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## January 2009 NEWSLETTER

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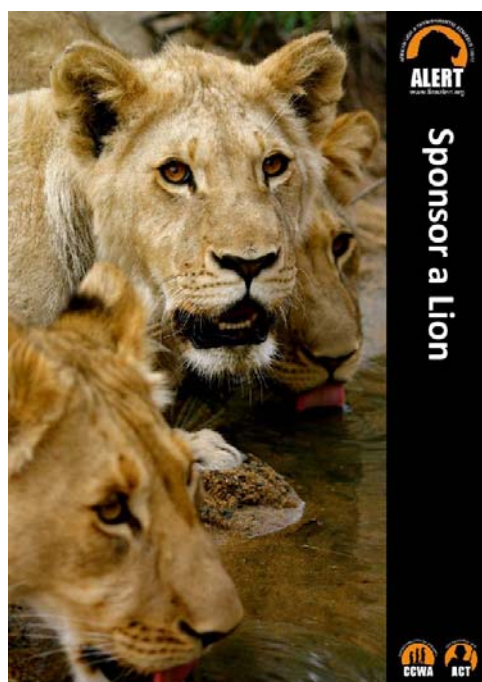
**Newsflash:** Luangwa makes his second kill taking a young impala. Swahili makes her first with a monitor lizard.



## ALERT Chief Operating Officer David Youldon takes a look back at a challenging year...

**In our first newsletter of 2008** I made the following statement... "I hope that like us, you have many plans for the year ahead and the desire to overcome all the challenges that may present themselves in order to meet those goals". Well 2008 turned out to be an extremely challenging year for Zimbabwe as I am sure everyone in the world who has watched the news or looked at a newspaper at any point will have seen, and yet we enter 2009 stronger than ever. We have a host of new conservation initiatives in place; we have expanded our operations into Zambia; and we have built upon the promise of 2007. All of this has only been possible thanks to the unwavering desire of everyone that works on our programs to strive towards achieving our aims, to conserve a wild Africa for future generations. But before we look at what is ahead of us in 2009, let's take a moment to look more closely at, and reflect upon some of the stories of the past year.

**January** saw the launch of our very popular Sponsor a Lion program. Appealing particularly to guests on our lion walks and to past voluntourists who have been fortunate enough to come into direct contact with the cubs, the program raises important funding towards the costs of securing and operating a release area. All of the money raised by the program this year went to stock our Dollar Block release site with a selection of game, which the pride very much enjoyed.



Sponsors receive a number of benefits for joining the program including:

- A high quality photograph of the sponsored lion;
- A complete biography of the sponsored lion;
- A monthly e-newsletter;
- Quarterly updates and photographs of the sponsored lion;
- The opportunity to help name any offspring of the sponsored lion.

Of course, the greatest benefit is in knowing that they are part of the ongoing solution to help save this, the most iconic of all African animals.

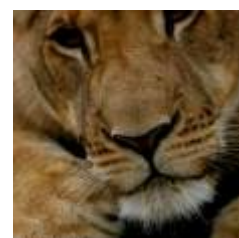
We have now produced a complete pdf (pictured left) to give potential sponsors the full information that they need in order to decide whether to join the program and how to go about it. For your copy please just send an email to us at [sponsor@lionalert.org](mailto:sponsor@lionalert.org) and we will be happy to send it out to you.

Existing sponsors will be pleased to hear that we are now able to offer a direct debit payment system which can be set up in a few moments online. This will make things a lot easier and we will be contacting all our current sponsors to give them the details very shortly.

Also in this month I travelled to the UK to host our first ever event outside of Africa. With our UK patron, Sir Ranulph Fiennes, giving a lecture on his many achievements, and a host of support from people like artists Guy Hammond and Paul Bussell donating their work towards a charity auction and from celebrities such as Hollywood actor Ralph Fiennes, the event was a huge success, attracting a large number of past voluntourists and many people looking to find out about the program, including the BBC's World Affairs Editor, John Simpson.

In **February** young Nandi made her first kill, taking a southern yellow billed-hornbill. Many of our cubs start their hunting career by taking birds.

We also announced that on 1<sup>st</sup> April 2008 Ashanti, Kenge and Phyre would be joined in stage two by three further females; Athena, Nala & Narnia. The six-strong pride proved themselves extremely capable hunters, but I'll come back to this later.





On Sunday 10<sup>th</sup> February the UK's Sunday Times newspaper printed an article entitled "*African Lion Encounters: A Bloody Con*". The article claimed that 59 lions had been sold by Antelope Park to big-game hunters and the canned hunting industry in South Africa. Further, claims of gross mistreatment of our animals were suggested and inaccurate comments about our release program were made in order to tarnish the good work of the Lion Rehabilitation & Release into the Wild Program. Our supporters rallied around us from far and wide to refute the article and we lodged a formal complaint with the Press Complaints Commission. Following an investigation during which we provided the Commission with substantial evidence that the claims made in the article were false, the paper was ordered to withdraw it and print a full retraction and apology.

