

PAIRED TEXTS
texts that share a
theme or topic

AT

IN THE WILDS
OF AFRICA,
TWO KILLER
LIONS WERE
TERRORIZING AN
ARMY OF MEN.
WHAT MADE THESE
BEASTS CRAVE
HUMAN FLESH?

BY LAUREN TARSHIS



**AS YOU READ,
THINK ABOUT:**

How has the plight of lions
changed over time?

TACK OF THE MAN-EATERS

Colonel J. H. Patterson was dazzled when he first arrived in the African city of Mombasa in March of 1898. The city, in present-day Kenya, was enchanting. It was “fresh and green” and “bathed in brilliant sunshine,” Patterson wrote. Patterson was a British engineer who had come to Africa to complete an important job: the construction of the 660-mile-long Uganda Railroad.

He led a small army of workers—some 4,000 men—who cut a path through a punishing African desert and a snake-infested jungle. It was backbreaking work, and there were constant food and water shortages. But by the time they arrived in the Tsavo forest, it seemed that the worst was behind them. They welcomed the cooling breezes and gulped down the clear river water.

“The noise of hammers, sledges, drilling, and blasting echoed merrily through the district,” Patterson wrote in his journal.

Soon, however, another sound was echoing through the Tsavo forest: screams. Night after night, two male lions were stalking into the camp, dragging men away, and eating them. Over the next nine months, these lions would kill some 75 men. The lions behaved with such cunning that some of the workers could not believe they were animals. Rather, they thought the lions were evil spirits, devils in lion form.



COLONEL PATTERSON

GRUESOME ATTACK

The first hint of trouble was the disappearance of two workers in the middle of the night. Rumors swirled that two lions had stormed into a tent and dragged the men off into the darkness.

Patterson was skeptical. Lions occasionally



attacked humans, of course, but usually they preyed on the vulnerable—a woman gathering water, a lone hunter tramping through the forest. Patterson found it hard to believe that lions would barge into a bustling, crowded camp. Finding no lion prints or human remains, he concluded the men had probably been robbed and killed by other men in the camp.

But a few nights later, the quiet was again shattered by screams. A popular worker, an Indian man named Ungan Singh, was gone. This time there was no doubt about what had happened. Three of Singh's tentmates had witnessed the grisly attack: A lion had thrust its head through the open tent door and grabbed Singh. He wrapped his arms around the lion's head and shouted "*Choro!*" (Hindi for "Let go!"), struggling wildly as the lion heaved him out of the tent.

Patterson and another man followed a trail of fresh blood and paw prints into a thicket. There, they discovered what little remained of Singh's body. "It was the most gruesome sight I have ever seen," Patterson would say later.

He vowed to hunt the lions down. Each night, he stationed himself in the branches of a different tree, where he scanned the darkness for hours at a time. The lions seemed to be purposely avoiding him. They were not tempted by the live goats or donkey carcasses he left out as bait, preferring, it seemed, human flesh. The lions **eluded** Patterson, and continued feasting on workmen, always attacking in different areas of the camp. The workmen became so terrified that they refused to work. Hundreds fled. All construction on the railroad came to a halt.

FEAR AND SLEEPLESSNESS

Weeks went by. Months. Patterson nearly went mad from fear and sleeplessness, but he did not give up.



Patterson and his team were building a railroad bridge, shown at right as it looks today. Most of the workers (above) came from India.



One December night, Patterson was perched on a crude shooting platform. In the darkness he heard the snapping of a twig and the rustle of a large animal pushing through the brush.

"The man-eater," Patterson thought.

It soon became clear that the lion wasn't just

lurking in the bush. It was stalking Patterson. For hours, Patterson waited motionless as the lion circled below, growling, its eyes glistening in the darkness. Eventually, the lion **hunkered** directly beneath him. Patterson's platform was so flimsy that all the lion had to do was charge at the poles holding it up and Patterson would come toppling down.

He gathered his courage and took hold of his rifle. Steadying his shaking arms, he took aim and pulled the trigger. His shot exploded in the darkness, and was followed by a roar and sounds of violent thrashing. He could see the lion stagger into the bush.

And then, silence.

Patterson waited anxiously, convinced that the lion was still alive. As dawn broke, he followed a trail of blood. There before him was a crouched lion that seemed ready to pounce—but in fact, the lion was dead.

Workers rushed over to Patterson and lifted him into the air. They paraded him around, shouting with joy. Congratulations poured in from around the country. The celebration became even more **jubilant** nine days later, when Patterson managed to kill the second lion. The terror of the man-eaters had finally ended.

MODERN ANSWERS

For more than a century, the story of the man-eaters of Tsavo has captivated scientists. What made those two lions behave so ferociously? Most experts at the time agreed that the beasts were **rogues**—that their behavior was not typical of lions.

In 1924, Patterson sold the lions' skins to the Field Museum in Chicago for \$5,000. Over the past 15 years, scientists there have been studying the episode with particular intensity. They learned that one of the lions suffered from injuries to its teeth and jaws, which would have made hunting large animals more difficult. After a trip to the Tsavo forest, the scientists also learned that the lions there might be naturally more aggressive than other African lions. They kill people from surrounding villages every year.

