
PREFACE

The lion is a beautiful animal, when seen at a distance.

—ZULU PROVERB

We carry within us the wonders we seek without us:
there is all Africa and her prodigies in us.

—SIR THOMAS BROWNE, *Religio Medici* (1643)

IN 2005 Canadian veterinary students travelling with me in Uganda were horrified to learn that villagers in Queen Elizabeth National Park had poisoned two lions. The lions had killed a cow, and there is nothing an African pastoralist values more highly than his cattle. What the students learned first-hand was that the killing was merely that latest skirmish in one of the longest running wars on the planet—the war between wild animals and humans. As one student put it, “That’s not quite the same as the nature films we see on the TV at home.”

There can hardly be a better example of the conflict between wildlife, on one hand, and livestock and humans, on the other, than the history of lion-human interactions. Jonathan Kingdon, whose magnificently

illustrated, seven-volume *East African Mammals* is the pre-eminent text on many species, including lions, has described our relationship with lions as being governed by “the fact that for centuries lions have been predators of, competitors with and above all a source of symbolism for the human race.” Each of these components of the relationship has created problems for the most charismatic of Africa’s big cats. But, there are two other elements to our interactions with the so-called “King of Beasts” that are relevant to this particular story of the human-livestock-wildlife triangle. First, lion parts have long been used in witchcraft and for a variety of traditional medical practices. Second, within the last fifteen years a new element in the conflict has arisen as domestic animal diseases crossing into wildlife populations has become more prevalent.

Two hundred years ago lions ranged over most of Africa, the only exceptions to their large territory being a belt across the two great deserts, the Sahara and the Namib, and a swath of tropical rain forest stretching from the coastal regions of what is now the Ivory Coast across through to the Congo Basin. There were also lions in the southern part of the Arabian Peninsula, Persia, and across much of northwestern India, almost as far east as Delhi. As with most other wild species, today their range is much reduced and dwindling. The only wild population outside Africa lives in the Gir Forest of India’s Gujarat state, where numbers are said to exceed three hundred, on a positive note up from the approximate twenty animals recorded a hundred years ago. More evidence of the former extent of lion presence, even beyond Africa and the Near East, was revealed when the Chauvet Cave in southeastern France was discovered in 1994. The cave is adorned with more stunning lion images than all other European art caves combined. It has been dated back about 35,000 years.

The symbolic significance of lions is pervasive. Indeed it is difficult to travel anywhere and not see the evidence of lions affecting the human imagination. The lion occurs everywhere in heraldry, notably for me perhaps as a Glasgow graduate, on Scotland’s flag. Lions have been the subjects of countless works of art—paintings and statues, tapestries and so on—from those giants in Trafalgar square “guarding” Nelson to the New York Public Library Lions that sit at the library’s entrance, from lions in Buddhist temples to those in ancient Egyptian works. Among



The gate posts of the children's garden in Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia, have this unusual piece of work in them.

the strangest images I have encountered involving lions is the chimera figure, a naked woman's body with lion's feet topped by a lion's head, which can be seen set into each of the gateposts of the children's garden in Mongolia's capital city, Ulaanbaatar. In Egyptian mythology there was also a lion-headed figure, the war goddess Sekhmet, who personified the fertilizing warmth of the sun and was later reduced in size to a cat. The ancient Babylonians also had a lion-headed deity, in this case an eagle named Imdugud. Still standing among the ruins of Babylon is a huge stone lion under whose feet lies the trampled figure of a man.

Kings, emperors and other leaders have been named for lions. Richard the Lion-Heart has been a hero for generations of schoolchildren in Britain and turns up at the end of the Hollywood version of the Robin Hood story. Who better to fill that cameo appearance than a bearded (maned?) Sean Connery? Emperor Hailie Selassie of Ethiopia was known as the Lion of Judah. Revered by some, the devil incarnate for others—Osama bin Laden's first name translates as "lion."

Lions have featured in most of the world's major religions. The Hindu god Vishnu appears in one of his avatars as a lion named Narasimha. The Old Testament prophet Daniel survived an ordeal in a lion's den.

The prophet Muhammad gave his first cousin and son-in-law Ali, the fourth Caliph of Islam, the title of Asadullah (Lion of God).

The first challenge for the Greek hero Heracles (Hercules to the Romans) was to slay the impossibly fierce and powerful Nemean lion, a competition immortalized (lionized?) by makers of ancient Greek vases and amphoras, Egyptian papyri, numerous mosaics, and by artists from the classical, Renaissance and Baroque eras, including works by Andrea Mantegna and Peter Paul Rubens. As Heracles won and wore the animal's hide as a cloak of immense power, it is small wonder then that so many of today's sports teams have the creature as a part of their name. They come particularly from most codes of football: rugby, the British Lions; soccer, the emblem of the English Premier League and the Indomitable Lions of Cameroon; Canadian football, the British Columbia Lions; and, in the American football code, the Detroit Lions and the Nittany Lions of Pennsylvania State University.