I would like to thank, both personally, and on behalf of the Trust, all those who were steadfast in their support of our aims, objectives, methods and ethics during this difficult time.



In **March** Amghela made her first kill taking a much larger bird... an ostrich, but our research was showing that although females were achieving a 51% hunting success rate on *Night Encounters*, they were being solidly beaten by the boys who were achieving a 54% success rate.

By the end of the year though the girls had clawed themselves back, and indeed slightly passed the all male groups' hunting success.

Maybe the saddest moment of the year for everyone working on the program was when Amanzi sadly died. This young male had been beset by health problems, but was one of the most charismatic of all our lions, and was deeply loved by everyone who enjoyed walking with him. He will always stay in our hearts and in our memories but his legacy will live on in Nandi, who, having learnt from Amanzi in a way that we could never fully emulate, found the confidence to fully experience the wild around her and as such has a much higher chance of survival in stage two because of him.

Those of us out after dark on the 24<sup>th</sup> of the month were treated to one of the most impressive *Night Encounters* ever witnessed at Antelope Park. A herd of wildebeest were spotted and the four brothers of Lokothula, Langa, Landela and Ltalo instantly went into stalking mode. Landela took advantage of a road with long grass between him and the herd to conceal a full charge from 150 metres that intercepted the herd as it ran away from the other brothers who made a more direct and visible charge on a broad front.

As the herd cut towards the road Landela was lying in wait easily taking a sub-adult. Ltalo came within inches of taking down an adult before settling for sharing the young wildebeest with his three brothers.

These four males have proven to be superlative hunters and we all look forward to their successful release into the next stage of the program.



ALERT seeks funding and support from individuals and organizations, either through direct contact or through an approved agency, and is committed to the highest ethical standards in the way it solicits funds, keeps a record of donations and engages with donors or potential donors. Our Ethical Fundraising Policy was published this month to foster respectful and productive fundraising with our communities. If you would like to receive a copy of this important document please email us at [info@lionalert.org](mailto:info@lionalert.org).



**April** was an extremely busy and productive month. Msasa made her first kill - a banded mongoose; preliminary results from a number of ongoing research studies looking at the hunting behaviour of our stage one lions compared to wild lions was published in our monthly newsletter showing that our lions are not only doing well, but in many cases surpassing the hunting success rates of wild prides; and the ALERT information pack was rewritten.

With so many questions being fired at us it made sense to try and collect as much information about the program into one place. The image to the left shows you latest version of the information pack, ready for 2009. We will continue to keep it updated and available for download from our web page at [www.lionalert.org](http://www.lionalert.org).

The image on the cover of course is the stage two release pride at Dollar Block; Ashanti, Athena, Kenge, Nala, Narnia and Phyre enjoying each other's company following their release just before 11am on Sunday 13<sup>th</sup> April 2008. Early morning on day four, we found the pride about 300 metres from the southern boundary in mixed mopane and acacia woodland. They had killed a wildebeest; the first of many.



ALERT welcomed an independent researcher who was on secondment from the Zimbabwean Parks & Wildlife Management Authority and studying with the University of Zimbabwe. This study (in prep.) will give an independent review of our release protocols as well as looking at the role of captive lion breeding in lion conservation within Zimbabwe and the extent to which these lions withdraw from their human imprinting. The final aim of the study was to assist the Zimbabwean authorities create appropriate legislation within the country regarding captive lion breeding and the use of these animals; regulations that do not currently exist.

In **May** we started to feel the effects of the economic challenges facing us. But we were not deterred – we simply put our heads down and focussed on making sure that each of our programs was functioning effectively and looked at ways to make them more efficient in preparation for harder times ahead. The main focus was on the continuing story of the released pride at Dollar Block. The six-strong pride were making regular kills, every two or three days, and the group was bonding well, although we were seeing some split between the two sub-groups; those that had been released in 2007 and the three that joined them in 2008. But as time went on this apparent split became marginal. During our first release we saw the pride often split into different groups to explore their new territory before rejoining, and it appeared that the same was happening the second time around. Athena, Nala and Narnia would often go off together, but always returned to Ashanti and co., who spent most of their free time lounging around by a waterhole having had many more months to explore. Week after week the group spent more and more time together until the pride was together at least 90% of the time and fully self-sustaining.

On the 30<sup>th</sup> of May 2008 the Environmental Council of Zambia (ECZ) made their decision regarding the proposed ALERT program in the Dambwa Forest just outside Livingstone:

“The ECZ has since reviewed the Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) and based on the information provided by yourselves and from written and verbal statements by interested and affected parties and our site verification inspection findings, we have approved your project proposal.”

It has taken four years to work through the necessary legal processes to confirm the go-ahead to build a stage two and our first stage three release area within the Forest. This is a huge testament to the dedication of the ALERT team as we take each day as it comes, to be patient and follow due process, no matter how slow it can sometimes be.

