


A close-up photograph of a young lion cub on the left, looking down and reaching out with its right paw to touch a large, dark brown ostrich eggshell on the right. The eggshell is decorated with a white and orange graphic of a lion's head in profile. The background is a blurred natural setting with dry earth and sparse vegetation.

LION  
GUARDIANS  
STRATEGIC PLAN  
2019-2021

A woman with dark skin, wearing traditional beaded jewelry and a headband with a white square ornament, is shown in profile, gently touching the face of a brown cow. The cow is looking towards the woman. The background is a blurred outdoor setting with other cows and trees.

*“Lion Guardians brings harmonious coexistence between lions and livestock and strengthens it over time.”*

- Guardian Lipap

# INTRODUCTION

## LIONS ARE ON THE BRINK

Large iconic species are threatened across the globe and the African lion is no exception. Across the African continent, lions are disappearing at an unprecedented rate. Today, it is estimated that there are less than 20,000 free-roaming lions remaining whereas fifty years ago, there were estimated to be more than 100,000 lions. There are several factors that have contributed to this significant decline with retaliatory killing of lions being one of the main drivers. Every year conflicts between people and lions intensify due to the continuing depletion of wild prey, habitat, and deteriorating livestock management, further threatening the future survival of African lions.

## POCKETS OF HOPE

However, within this cycle of decline there are pockets of hope. At Lion Guardians, we have seen the significant impact that innovative and inclusive solutions can have on conservation efforts. Since 2007, we have trained and supported hundreds of local conservationists at different sites across the continent. Our approach to participatory conservation, built on the strong foundation of science and traditional knowledge, has allowed us to work closely with communities to build, adapt, and prove a conservation model that works. At our core site in southern Kenya, we are proud to help the local communities protect one of the continent's few free-roaming and growing lion populations found outside of any formally protected area. Our conservation model has helped to reduce lion killing by more than 90%; we have supported the recovery of the lion population in Amboseli where numbers have more than quadrupled in the last ten years. Additionally, among other successes, our model has facilitated the passage of lions between the genetically isolated Ngorongoro lion population and Serengeti region of Tanzania.

## CHANGE IS IN THE AIR

As we turn our gaze to what lies ahead, we see immense change on the horizon. The context that we found ourselves in when we first started more than a decade ago has shifted dramatically. We are facing uncertain times with cultural change that is affecting people's values towards wildlife and conservation; climate change that is affecting people's livelihoods and resilience; and lion behavioral changes that are intensifying conflict. Today, we have a lot more lions and more people. This has resulted in conflict occurring nearly every day. We now have a decade of experience and insight, lessons learned, and an effective and passionate team to help us confidently navigate the future.

## VISION 2019- 2021

Our vision for the next three years is bold. We want to see more local communities conserve lions and other challenging species while preserving cultures across broader areas. We want to see our conservation impacts amplified across more areas, countries and into the future. Our strategic plan 2019-2021 is focused on adapting and evolving to the rapidly changing world around us. We envision a world where people are enabled to live alongside wildlife through impactful community-driven conservation initiatives based on collaboration, science, and cultural values.

This short document provides an overview of our strategic focus over the next three years as we continue to evolve both as an organization and as a dedicated team, to meet the ever-growing challenges of community-based conservation. Our strategic plan invests in the expertise and professionalism of the Lion Guardians team and the energy, enthusiasm, and talent of the broader conservation community.

# LION GUARDIANS AMBOSELI

## FOCUS: Community Ownership of Conservation

- Support a viable lion population and meta-population (allowing for successful dispersal).
- Reduced lion killing (as a measure of tolerance).
- Increase the sense of ownership in community conservation. Metrics of ownership could include:
  - ◇ Perception and attitudes
  - ◇ Number of hunts and killings
  - ◇ Number of hunts that the community themselves stop
  - ◇ Successful transfer of the organization to local ownership
  - ◇ Maintain and improve trust with the community

# SCIENCE & RESEARCH

## FOCUS: Developing Rigorous and Impactful Conservation Solutions

- Do innovative science and research that strengthens conservation impact (applied research).
- Have good data, reliable conservation metrics, indicators, and adaptive management.
- Develop impactful solutions to proactively mitigate conflict to reduce the impacts and burden on the communities that are living with wildlife.