Then there is the most popular of British pub names: The Red Lion. It was James VI of Scotland (I of England) who, in 1603, when he assumed both crowns, ordered that the heraldic red lion of Scotland be displayed on all important buildings, including pubs. One of the more extraordinary manifestations of the royal lion obsession was recorded by John Hanning Speke, perhaps the first white man to see the source of the river Nile, who wrote somewhat scathingly about the gait of Mutesa, the Bugandan king, who walked on tip-toe in the belief that he was thus majestically representing the gait of the lion.

For ceremonial purposes several African tribes use lion headdresses or haloes imitating the mane. Tony Dyer records that in 1952, at the warrior's graduation ceremony of a Maasai clan in Kenya, twenty-two young men arrived, each wearing the mane of a male lion he had speared. It would be difficult to find a depiction of Maasai that lacked at least one image of warriors in a lion headdress, or *bushy*, as author, artist and lion-lover Joy Adamson appropriately called them.

From a twenty-first century perspective, the use of lions in Roman circuses can hardly be believed. In many Roman circuses, at least one hundred lions were slaughtered per single event. The zenith (or nadir) of such slaughter was probably the massacre of six hundred lions in 55 BCE in the games organized by General Pompey. No wonder lions

vanished from their former ranges in North Africa and on the northern shores of the Mediterranean. The reason for such slaughter could no doubt be attributed to both iconic and entertainment elements, as maned lions—the males—were much preferred in these shows. Perhaps the blood lust of the spectators and organizers of such events was a mere variation of that seen around the rings of the bull, dog and cock fighting shows that still occur today.

Now, with lion populations dwindling, in no small part because of humanity's love-hate relationship with them, lions are the key drawing cards in Africa's national parks. On one trip with friends to Kruger National Park in South Africa, we were struck by their obsessive counting of the creatures. By the end, our hosts had counted twenty-seven and considered the trip one of the best they had ever made, largely based upon this figure.



WHEN I WAS PLANNING THE STRUCTURE OF THIS BOOK, it seemed to me that the lion is symbolic of the entire gamut of wildlife species, not only in Africa, but worldwide. *The Trouble With Lions* might easily read *The Trouble With Rhinos*, or *Marmosets*, or possibly even the improbably named *Dromedary Jumping Slug* (threatened in Canada's British Columbia), not to mention the names of a host of other species. Of course a title such as *The Trouble with Jumping Slugs* or *Codfish* might not catch the potential reader's eye in quite the same way, and it would certainly not have excited a publisher. The type of trouble may differ between each of these species and humans, but it is undoubtedly there.

These days lions are principally considered trouble as livestock predators; but they are also *in* trouble, not only from humans defending their stock but also from massive declines in numbers of prey species and from newly emerged diseases. There are glimmers of hope that the trouble may not lead to the disappearance of the species in some areas, but overall numbers are way down and still declining.

The war humans are waging against lions shows no signs of stopping. As this book was being completed, a news item on the BBC website under

the headline “Lion killer is killed by hyenas” related how Mr. Moses Lekalau, a Samburu herder in the Maralal area northeast of Nairobi, had been attacked by a lion and had somehow managed to fight it off, telling doctors “that it took him half an hour to spear and bludgeon the lion to death.” Unfortunately he was subsequently attacked by a hyaena and died of blood loss, despite a seven-hour operation in Nairobi, where he had been airlifted.

I use the lion here as a symbol of the way that things have changed and are changing for wildlife in Africa, but this book is by no means limited to stories about these cats. As a wildlife vet, I have worked with numerous other species, and there are four chapters about my experiences with rhinos (perhaps appropriately enough, as one of my earliest medical cases required me to spend an hour evacuating a constipated rhino and then administering a four-gallon enema, with spectacular results). Other species whose stories I recount in the following pages include forest elephants, wild dogs, a variety of antelopes and other hoofed stock, several primates and a few species of bird. Most are in trouble because of humans, and some give people trouble in various ways that include attacks, crop damage and transmission of diseases, either to people or to their livestock.

A major theme of these accounts is the complicated relationship that exists between people, their livestock and the wildlife around them. In many ways this matrix defines the past, present and future of wildlife issues in Africa.

In this book I tell stories of working with wild animals and people over a forty-year span in Africa, from South Africa to Cameroon, and from early days in Kenya to recent activities in Uganda. All the stories are linked to my work as a wildlife vet and my fascination with the animal world. ✱