In **June** we published the results from another independent study by a researcher from the Zimbabwe National University of Science and Technology. The study examined the activity patterns of three groups of captive lion cubs. Two groups (Antelope Park and Lion Encounter at Masuwe Lodge) are raised by humans as cub only prides and undergo behavioural enrichment, including daily walks, to prepare them for release into a wild area. The third group (Chipangali Wildlife Orphanage) consists of mother reared cubs with no behavioural enrichment. The results showed that the cubs within the ALERT program were displaying significantly more hunting instincts (including in play behaviour) compared to the mother reared cubs. Our cubs are also more active and alert. The study noted that the raising of cubs in the manner used within the ALERT program as a conservation technique receives a lot of criticism because there is no assurance that these cubs will develop normally. However, it concluded that the social upbringing being done at Antelope Park and Lion Encounter is aiding the cubs to develop characteristic hunting instincts; important behaviour in preparation for release.



Seventeen-month old Lozi and 18-month old Mana spotted some warthog disappearing down a burrow. Getting closer to investigate, the cubs got a shock when three warthog, a mother and two sub-adults, shot out of the den.

Without any hesitation, Lozi sprang after one of the younger animals, catching and killing it and initially refusing to share any of it with Mana.

This was Lozi's first kill. His brother, Luangwa, made his first kill, a mongoose, soon after, but both were topped by the third male in the litter, Lungile, who managed to bag himself a buffalo! Their sister, Lina, not to be left out, got herself on the back of an elephant, although of course it was far too big for her to bring down.

During August I met with David Barron, President of the ICCF, an organization that educates US policy makers on funding priorities for sound natural resource management. The meeting was highly productive and a road map was agreed for ALERT to develop its US fundraising capabilities. I also met with the Savannah Cheetah Foundation in Parys in South Africa. There are many crossovers between their program and what we at ALERT are trying to achieve. ALERT believes that we can be more effective by developing cooperative partnerships and has now formally established a forum for this. You can read more about our new partner later in this newsletter and we hope to announce a number of others in the near future.

Ben Deary, project manager for Antelope Park, was sponsored in **August** by CCWA to join a wildlife monitoring expedition in Zimbabwe's Matusadona National Park run by the Zambezi Society. The expedition lasted for five days and took the team through some rugged terrain, with the group carrying all their food, clothes and camping equipment along the way. Numerous water points were found and catalogued along with sightings of elephants, hyenas and a honey badger en-route - but unfortunately there was no sign of the black rhino they were hoping to see. At the end of the trip all the data collected was sent back to Harare for analysis by the Zambezi Society in order to determine areas of the park with good water supply and also any possible black rhino territories. This information will be used to coordinate anti-poaching patrols, as poaching in the park is a major problem.

Also this month we launched our Facilitated Research Program permitting students from around the world to come and conduct studies on various elements of our programs. Our first arrival was an MPhil student from Exeter University who had elected to expand on the work we had already started looking at character traits in lions as a predictor of the role that an individual will take within a pride. The study will take some years to complete, but the results will have far reaching benefits to our program and our understanding of the social complexities within a lion pride.

By **September** the challenges within Zimbabwe were acute. This demanded an even greater resolve to continue our work. This month we started a huge undertaking; to disease test every single lion within the program. Our consultant vets came to Antelope Park at the end of the month to commence the testing, dealing with the first 33 lions. Testing continued in December with a final round due to be completed in late January or early February.

Our consultant vets are also founders of the AWARE trust. CCWA assisted in funding their joining vital conservation work on Zimbabwe's hard-hit rhino population in Matopos National Park.

We also confirmed new release areas adjacent to Antelope Park. These new areas are large enough to build several release sites and work on this will commence in 2009. In partnership with the Zambian Wildlife Authority (ZAWA) we agreed a partnership to expand the Mosi-oa-Tunya National Park, bringing greater protection to this habitat.

In **October** we brought you news on our work so far this year in Hwange National Park and surrounding areas. This included elephant-human conflict mitigation, small carnivore research, our work with the Red Cross at a local community centre as well as our annual assistance in the 24-hour game counts held in the area. We are hoping that we will see significant expansion in our work in this Park during 2009.



Through discussion with our partners; the Zimbabwe Parks & Wildlife Management Authority, Environment Africa and the Victoria Falls Home Based Care Group, we initiated a number of new programs within the Zambezi and Victoria Falls National Parks. These include the eradication of invasive alien plant species (see a special section in this newsletter on how you can become involved in this work), a study on the predator populations within the ZNP and research on habitat selection by sable antelope.

We also formalized our conservation education program for the Victoria Falls area following a period of pilot schemes that were operated throughout 2008. As we head into 2009 we hope to expand the program to more areas.

The Best of ALERT screensaver was launched to a delighted support base. Many people have now downloaded the screensaver which offers over 160 stunning images from the lion program. To get your copy just click on this link.