# KNOWLEDGE SHARING

## FOCUS: Catalyzing and Scaling Impactful Conservation

- Scaling of measurable conservation impact.
- Conserving lions and other wildlife across other sites.
- Increase knowledge sharing locally (within the ecosystem), nationally, and globally.
- Improve and adapt based on lessons learned and best practices as well as feedback from trainees.
- View through relevant cultural lens and adapt appropriately.
- Continue to embrace a mindset of abundance through sharing and disseminating knowledge openly and transparently.

# OUR IMPACT

## PROMOTING COEXISTENCE

A little over a decade ago, the lion population in the Amboseli-Tsavu ecosystem was dwindling rapidly. Persecuted by warriors as a rite of passage and in retaliation to livestock depredations, the threat of local extinction was imminent. But every challenge births an opportunity, and this one led to the formation of the Lion Guardians organization. Since 2007, through proactive conflict mitigation stewarded by local communities, Lion Guardians has reduced the negative impacts of living with lions and improved livelihoods, while conserving lions. Furthermore, through training, collaborating, and sharing knowledge, we have helped many other conservation organizations build their capabilities to promote coexistence. We have also invested in our team to ensure the sustainability of the organization well into the future.

## BUILDING TOLERANCE



- Overall, communities are more than 60% less likely to retaliate against lion depredations than when we started ten years ago, in the areas where Guardians and other conservation stakeholders work.
- 97,000 lost livestock have been recovered by Guardians, helping communities to avoid approximately \$14 million in potential losses.
- 2,700 bomas (livestock corrals) reinforced; 98% of these bomas reported no further incursions, resulting in decreased numbers of depredations occurring at bomas.
- 144 lost herders and children safely returned to their families.

## ENHANCING CAPABILITIES



- Engaged leadership coaches for Lion Guardians Amboseli senior managers, which led to team members from the local communities taking on new roles and responsibilities, as well as our Program Manager being accepted to University of Kent's Master of Science program, our accountant to the African Leadership University MBA program, and our Director of Strategy to the Conservation Leadership program at the University of Cambridge.
- Embarked on a bottom-up strategic planning and budgeting process where all team members were actively engaged and driving the processes.
- Obtained five scholarships for senior Kenyan staff to attend leadership training in Kenya, Namibia, and the US.

## CONSERVING LIONS



- We have supported the recovery of the lion population in the Amboseli-Tsavu ecosystem and beyond.
- 283 hunts stopped; approximately 65% of these in collaboration with Big Life and Kenya Wildlife Service.

> 200 lions currently monitored by 40+ Guardians, up from 5 Guardians monitoring 32 lions in 2007.

> 90% reduction in lion killing documented in the areas where we operate, and lion density increases from an average of 1.2 lions per 100 km<sup>2</sup> to more than 5 lions per 100 km<sup>2</sup>.

- 80% decrease in retaliatory lion hunts by affected community members after Lion Guardians mock-hunt interventions.
- 205 lions documented dispersing out of our areas with zero dispersers observed in 2004-2006; a sink population transformed into a source population.

## SCALING IMPACT



- 6 organizations in three African countries inspired and fostered by us and who are now running their own Lion Guardians-based projects.
- 16 additional sites where we have trained hundreds of individuals; all of whom are now actively conserving lions and helping their communities.
- 5 long-term national and international large-scale collaborations where Lion Guardians is a lead stakeholder providing scientific knowledge and expertise.

## IMPROVING LIVELIHOODS



- ~\$1,100,000 in direct economic benefits to the community; from 5 in 2007 to now more than 50 community members employed in the Amboseli-Tsavu ecosystem.
- ~10,000 community members assisted with emergency transport to medical care facilities, transport, and treatment of injured livestock and support of community-led initiatives.

# A CONSTANTLY CHANGING CONTEXT

The wildlife conservation space is continuously changing, and because we are both field and community-based, Lion Guardians also operates within several multi-faceted environments. The community lands where we work have been generally kept intact, allowing communities and wildlife to thrive. But now changes are looming. Rising human populations are exerting greater pressure on land and natural resources, cultural changes are threatening land tenure and traditional livelihood systems, and successful conservation efforts are creating intense competition for space between burgeoning wildlife populations and human interests.