Finally, by poring over historical records from 1898, the Field Museum scientists learned there was a drought in the area at the time Patterson was there. More importantly, there was an outbreak of a disease called rinderpest, which killed cattle as well as large wild animals like wildebeests and antelopes. This would have been a crisis for the lions, which preyed on

these animals for food.

All this information came together like pieces in a puzzle. It has enabled scientists to understand the terrifying events of 1898 more clearly. The lions of Tsavo, it is now believed, were not rogues. They were naturally aggressive animals suffering from a variety of problems—injuries, drought, and a shortage of prey. Perhaps the man-eaters weren't so savage after all. Perhaps they hunted the railroad workers for a simple reason: They were hungry.

Today, you can stand within a few feet of the man-eaters; they are on display at the Field Museum. When you stare into their majestic faces, it's easy to imagine the terror Patterson's men must have felt on those dark nights more than a century ago. But it's also clear that the events of 1898 were tragic not only for the lions' victims, but also for the lions. ●



Above: Patterson with one of the man-eaters he killed. Left: Today, the man-eaters of Tsavo are on display at the Field Museum in Chicago. Unlike most male lions, those native to Tsavo do not have manes.



Meet the Lion Whisperer

How one man is using his unusual bond with these fearsome creatures to save them from their most dangerous predator: us. **BY SUSAN ORLEAN**

One recent morning, Kevin Richardson hugged a lion, then turned to check his phone. The lion, a 400-pound male with paws the size of dinner plates, leaned against Richardson's shoulder. A few feet away, a lioness yawned and stretched. She swatted at Richardson's thigh. The male lion began gnawing on Richardson's head.

This was the scene unfolding on a grassy plain in a northeast corner of South Africa, where Richardson runs a sanctuary for lions and other animals born and raised in **captivity**. If you had been there, you might understand why so many people place bets on when Richardson will be eaten alive.

Human-Shaped Lion

It is clear, however, that Richardson's lions do not plan to eat him. They snuggle up to him, as lazy as house cats. They nap in a pile with him. They aren't tame, but they seem to have accepted him, as if he were an odd, furless, human-shaped lion. Richardson, a bright-eyed, energetic father of two young children, is famous for his unusual bond with wild cats. The most popular YouTube video of Richardson with his lions has been viewed more than 25 million times.

The first time I saw one of his videos, I was **transfixed**. After all, our instincts tell us not to cozy up with such dangerous animals. When someone defies that instinct, it seizes our attention like a

tightrope walker without a net.

Richardson, whose nickname is "the lion whisperer," discovered his love of big cats in an unexpected way. Just after college, he was working as a trainer in a gym. One of his clients, Rodney Fuhr, had recently bought a tourist attraction called Lion Park outside Johannesburg. He invited Richardson to come for a visit.

The visit changed Richardson's life forever.

The lions mesmerized him—especially those at Cub World, where visitors could hold and pet lion cubs. Richardson discovered he could relate to the lions in a way that no one else could. He played with the cubs as if he were another lion, tumbling and wrestling and

nuzzling. He got bitten and clawed and knocked over, but he felt the animals accepted him. He became most attached to two sets of cubs, Tau and Napoleon and Meg and Ami. Soon he was spending so much time at Lion Park that Fuhr gave him a job.

What Richardson did not understand was that petting farms like Cub World, while very popular, have a dark side.

Sad Fate

Once cubs are too big and strong to be cuddled, at around 6 months, they often graduate to the “lion walk,” where, for a fee, visitors can stroll beside them in the open. By the time lions are 2 years old, though, they are far too dangerous for such interactions. So very quickly, there are far more adult lions than there is room in a park.

These lions cannot be released into the wild; born and raised in captivity, they often cannot survive on their own. And even if they could, there is nowhere for them to go. South Africa’s wild lions are kept in national parks, where they are carefully monitored to make sure they have enough space to roam and food to hunt. Each park

has as many lions as it can handle.

So what happens to the lions from petting farms?

Some end up in zoos and circuses; others are sent to Asia, where their bones are used in folk medicine. Many are sold to lion breeders, where they are used to produce more cubs. The rest end up as trophies in what are known as “canned hunts,” in which lions are placed in fenced-in areas and sometimes **sedated** to make them easier targets. Up to 1,000 lions are killed in these types of hunts every year. In South Africa, such hunts bring in nearly \$100 million a year. The hunters come from all over the world, but most are from the United States.

At first, Richardson didn’t think about what became of the lions that had aged out of petting and

walking. Then one day, he learned that Meg and Ami had been sold to a breeding farm. Richardson raced to retrieve them and was shocked by what he saw: a vast sea of lionesses in overcrowded corrals.

Richardson realized he was part of a cycle that was dooming endless numbers of animals.