<http://www.shareit.com/product.html?productid=300270336&sessionid=1029453588&random=be6d9f11c9b0d33e5d3fcf3d7aa580c4>





At the end of October Sir Ranulph Fiennes, patron of ALERT UK, and his family returned to Antelope Park to see how we have been getting on since they were last with us for the first release at Dollar Block in 2007. Ran was particularly excited to see Echo and Etosha again, following an attempt to film an interview during his last visit that was gate-crashed by a particularly playful Echo.

*"I am extremely proud to represent ALERT, not just because of its forward thinking work to help save the African lion, but because they are looking at the wider issues in conservation on the African continent; looking at the whole eco-system within which the lion lives; trying to find ways to develop management plans that will work in the long term and involving and empowering local communities every step of the way.*

*I am also refreshed by ALERT's willingness to work alongside other organizations in partnership, to share ideas and draw different people together to try and find the best solutions to face Africa's challenges"* Sir Ranulph Fiennes.

We continue to be grateful for the support that Ran and his wife, Louise, show to the program.

In **December** operations commenced at our new stage one location in Livingstone. Walking along the Zambezi River whilst around you young cubs play and practice hunting the local waterbuck and buffalo population is an absolute pleasure. The voluntourist program is also about to become operational and we are talking with ZAWA and the local community about a number of conservation and community development schemes that we hope to implement over the coming year including a partnership to extend and provide more protection for the Mosi-oa Tunya National Park.

It has been a very bumpy year, but also an incredibly successful one. ALERT has acquitted itself well in making significant progress on all its priorities and we can only continue to grow in the following year. ALERT is particularly grateful for the secure partnerships it has with our commercial partners and in particular African Encounter. Without these partnerships and relying on donations alone ALERT would have struggled severely to achieve what it has, but thanks to the way that our relationships with other organizations have been structured, ALERT is able to rely on our partners during these difficult times.

And so we look forward to 2009. As each month passes the work that ALERT is doing is becoming better appreciated within the conservation, academic and funding communities. Our focus for 2009 is to build on the foundations put in place during 2008 and we hope to achieve the following by the end of 2009:

- to complete the infrastructure for at least two stage two release areas and start work on a third;
- to commence building on our first stage three release area and confirm the land for a second;
- to confirm the location of our first stage four release area following an impact study to ensure the site is appropriate;
- to establish a greater presence within Victoria Falls and engage local communities in local conservation issues to a greater extent;
- to expand our operations within Hwange National Park;
- to develop our new Livingstone project to the benefit of local communities through employment, empowerment schemes and education;
- and to finally go live with our new website which is now in production.

There are many other developments which I have passed over from 2008 due to space in this letter, and many more projects we hope to develop in 2009, but I leave you with our grateful thanks to all of you who have continued to support our programs over the past year. All of us at ALERT look forward to an even more successful 2009, in partnership.

Kindest regards and thank you,

**David Youldon**  
ALERT Chief Operating Officer





## The unstoppable hunting machine that is Etosha

trumped all past efforts with an incredible zebra kill on the 8<sup>th</sup> December.

On an early walk with brother **Echo**, the 20-month old cubs began by stalking tsessebe. A nearby herd of zebra spotted the pair and began to flee.

Unfortunately for the zebra this attracted the 2Es' attentions and the brothers immediately gave chase.

Navigating a deep ditch meant that the zebra had to slow their pace, and this is when Etosha made his move – launching himself at a juvenile estimated to be between 18-months and two-years old; latching his jaws firmly around his prey's throat and dragging it to the ground.

Etosha is still very young at 20 months – in the wild, lion cubs are reliant on their



Their young jaws struggle to make a clean kill

mothers until two-years old – and his jaws are still not fully formed. As such, his technique to dispatch prey quickly is still being developed.

Echo didn't even see his brother make the catch and continued chasing the rest of the herd for several more minutes.

Finally giving up he returned to find Etosha with his catch and both cubs settled in to enjoy zebra for breakfast.

This is only the second time in the history of stage one that a lion has managed to successfully take down a zebra. Fourteen months to the day before Etosha's effort the first zebra kill was made by Phoenix, assisted by his brother, Penduka. They were two-and-a half years-old at the time; considerably older than Etosha.

Also, Phoenix made his kill with the added benefit of the cover of darkness on their penultimate *Night Encounter*. This only makes Etosha's kill that much more impressive; taking place as it did in broad daylight.

This was Etosha's third kill to date having caught a baboon in September whilst still at our stage one operation in Victoria Falls, followed by a monitor lizard just a few days after he and his brother were returned to Antelope Park.

Zebras are large animals with a kick that can shatter bones. They live in herds under the charge of an aggressive stallion and many a young cub has been seen off by these '*gentlemen of the Bush*' as they are known, due to their fearless defence of their females and young.



Mana faces off against the herd stallion in June 08

What we have observed over the years is that zebra herds at Antelope Park tend to stand their ground against the cubs rather than flee, maybe as the cubs are too small to be seen as much of a threat. Further, the stallion will often charge the young cubs and we have seen some lions become very wary of, but no less interested, in this species.

