

Impact Spotlight

Chyulu Hills REDD+ Project
Q3 2021



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LAND**

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The Simba Scouts: from Lion Hunters to Lion Guardians



The Maasai Wilderness Conservation Trust (MWCT) employs a dedicated team of 18 Maasai warriors (Moran), who day in and day out monitor GPS-collared lions and other wildlife species in the Chyulu Hills. Data collected is analyzed and used to gauge various aspects of different wildlife species like their eating habits and the prey selection of lions. The monitoring is also a very significant measure to mitigating human-wildlife conflict within the local Maasai communities.

The program started in 2006 with two Simba Scouts as a way to create an avenue for young Morans to have job opportunities and to instill a notion of the importance of protecting wildlife and conservation. The idea was to transform the traditional Maasai rite of passage of killing a lion to the noble act of being their guardians.





Meet the Simba Scouts

Name: David Kanai (Simba Scout coordinator)

Age: 27 years

Community: Maasai

"I was brought up in the local community which gave me a chance to interact with wildlife at a young age. Experiencing human wildlife conflict made me curious about wanting to come up with innovative ways that humans can coexist peacefully with wildlife. The job for me can best be described as opportunity and passion. Besides earning an income, I can save the lions while teaching Maasai morans from my community how to monitor the lions using new technology. Saving the lions has enabled us to earn an income through tourism that supports various programs that improve the livelihood of people in my community."

Name: Orkewua Ntanin

Age: 31 years

Community: Maasai

"I have been able to earn an income from guarding lions that has sustained me and my family. When the Maasai morans in my community used to kill lions, we lost so many of our king's men. Now we are conserving and not killing. We have seen so many benefits of conserving the lions rather than killing them in the name of bravery, my community has been able to benefit from the income by improving health care, education and livelihood. It has also improved the coexistence between humans and wildlife."

Name: Leyian Rimba

Age: 38 years

Community: Maasai

"I got a job even though I did not go to school, and the job has been able to pay school fees and feed and sustain my family. Protecting the lions is an assurance that I will be able to sustain my job. Even though I did not get an education, I can be taught the technology of monitoring the lions. Guarding the lions has also brought us an income that has been used to compensate livestock when they are preyed on by predators. We have been able to get bursaries for our kids to go to school. We also get good health services without having to travel long distances."



Key activities

The key activities of the Simba Scouts program involve lion monitoring, mitigation of human-wildlife conflicts, assisting in lion collaring operations, and recording and collecting data on other wildlife species.

Data from the lion monitoring provides a greater look into movement patterns, behavior and diet of specific groups, contributing to further lion research within the ecosystem. It also helps their scouts warn herders of areas to stay away from, mitigating potential human-wildlife conflict. This program has also provided employment to local community members.

Mitigating human-wildlife conflict within areas where communities share vast spaces with wildlife encourages better husbandry and coexistence between people and their surroundings. This creates trust between the project and the local community, which in turn creates space for conversation about other projects such as forest protection and land use management.



A typical day at work:

Every morning, David Kanai, the head of the Simba Scouts, goes into the office and checks the information system from the seven collared lions in the project area. He checks the system, sees where the lions have moved throughout the night and where they are that morning and informs the team of their current locations. Then a message is sent to the local community and herders via WhatsApp about which areas to stay clear of to avoid human-wildlife conflict.

He then dispatches a team of Simba Scouts to conduct patrols and to monitor wildlife sightings, focusing on locations that are in conflict areas, further investigating or talking directly with the community if there is any potential for retaliation.

Community engagement is an essential part of the program. Simba Scouts engage face to face with the local community and hold outreaches to update them on what is going on with the lions in the project area, why it's important to not retaliate, the benefits of conservation and to learn more about how the REDD+ project works.



Milestones

The program maintains accountability within the community on being active stewards of this landscape and contributors to its protection. The most important difference this program has made is that it has kept the lion population in the project area protected and thriving.

A circular inset image showing a close-up of a lioness's face, looking slightly to the left. The image is framed by a teal and green circular border.

✓ From 2007 – 2020 the project has seen an 83% decrease in retaliatory killing

✓ Since 2019, the project has seen a 28% increase in lion sightings

✓ The Moran who used to be lion hunters are now lion guardians

The most significant milestone has been the transformation from killing lions to being their protectors. In Maasai culture, it is a rite of passage for a Moran to kill a lion. This has changed when conservation came. Now you don't have to kill a lion to be called a Moran, you can earn that title by saving them.



Current news

In total, the Simba Scouts covered a total of 5,876km during Q3 2021.

On 6th August 2021, a pride of three lions (male and two lionesses) preyed on a bull, which resulted in an attempted lion hunt the following day. The Simba Scouts successfully mitigated the attempt.

On 28th August 2021, a sick lioness was spotted close to MWCT camp. The Simba Scout team closely monitored the lioness before and after she was treated to avoid any potential conflicts. The lioness recovered after a few days and joined her pride.





The future



The Simba Scout program is implementing cutting-edge cyber-technology tools to create landmark successes in research and protection. The Zoological Society of London (ZSL) chose MWCT to pilot the use of SMART (Spatial Monitoring and Reporting Tool), an innovative cyber-data collection and analysis platform in partnership with Google Earth Outreach. MWCT installed 12 solar powered Wi-Fi hotspots within different sectors, enabling real-time data collection and reducing fuel costs – making our data collecting carbon neutral.

MWCT seeks to continue to increase its efficiency and effectiveness, with the intention to potentially train other partners on SMART with the idea of replicating our model within the surrounding ecosystem. Continue with increased awareness and outreach to communities on the importance of protecting our natural resources/wildlife.

In the long term, the vision of success of the program includes: Better husbandry, zero retaliation attempts, and continued increase in lion population within the ecosystem.