

SAVING

Oxford University's Wildlife Conservation Research Unit (WildCRU) and the big cat group Panthera assembled field biologists, politicians, economists and donors at a unique Cecil Summit in September to explore ways of enabling Africans to live with lions. This is what they said.

DAVID MACDONALD

Director, WildCRU

“I think the millions of people captivated by the Cecil story were signalling to us not just that they cared about one lion that met an unhappy end, but that they valued lions in general. If I am right, I



Conservationists say there are 20,000 lions left in the wild but there is space for four times as many individuals if 1.2 million km² of the best available habitat were brought up to its full carrying capacity.



The percentage of the land area that is protected in Zambia, a significant lion range-state. It compares with 25 per cent in the whole of the EU, 14 per cent in the USA and 5 per cent in India.

CECIL

CONSERVATIONISTS BELIEVE THAT THE SURGE OF INTEREST IN BIG CAT CONSERVATION SPARKED BY THE KILLING OF CECIL THE LION LAST YEAR BY A TROPHY HUNTER COULD YET RESCUE THE SPECIES FROM OBLIVION. BY JAMES FAIR.

wonder if there could be an opportunity to break the mould of lion conservation, to transform the Cecil moment into the Cecil movement.

LUKE HUNTER

President, Panthera

“The attention on trophy-hunting is not surprising and it’s not irrelevant, but you could stop it tomorrow and you wouldn’t be doing anything to stop the decline in lions. The key issues are the bushmeat trade and human-lion conflict. Nevertheless, the sustainability of hunting lions is much harder to ensure than for a species such as impalas. Lions didn’t evolve with a high hunting

pressure – to do sustainable hunting of any top carnivore is difficult, especially when this is not the only reason that people are killing them. In the case of lions, they’re also killed by snares and by people who are aggrieved with them because they took one of their cows.

THOMAS KAPLAN

Philanthropist, and founder and chairman of Panthera

“When WildCRU went into Hwange, the number of permits being given for lions was more than the lions, and they showed the Government that it was unsustainable. They got a moratorium, and the [trophy-hunting] permits went from 60 to four. The fact that Cecil wasn’t killed years ago is a function of the work that WildCRU and Panthera have been doing. We do this with jaguars every day – from Mexico to Brazil, you have countries that have signed on to a jaguar corridor programme because nobody wants to lose those cats.

We got money from the [George W] Bush administration to encourage Central American unity through a jaguar corridor. If you plan proactively, the cats will find a way to survive.

JOE MBAIWA

Expert in tourism, University of Botswana

“The question is how much collaboration is taking place between the scientists who want to conserve lions and the communities living around the nature reserves? We should promote interaction between all the stakeholders and come up with a bottom-up approach in lion management, instead of only scientifically focused solutions that come from experts in universities. Local communities living in resource areas do have traditional knowledge of conservation, and you need to integrate it with the scientific knowledge, come up with a hybrid and then, with this hybrid, we can talk about lion conservation.

RORY STEWART

Minister, Department for International Development

“In Britain, we are committed to spending 0.7 per cent of our GDP on international development, about £12bn this year. We have to do this in a way that sustains support over the next 20–30 years, so we need to find projects that we can explain to the public in simple terms. My instinct is that saving 1.2 million km² of lion habitat in Africa would be one of those projects. Our International Development Act has a focus on eliminating poverty, so we’d have to see whether we could adjust the project to focus on that or find another mechanism for delivering it, and we’d have to work out how we would balance this spend with humanitarian commitments in [countries such as] Syria and Iraq. But if we could get a new US administration and EU that was genuinely committed to this, we have the resources in Britain and it is an issue that’s dear to people’s hearts. ▶



Lions impose significant costs on the communities who live with them, and some conservationists say these should be paid for by the international community – us, in other words.

Arjun Shah

695,983

The number of mentions of Cecil the lion in 125 different languages on Facebook, Twitter and YouTube over a three-month period after his death. There were also 12,000 stories on Cecil in traditional media on one single day.



The number of surviving sons and daughters Cecil the lion had left as of September 2016. He was fathering cubs probably into his 11th year, and his progeny have themselves produced 15 offspring between them.

LION CONSERVATION: THE BIG IDEA

OXFORD UNIVERSITY'S WILDLIFE CONSERVATION RESEARCH UNIT (WILDCRU)
SAYS RESOURCES MUST BE TARGETED WHERE THEY ARE MOST NEEDED.

WildCRU has identified six large areas each holding more than 1,000 lions. In total, there are 60 where lions are still found, but in most of these their survival is far from secure and half have fewer than 100 individuals. The protected areas where lions survive amount to 1.2 million km², an area nearly double the size of France. WildCRU believes that funding of up to \$2bn a year from international donors would ensure the continued survival of the species in those protected areas. "Save the 6 and secure the 60" is WildCRU's new slogan.