Both Phoenix and Etosha spent most of their stage one careers in Vic Falls where zebra are almost never encountered. They have not therefore learnt to fear being charged by an angry stallion. Maybe the early run-ins with the stallions that the AP cubs have actually has an effect on their hunting development?



**Located in the far west of Zimbabwe** is a unique eco-system of only 23km<sup>2</sup> comprising a riverine jungle with ilala palms, ferns, figs, liana vines and mahogany known as the **Victoria Falls National Park**; a world heritage site, the Park is home to a relic of a rainforest that closely resembles that of a true equatorial rainforest; the vegetation being supported by the seasonal spray of water from the Falls themselves.

But these perfect conditions have also supported the growth of invasive alien plant species (IAPS) over at least the last 30 years, the most prevalent of which is *lantana camara*; the “wicked weed”. IAPS are invading the Park and replacing native vegetation that will eventually result in the local extinction of these species.

**Our hope is to completely eradicate IAPS in the Victoria Falls National Park area whilst providing local employment and enhancing tourist facilities to better educate visitors to the Park about this unique site to encourage their support.**

#### **How Can You Help?**

CCWA has formed a partnership to enhance direct management intervention to undertake mechanical control of the weeds, implement a biological monitoring program and enhance the Park’s education centre. We invite you to become a **“Friend of Victoria Falls NP”** and help support this vital work.

For an annual donation you can sponsor a part of the 2,300 hectare Victoria Falls National Park. For doing so you will receive the following benefits:

- A welcome pack by email giving you more information about this spectacular location and its wildlife;
- A selection of photographs from the area displaying the Park’s natural beauty at its fullest;
- An annual update on the progress of the project with special features on the fauna and flora that can be found in the Park;
- The knowledge that you are part of the ongoing solution to help save this unique eco-system.

#### **Costs to sponsor the Victoria Falls National Park**

<b>Area sponsored</b>	<b>Annual donation</b>
1 hectare	£25.00
5 hectares	£100.00
10 hectares	£200.00
50 hectares	£1,000.00
100 hectares	£2,000.00

**For your chance to make a difference** simply email [sponsor@lionalert.org](mailto:sponsor@lionalert.org) to receive your supporters pack or download it at [www.lionalert.org](http://www.lionalert.org).



#### **In partnership with:**

Zimbabwe Parks & Wildlife Management Authority & Environment Africa





Professor Peter Mundy joins ALERT as our scientific officer...

**Until now** ALERT has relied on many expert individuals, such as Dr. Pieter Kat and Dr. Don Heath, to assist us with regards the scientific aspects of our program on an unpaid consultancy basis. We thank them for their support and advice so far and are extremely happy to be continuing to work with them as our programs progress. However, we also felt it was time to appoint a permanent scientific officer to work with our consultants and oversee the development and implementation of our various research efforts, both on lions within the Lion Rehabilitation & Release into the Wild Program as well as for our other conservation initiatives.

We are therefore proud to announce that Professor Peter Mundy of Zimbabwe's National University of Science & Technology (NUST) has agreed to accept this post.

Peter attained his PhD from the University of Zimbabwe having previously studied at King's College London. He was scientific officer for the Endangered Wildlife Trust in Zimbabwe from 1983 to 2003 and in South Africa from 1983 to 1984. He worked as Principal Ecologist (Ornithology) with the Zimbabwean Department of National Parks and Wildlife Management from 1984 to 2003, joining the National University of Science and Technology in June of 2003 where he is acting chairman of the faculty of Forest Resources and Wildlife Management.

His many publications include five books as the author or co-author such as 'The Vultures of Africa' (1992) and 'Francois Levillant and the Birds of Africa' (2004). He is an assistant editor of the 'Vulture News' and 'Honeyguide' journals, and an editor of the 'Zimbabwe Journal of Science and Technology'. He is also winner of the 1994 Rutherford Conservation Award and co-founder of the Biodiversity Foundation for Africa.

In addition to his work on our existing programs Professor Mundy will also be providing assistance to students that choose to join us on our Facilitated Research Program which provides opportunities for students in relevant fields to join any of our programs to conduct their own studies and provide independent reviews of our projects.

We are honoured that Professor Mundy has accepted this position and we believe that he, alongside Dr. Kat, Dr. Heath, our research technicians in the field and our research partners will bring significant benefit to our programs and to the future of Africa.



**First kill for Bhubesi...**

**Eight-and-a-half-month old Bhubesi** is proving to be no slouch in the hunting department.

Back in September, aged just five months, she caught a monitor lizard. At the time her teeth and jaws just weren't strong enough to pierce the lizard's thick skin. But a couple of months has made all the difference. Returning from one morning walk with her brother, **Batoka**, the cubs came across a monitor lizard.

Without any hesitation she pounced on it, and this time wasted no time in finishing off the reptile.



## Dr Keith Dutlow returns to continue disease testing on Antelope Park's lions...

**Back in September** 33 lions at Antelope Park were given vaccine updates and tested for FIV by our consultant vets. A random sample was also tested for tuberculosis. Early in December, Dr Keith Dutlow returned to lead testing on the remainder of the Park's lions – mainly the walking cubs and *Night Encounter* lions.