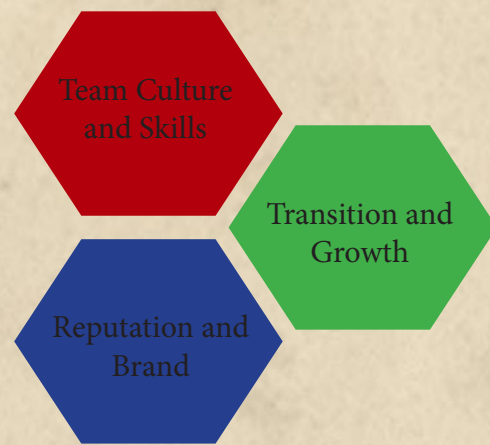
At the same time, our team has been growing – in numbers, capacity, and capability. From five Guardians and two scientists to over 40 Guardians supported by a senior management team of more than ten, our organization has matured to meet the challenges we face head-on.

This thriving system and the forces within it raise important strategic questions and create critical opportunities for Lion Guardians to leverage as we move into the next decade of our conservation efforts.

## OUR CONTEXT

## KEY STRATEGIC QUESTIONS

INTERNAL



- How do we know that our science is informing conservation for maximum impact?
- What support will the team require in order to drive towards Lion Guardians Amboseli being locally-run?
- How do we maintain our internal cultural identity (protecting what works while evolving to the changing context)?
- What is impacting our reputation (the technical brand and our position to influence)?
- How do we establish a fully digital Lion Guardians system with the highest levels of data integrity across all areas?

EXTERNAL



- What would the impact of land subdivision be on the lions and our organization?
- How can we best evolve to respond to cultural changes (e.g. changes in the methods of killing, expectations of benefits, livelihoods, decrease in bush-skills)?
- How can we proactively increase coexistence given the changing behavior of lions and people are leading to increased interactions and conflicts?





# OUR THEORY OF CHANGE

At the heart of Lion Guardians' work are conservation efforts that drive behavior change. At the ground level, our model enables local communities to actively participate in wildlife conservation by marrying traditional ecological knowledge with modern science. We strengthen the impact of our interventions, ideate, and test adaptations through the rigor of our science. We scale our impacts through a novel knowledge-sharing model that allows us to build capacity and capability within and beyond Africa.

## KEY INTERVENTIONS



### LION GUARDIANS AMBOSELI

Proactive conflict mitigation, participatory monitoring and social interventions based on cultural values married with modern science driven by local communities to build tolerance and help people live with lions and other wildlife.



### SCIENCE & RESEARCH

Adaptation, testing, analysis, measurement and innovation of tools and techniques to mitigate conflict, foster community conservation of large carnivores/conflict species.



### KNOWLEDGE SHARING

Codifying and sharing experiences, expertise, and lessons learned through customized coaching, training, and various collaborations with other conservation organizations and academia to build conservation capacity and scale impact.



## KEY OUTPUTS

SIGNIFICANT ECONOMIC COMMUNITY GAINS

ADAPTATIONS AND CHANGE

REDUCTION IN LION KILLING

TRAINED/COACHED INDIVIDUALS



## KEY IMPACTS

SENSE OF OWNERSHIP

INCREASED LION SURVIVAL

SYSTEMIC CHANGE

INCREASED TOLERANCE

DISPERSAL AND REPRODUCTION



## LONG TERM OUTCOME

SUSTAINABLE COEXISTENCE

# LION GUARDIANS AMBOSELI

## 1 Evolve and adapt our model to contextual changes to sustain our effectiveness in Amboseli

Lion Guardians Amboseli is where we developed our proven methodology for working with local communities to dramatically reduce lion killing. Today, the context is very different from our beginnings in 2007: there are now more than five times the lion population density, coexisting amongst rapid and complex human cultural changes including in land tenure and livelihoods. The need is for nearly constant innovation in order to stay relevant and effective within our core site while expanding our model and impacts beyond Amboseli and lions as threats to carnivores and other megafauna are changing rapidly across their remaining rangeland.