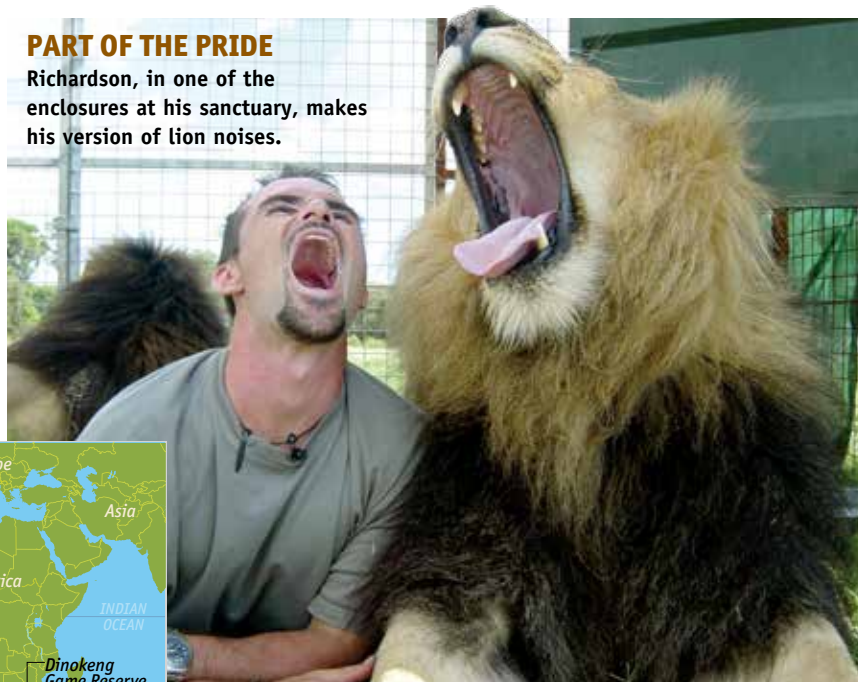
A Sanctuary

In 2005, and with Fuhr’s approval, Richardson created a sanctuary for 32 lions (including Meg and Ami and Tau and Napoleon), 15 hyenas, and four black leopards from Lion Park. The animals now live on farmland next to the Dinokeng Game Reserve—the largest wildlife preserve in the Johannesburg area. They live in simple, spacious enclosures so they can’t



PART OF THE PRIDE

Richardson, in one of the enclosures at his sanctuary, makes his version of lion noises.



JIM McMAHON/MAPMAN™ (MAP); WENN/NEWSCOM (RICHARDSON AND LION)

wander into Dinokeng, where they might mix with the wild lions. (In spite of their social nature, lions are very territorial. Fighting among rival **prides** is one of the leading causes of death.)

Richardson tries to make up for that by taking them out in the park frequently, letting them roam under his supervision. “In a way, I’m a glorified jailer,” he says. “But I try to give them the best quality of life they can possibly have.”

One morning, we took two lions, Gabby and Bobcat, for a walk. As soon as they saw Richardson’s truck, they crowded up to the fence, pacing and panting. The air pulsed with the tangy scent of their sweat.

“Hello, my boy,” Richardson said, ruffling Bobcat’s mane. Bobcat shifted just enough to allow Richardson room to sit. Gabby flung herself on Richardson, wrapping her massive front legs around his shoulders. He tussled with her for a moment. Then he checked an app on his phone to see where Dinokeng’s eight wild lions were. Each of the wild lions wears a radio collar that transmits its location; the lions show up as little red dots on a map.

After setting a course that

DWINDLING NUMBERS

The number of wild lions in Africa has dropped from 100,000 or more in the 1960s (some estimates are as high as 400,000) to perhaps 32,000 today. Lions need open territory, which has largely disappeared. Their former habitats have been developed for human use—for houses and businesses and farms and cattle ranches. In most of Africa, there are far more lions in captivity than in the wild.



avoided the wild lions, Richardson loaded Gabby and Bobcat into a trailer and we headed out. At a clearing, we rolled to a stop. Richardson climbed out and opened the trailer.

The lions jumped down, landing without a sound. I asked why they don’t just take off once they are loose in the park. “Probably because they know where they get food, and just out of habit,” Richardson said. Then he grinned and added, “I’d like to think it’s also because they love me.”

Gabby and Bobcat moved quickly, confidently, and for a moment it looked as if they were on their own, lording over the landscape. It was a beautiful illusion, because even if they ran off, they would soon come to the

fenced perimeter of the park. Those fences are not present just here in Dinokeng: All of South Africa’s wilderness areas, like many throughout Africa, are fenced in.

Keeping Wild Lions Wild

Today, Richardson’s goal is to keep wild lions wild. He believes that helping people appreciate lions will inspire them to support the protection of lions. He imagines a world in which humans do not interfere with wild animals at all, where cub petting and canned hunting do not exist. In such a world, lions would have enough space to be free, and places like his sanctuary wouldn’t be necessary. ●

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WRITING CONTEST

In “Attack of the Man-Eaters,” Lauren Tarshis writes that “the events of 1898 were tragic not only for the lions’ victims, but also for the lions.” What does she mean? What is tragic about the plight of lions today, and what can be done to help them? Send your response to **LION CONTEST**. Five winners will get *Scat* by Carl Hiaasen.

GET THIS
ACTIVITY
ONLINE