As before, the program's voluntourists assisted in monitoring the lions' breathing while they were unconscious and helped to keep the medical records updated and in order.

The extensive operation which took place over five days also gave ALERT the chance to extend one of our research programs. Spoor measurements have been taken from the walking cubs on a monthly basis since June with the intention that the data collected will be used to bring greater accuracy in aging wild lions, even in unseen populations, through their spoor alone. This will be of particular use to us as our study on wild lion populations within the Zambezi National Park kicks off this month.

With the walking cubs retiring at around 18-months of age, taking measurements from the older lions had not been possible, until now.

As the lions had to be sedated while blood samples were taken, this afforded ALERT's research technicians the opportunity to measure pad lengths and widths from a range of ages. In addition, measurements were also taken on the lions' upper and lower canines, their claws, total body length, tail length and their shoulder height.

The visit also coincided with the return of the stage two Dollar Block pride to Antelope Park, meaning that they too could be re-tested and vaccinated, having last been done so prior to their release. More details of their return can be found on the following pages of this newsletter.

The final round of tests on the lions at Antelope Park will be completed later this month or early next.



## The stage two pride of Ashanti, Athena, Kenge, Nala, Narnia

and **Phyre**, returned to Antelope Park on the 3<sup>rd</sup> of December 2008, and were placed in a holding enclosure near to land recently agreed as an area for several new release sites. Maxwell and Luke of course were returned to Antelope Park last year to join our breeding stock.

The decision to bring the pride back to Gweru was made in September when the economic situation in Zimbabwe began to take its toll on the effectiveness with which we could operate the site and the research program.

Land adjacent to Antelope Park had been agreed with the local council as being ideal for new release areas. The pride was moved in to holding enclosures at Dollar Block while the main release site was deconstructed in a matter of weeks. Simultaneously the holding enclosure was built at the Park.

A couple of days before the females' return **Mickey, Milo** and **Puma**, three males all aged six-years old, were placed in an enclosure next to the returning pride's. Our intention is to conduct studies into which of the three males the pride form the strongest bond with; some preliminary results from which you can read about on the following page.

The rainy season will play a significant factor in the length of time it will take to build the new site, but once a clear favourite among the males is confirmed and the site is ready and stocked with prey the seven-strong pride will be re-released.

The new site's location will have many advantages; greater ease of access being the most obvious. Communication between Dollar Block and the Park was always problematic, which will no longer be an issue, and with Antelope Park having its own vehicle workshop the research vehicles can be better maintained.

While the pride's progress has had to be temporarily halted, Dollar Block can only be viewed as a success. During their time in stage two the pride lived independently for many months; sustaining themselves on the kills they made which included an eland three days after first being released, wildebeest, impala, warthog and of course an adult giraffe which Ashanti, Kenge and Phyre brought down and killed over Christmas 2007. Any way this part of the program is viewed, it has been a remarkable achievement for the lions from the captive born cubs that they were. Our careful and dedicated programs have made this a reality.

And as the lions have learnt, so have we. The research conducted at Dollar Block has taught us much about lion behaviour, and in particular the complexities of lion sociality – the results from which have led us to review our release protocols and instigate a study among the stage one cubs in an effort to group future release prides with the best chances of social cohesion.

Our research from this time not only shows that the pride became self-sustaining, but also that it was socially stable, the criteria a stage two pride must meet to advance onto stage three. Now all they have to do is learn to live with a male!



*From top left: Dollar Block Manager, Roy Steffan, and AP Lions' Manager, Cara Watts, travel up with the carrying cages; the sedatives are prepared; the lions are transferred from the holding enclosure to the cages; Dr Keith Dutlow and Cara find time to relax for a minute before bringing the lions back to the Park; and unloading the pride in Gweru*