At Lion Guardians Amboseli, we have a strong and mature team who are able to read the pulse of change and quickly prototype and test new ideas in the field. We have the support of an engaged community that understands and has experienced first-hand the benefits and challenges of successful carnivore conservation. And lastly, we have over a decade of scientifically-rigorous data that allows us to develop new tools that address contextual changes and can be adapted to situations across the world.

### WHAT WE WILL DO

- Continue to minimize lion killing by stopping hunts and proactively mitigating conflict so as to maintain a stable lion population in Amboseli-Tsavo ecosystem (our decade and a half of monitoring is showing this to be approximately 4-6 lions/100 km<sup>2</sup>).
- Test and analyze the results of specific conflict mitigation techniques after implementation at our core site in Amboseli with the aim of adapting them to other sites across Africa.
- Problem Animal Control (PAC):
  - > Close monitoring and mitigation of chronic problem lions including mock hunts
  - > Broader community engagement through the now-accepted ecosystem-wide PAC protocols
- Continue to build our senior team to equip them with sufficient resources to confidently and competently manage conflict, the team, and the program (transition of leadership to a locally-run program and management team).
- Develop, test, and analyze adaptations to specific changes in context to remain culturally appropriate, relevant, and impactful. In particular, conduct field-based scientific research that explores the changing ecological and cultural contexts that most impact wildlife conservation effectiveness while concurrently testing and implementing specific conflict mitigation strategies and adaptations to the Lion Guardians model. These include:
  - > Lost livestock mitigation
  - > Skillset enhancement
  - > Land subdivision
  - > Gender roles
- Continue to cultivate strong and effective collaborative relationships with all relevant stakeholders to continue to assist communities in conserving lions while maintaining their cultural identity.





# SCIENCE AND RESEARCH

## 2 Maintain the quality and rigor of our science to inform, sustain, and amplify our conservation impacts

One of the key elements of our success to date has been our strong science-based approach and our subsequent ability to utilize applied research to advance conservation. This inherent core competency sets us apart from other conservation organizations or research groups, as it is generally difficult to marry the two disciplines and achieve high impact as we have done. Over the last three years, we have designed and started to deliver a strong and influential research agenda with practical implications that has allowed Lion Guardians to continue to test novel solutions on the ground and maintain or increase our impact. This has also created a platform for Lion Guardians to contribute to broader scientific and conservation discussions and help to build conservation capabilities in the academic arena.

Now, we want to harness the full potential of this strategic asset by upholding the quality and rigor of our science while investing in deeper utilization of our data to design and implement adapted solutions as we continue to generate more knowledge.

### WHAT WE WILL DO

- Continue to deliver on our research agenda by prioritizing key projects that are aligned with conservation needs on the ground and ensuring funding is in place. For example:
  - > Situational analysis of land subdivision
  - > Potential responses to changing lion behavior and cultural contexts
- Leverage our data and our processes and move Lion Guardians to becoming fully digital in order to improve efficiencies and response times.
- Perform a step-by-step process to identify gaps in documentation so the model can be fully documented and shared, reducing risk of inadequate implementation of model by other projects and organizations.
- Maintain Lion Identification Network of Collaborators (LINC) as a key tool for broad-scale conservation.
- Advance the field of impact measurement in conservation using a holistic approach. We will develop a framework and methodology for field-based conservation metrics that are meaningful and can drive effective change and impact.



# KNOWLEDGE SHARING

3

**Catalyze and scale our conservation successes by building the conservation capabilities of organizations and communities**

The Lion Guardians model's strength, sustainability, and innovation comes from its ability to incorporate indigenous culture and knowledge and develop intuitive methods that empower communities to invest in the protection of their lions as a livelihood strategy, now and for future generations. **To date, at our core site in the greater Amboseli-Tsavo ecosystem, our actions and collaborations have reduced the killing of lions by >90% and we have documented a quintupling of the lion population.**

This positive track record has resulted in Lion Guardians' services becoming increasingly in demand by other conservation organizations from around the world, including countries like Namibia, Rwanda, Zimbabwe, India, and Uganda. Some are interested in implementing Lion Guardians-type projects in their areas of operation, others are interested in learning about specific aspects of the model such as lion monitoring or community engagement in conservation.