THE SIX AREAS WITH LION POPULATIONS ABOVE 1,000

1 Greater Serengeti, including Serengeti NP and Ngorongoro Conservation Area

2 Selous Game Reserve in southern Tanzania and Niassa National Reserve in northern Mozambique

3 South-eastern Zimbabwe, including Gonarezhou NP, north-eastern South Africa including Kruger NP and south-western Mozambique

4 South and central Botswana including Central Kalahari Game Reserve and northern

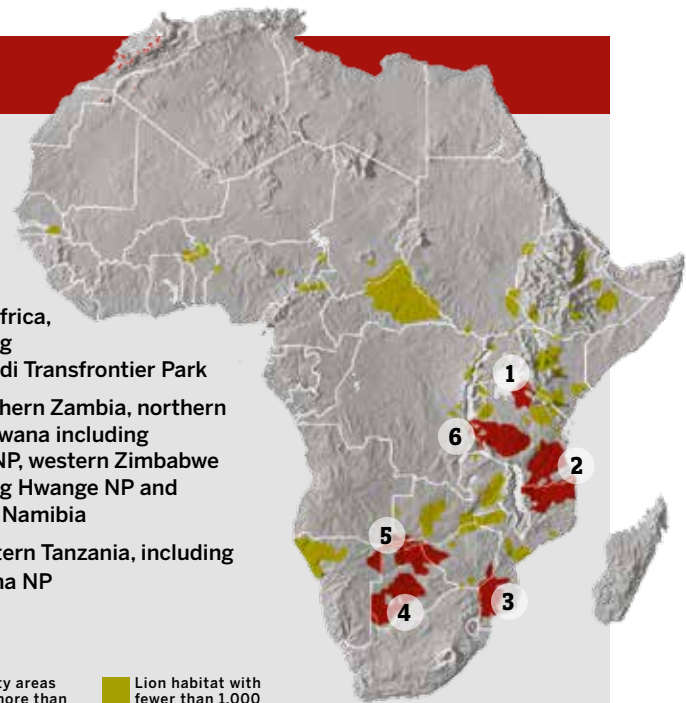
South Africa, including Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park

5 Southern Zambia, northern Botswana including Chobe NP, western Zimbabwe including Hwange NP and eastern Namibia

6 Western Tanzania, including Ruaha NP

KEY

Priority areas with more than 1,000 lions Lion habitat with fewer than 1,000 lions



JOHN KAMANGA

Director, South Rift Association of Land Owners

“The landscapes that we’re talking about saving for lions have been occupied by pastoralists for over 300 years, and traditionally people have lived there without depleting the numbers of lions a great deal. For some of the pastoralist communities, the areas called conservancies are also grass banks for their livestock. So we have to marry conservation ideology with the practices of pastoralist communities – if we can do that, we can continue to have our wildlife heritage as well as the spaces

pastoralists need for their livestock.

LOVEMORE SIBANDA

Community officer, Hwange Lion Project (WildCRU)

“The communities living around Hwange have their cows and donkeys – if they lose one to a lion, it’s like you waking up one morning and getting a message from your bank manager saying your account has been hacked. How would that make you feel?

KIRK HAMILTON

Visiting fellow, London School of Economics

“Lions in the wild are part of our global heritage, and in different ways and to different extents, we all benefit from having them. When we look at the costs of lion conservation, there is the management cost, there is the cost of predation and loss of human life, but the other issue is what we call an

opportunity cost of putting land under conservation – that land has other uses. The predation and opportunity costs are faced by the local community, so any fair solution must increase benefits for the African villagers who are directly affected. In some African countries, 3–6 per cent of their GDP derives from tourists who come to see wildlife, so conservation in Africa is also a development issue.

ACHIM STEINER

Economist and director of the Oxford Martin School

“Why should a nation care about keeping lions within its territory – they take up a lot of land and they kill cattle and people. They are a liability on many fronts that those watching Discovery or National Geographic have no sense of, and for some people, it’s a blessing to finally get rid of this threatening animal. But we can also create a very clear rationale for having lions. For the farmer in Botswana for whom lions cost a lot of money, there is another person living in the United States willing to pay up to \$2,000 for a night to sit next to that lion. If you can connect these two realities, you begin to have a source of economic benefit.

CRAIG PACKER

University of Minnesota

“An important thing to recognise about lion conservation is we’re not asking to initiate a project with a five-year term and a final write-up. We’re seeking to do something that will cost billions of dollars every year forever. Maybe some of this burden can be shifted to national governments as they develop their economies, but in the meantime these are some of the poorest countries in the world. We are fortunate that we are with lions where we were with tigers maybe 150 years ago – 1.2 million km² of lion habitat is an enormous estate that brings with it enormous expenses. But a lion is an umbrella as well as ambassador species. If we can conserve lions, we conserve all the trophic layers below them – the plants, the plant-eating animals, the other carnivores – and so we deliver natural capital benefits such as carbon sequestration, too. 🐾

➕ FIND OUT MORE

The open session of the Cecil Summit is available on YouTube: <http://bit.ly/2coZtnV>
Cecil Summit conclusions [www.wildcru.org/cecil-summit](http://wildcru.org/cecil-summit)

Can Cecil’s death at the hands of a trophy-hunter be used to benefit lions all over Africa?