## Battle of the boys: *a feline blind date...*



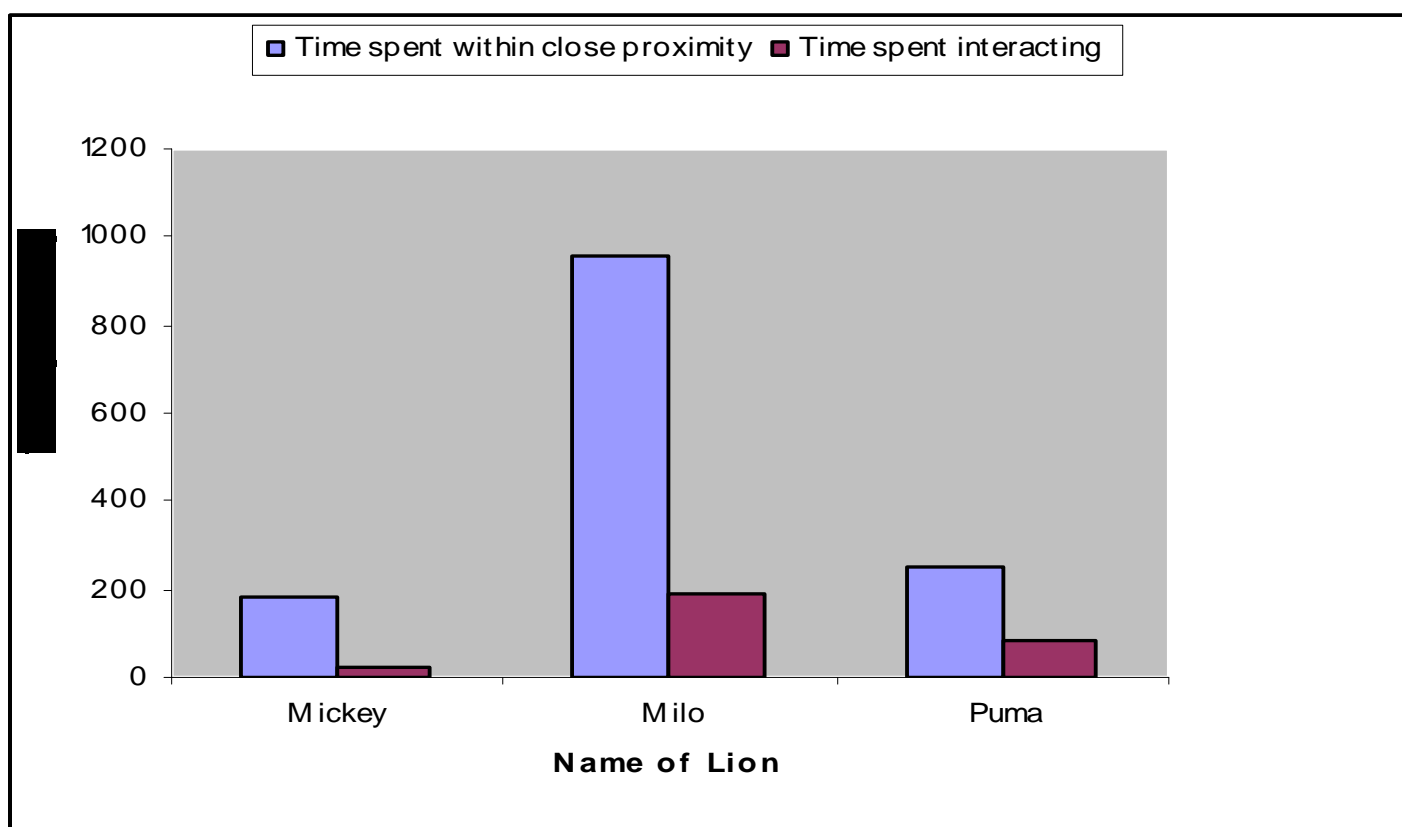
*The contenders, from left: Puma, Mickey and his brother, Milo, are all six-years old*

**With stage two on temporary hold** while the new release site is built in Gweru, it gives us the chance to bond the six females to a pride male. Following the first release at Dollar Block we elected to change our protocols to release the females only to start with to give them the maximum chance to bond and become self-sustaining before having to deal with the complications of an amorous male; after all, it is the females that form the core of the lion's pride from generation to generation, whilst the males come and go. We also decided that the males to be released with the females when the time came would be at least five years old.

Three males, **Mickey, Milo** and **Puma**, have been moved from Antelope Park's Breeding Program to a holding enclosure next to the Dollar Block pride's. While their new release site is under construction, we intend to observe how the males and females react to each other; to let them choose for themselves which male should be released with them.

In order to do this effectively, ALERT research technicians have been monitoring the social displays which have taken place between the two groups with the intention that a clear favourite will emerge. The two groups have been next to each other since the 3rd of December.

The study looks at a number of parameters. One element is to focus on the boys and the time they spent in close proximity to the girls in the next enclosure as well as the amount of time spent on affiliative interactions. These affiliative interactions encompass social licking, greeting and rubbing each other against the fence. So far Milo has spent a far greater amount of time near the girls as compared to Mickey and Puma. Milo also interacted with the girls a lot more by licking through the fence and producing a variety of greeting sounds. Puma and Mickey haven't shown much interest in the girls and Puma is so far the only male who has shown aggressive behaviours towards the females.





## Lion Fact File: *the call of the wild...* As

**social animals**, lions have developed a multitude of communication tools to strengthen the bonds among pride members and send warning signals to other, unfamiliar lions.

In physical terms there are a number of indicators which a lion can use to communicate to others. Perhaps most visually the mane of a male advertises fitness from a distance. A dark mane is a product of higher testosterone levels, and therefore a signal of increased fighting ability – a cue which females can pick up on as studies show that if given the option a female will almost always pick the darker-maned male.

The greeting ceremony performed by lions is loaded with visual messages. To engage in the ceremony, an individual will moan softly, swing its head from side to side and lick its lips while approaching another before butting heads, rubbing cheeks and leaning into each other. If intolerant of another member's approach or presence, a lion's response can range from moving away to baring teeth and pushing the ears flat against the top of the head, hissing and growling and in some instances a violent encounter can occur.