Recognizing that while many conservation challenges are common across the world, solutions to them almost always remain localized, we have implemented an innovative knowledge sharing model through which impactful solutions can be shared, adapted, replicated and scaled up locally and globally. And in addition to helping scale our impacts, our knowledge sharing program provides an alternative avenue to source unrestricted funding that supports our other conservation efforts.

## WHAT WE WILL DO

- Amplify our sharing and development of conservation tools and best practices based on more than a decade of program management, research, and field-based community conservation programs at multiple sites.
- Continue to build a physical space and start developing an online repository of our knowledge, including lessons learned that will engage a wider variety of conservation organizations and individuals. These spaces will centralize and consolidate our knowledge, data, and information allowing for sharing on a global scale.
- Provide high-impact customized coaching and training services with a goal to continue scaling our efforts with organizations that work with communities and conflict-prone wildlife species.
- Assess quality of delivery to adapt and enhance services and processes for maximum conservation impact; document lessons learned, tools, and templates from each service to leverage for conservation benefit.
- Strengthen our team's ability to build capacity and coach through skill-set building.
- Build on our engagement in large-scale contributions where our knowledge is integral e.g., Kenya's National Lion Survey, Problem Animal Control Policy, PRIDE Conservation Alliance, and Women for the Environment: Africa.
- Maintain our relationships with academic partners to bridge theory and conservation practice.
- Work to enhance environmental stewardship at the local community level through appropriate forums (e.g., schools, conservation education workshops, community film).





# ORGANIZATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

## 4 Grow our team of leaders to independently run an effective, efficient, and nimble organization that can respond and adapt strategically to challenges and opportunities for long-term conservation impact

The success of Lion Guardians in achieving our vision lies in the hands of the team that we have built and the organization and financial structures that support it. We are a small closely-knit team of highly committed individuals and as we move to increase our impact, we need to ensure we do it in a sustainable manner for the team, the organization, and our financial health. Sustainability requires long term planning, both to facilitate diverse donor engagement and to enhance institutional capacity. At Lion Guardians, we are actively working on this to ensure that the future of the organization is secure. We have been honing the capabilities of our senior management team through expanding responsibilities, engaging leadership coaches, and customizing individual development plans. We have focused on developing systems, protocols, and processes that underpin the smooth functioning of the organization. And we have diversified our fundraising, created a knowledge sharing income stream and an operational reserve.

### WHAT WE WILL DO

#### Organization Sustainability

- Maintain a safe, happy, and healthy workplace by ensuring alignment of roles to capabilities, motivations and inspirations to achieve our conservation goals.
- Build on the efficient and standardized processes we developed specifically for administrative and management functions to minimize duplication of effort and optimize decision making.
- Align administrative and management functions to allow senior management to focus on key objectives
- Ensure all structural, legal, and compliance are in place.
- Continue to recruit the best-in-class to deliver effective on-the-ground conservation.
- Enhance our structured approach to managing risk and stakeholder engagement to proactively address any liabilities or opportunities as effectively as possible.

#### Financial Sustainability

- Maintain key income streams and revenues from existing donors to support our organizational sustainability; focus on high-impact donors and long-term commitments.
- Diversify fundraising activities to include senior team members taking on lead roles (e.g. donor safaris). This will involve the development of clear responsibilities for the senior management team in fundraising efforts.
- Continue to build our operational reserve to strengthen long-term financial viability and seek financial advice on how to best manage it for maximum benefit.
- Grow and diversify sources of funds including corporate partnerships, in-kind donations, etc.

#### Team Sustainability

- Continue to develop a robust and practical set of leadership and management capabilities (skills and tools).
- Proactively attract, support, and develop an internal leadership coach and head of wellbeing who will work with each senior management team member to develop capabilities, confidence, and skills for long-term sustainability of both the organization and individual team leaders.
- Enhance engagement of all staff in key strategic developments and decisions to deliver high-quality and effective conservation.
- Redefine roles to align with team members individual strengths and the organization's strategic vision and goals.
- Conduct a capabilities assessment and provide coaching and training to build key skill sets.
- Continue to work on our internal communications process to improve efficiency in organizational and operational decision-making.



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