Conservation



Vision

Namibia supports a unique population of desert-adapted lions that survive in the harsh Namib Desert. The “Desert” lion is a prominent feature in Namibia and is highly valued, both aesthetically and financially, by the growing tourism industry. Namibia has received international recognition (e.g. CITES) for successful conservation efforts, such as the communal conservancy program, that led to significant increases in wildlife numbers, especially in the arid areas. With the growing wildlife populations the conflict between lions and the local people has intensified as lions are killing livestock more regularly. In protection of their livestock, farmers often shoot, trap, or poison lions. These local communities bear the costs of living with lions, but do not share equally in the benefits from tourism, and they receive little assistance in managing conflicts.

Goals

- Collect baseline ecological data on the population dynamics, behaviour, and movements of lions.
- Monitor the key ecological & biological parameters of the desert lion population.
- Monitor the frequency & impact of conflicts between people and lions.
- Develop & implement human-lion conflict management plans at local community level.
- Develop & promote specialised lion eco-safaris and other forms of sustainable utilisation.
- Collaborate with Government, local communities, and NGO’s to further lion conservation.
- Make important information available to the world, through publication and the Internet.

Approach

Human-lion conflict is arguably the biggest threat to lions in Namibia, and elsewhere in Africa. There is need for proactive management of human-lion conflict to ensure the long-term conservation of the species. In 1998 I started an intensive research project on the desert lions, termed The Desert Lion Conservation project was started in 1998 with the aim to collect sound ecological data, address human-lion conflicts, and to develop a conservation strategy. Applied research and sound scientific data on lion movements and dispersal, and the ecological mechanisms that regulate the population are fundamental to this process. Lions are fitted with radio collars and are tracked and observed to record behaviour, movements, grouping patterns, reproduction and mortality. Lions are tracked using GPS and satellite Information and pictures obtained from www.desertlion.info – please support this worthy cause if you can

technology, a light aircraft (fitted with radio-tracking equipment) and by vehicle. Direct observations and monitoring lions in the field for extended periods are the primary means of collecting data. Lions over the age of two years are marked or radio collared, and individual records are kept of all lions in the population. Emphasis is placed on monitoring lions that disperse and occupy new habitats, and on those that live near local communities. Human-lion conflict is addressed by developing localised conflict management plans.

Conclusion

As a species, the lion is highly adaptive and resilient. Current research findings demonstrate that Desert lions can survive in extreme conditions. They do not need to drink water and feed on gemsboks, ostriches, and occasionally on seals. They breed rapidly under ideal conditions and are quick to expand into areas of suitable habitat. The value of the unique Desert lions to the Namibian tourism industry is of great significance. However, to ensure the long-term conservation of Desert lions, we need to monitor their population ecology and manage human-lion conflict.

Funding

A comprehensive summary of the funding requirements and annual running costs of the Desert Lion Conservation Project is available on www.desertlion.info