Lions also use olfactory communication; scent marking the boundaries of their territory and scraping at the ground with their paws, which leaves a substance emitted from the glands in the pads, announcing to other lions that a pride is in residence.

But vocalisation perhaps contains the largest spectrum of communications which lions engage in, ranging from grunts, snarls, hisses, moans and, of course, the roar.



Roaring begins with a series of moans, escalating into a deep and loud roar before tailing off in a succession of grunts and is made possible by a two-piece hyoid bone in the lion's throat. Typically, roaring lasts between 30 and 60 seconds and male lions start to roar from around a two years old, and females soon after this. They will often take a crouching or standing position when doing so, and this vocal display can be heard up to eight kilometres away.

The roar has many purposes; it announces ownership of a territory; helps pride members communicate with one another over large distances; it can be used to attract mates or to intimidate rivals and when performed as a pride it acts to strengthen their bond.

The extent to which lions can recognise the roars of fellow pride members versus those of a stranger was highlighted through playback experiments conducted on groups of wild lions in Tanzania's Serengeti National Park. Making this distinction, especially for prides with dependent offspring, can be the difference between encountering a potential pride takeover and an infanticidal male, and keeping their cubs safe. During the experiment, females were observed as untroubled if a resident male's roar was played from the loudspeakers but would show signs of great agitation when a strange male's roar was played, often resulting in them leading the cubs away. The study showed this was not merely a universal reaction to any unknown lion, as resident lionesses would approach the loudspeaker if unknown females' roaring was played – suggesting that they would willingly risk an encounter to remove them from their territory.

While this may show that lions can discern the different characteristics of individual members of their pride's roars as well as those of unknown lions, it is unlikely that nomadic males, and those which pose the highest threat to a pride's status, do in fact roar.

Male coalition members must engage in many of the same social behaviours as a mixed pride – as only by building and maintaining a bond with one another can they hope to overthrow established pride males. But a further study produced results suggesting that, while their social unit might suffer as a result, nomadic males do not roar as it could potentially alert a resident pride to their presence.

In a number of nocturnal observations conducted both on resident and non-resident male coalitions, roaring was exclusively confined to resident males.

It was also noted that roaring is a behaviour which a lion will adjust to its situation; a ruling male will remain silent if outside of his territory, even on hearing the roars of unfamiliar males, while nomadic males only begin roaring when they are taking over a pride.

**Sources:** *Roaring and social communication in African lions: the limitations imposed by listeners* (Jon Grinnell & Karen McComb); *Female lions can identify potentially infanticidal males from their roars* (Karen McComb, Anne Pusey, Craig Packer & Jon Grinnell)



**SAVANNAH CHEETAH FOUNDATION**

[www.scfafrica.co.za](http://www.scfafrica.co.za)

**CCWA is proud to announce a partnership with Savannah Cheetah Foundation...**



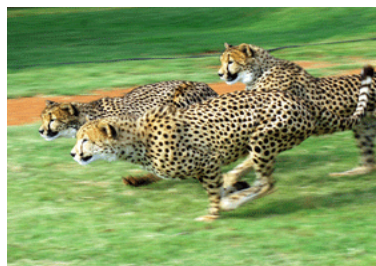
**“The Savannah Cheetah Foundation**, based in Parys in South Africa’s Free State, has been working with, and breeding, cheetahs since 2001. We have bred 17 cheetahs since then with a 100% success rate. We initially started breeding cheetahs to provide them to other reserves, zoos and breeding programmes to prevent them being taken from the wild; for every four cheetahs taken from the wild and placed into captivity, three will die of stress related illnesses. By breeding cheetahs that are happy and healthy in captivity we can prevent damaging the wild populations.

We have since appreciated that this is not enough to save the cheetah, and we have decided to start a reintroduction project. It is not possible to release hand raised animals back into the wild as they will come into conflict with humans so we have therefore come up with a phased programme which will see hand raised cheetahs taught to hunt using a lure machine and small live prey. They will then be placed into a large controlled environment where they can further refine their hunting technique, and once they are self sufficient they can start mating with other cheetahs. The females will then raise cubs in a semi-wild environment with no contact from humans. These cubs, once old enough, will be removed and can be used to bring in new bloodlines to existing cheetah populations in parks and reserves across their traditional territories, or can start a new cheetah population where one has previously died out. These second generation cheetahs will have no contact with humans and will have been raised completely by their mother, thus avoiding them coming into conflict with humans.

Another important part of the work we do at the Savannah Cheetah Foundation is educating people, particularly local farmers, about the cheetah and the necessity of keeping them in the eco-system. We also work closely with other cheetah breeding programs in Southern Africa to share knowledge and research so that we can do everything possible to help this beautiful species.

When we discovered that ALERT was operating a project for lions with a similar methodology we contacted them to see if there was a way in which our two organizations could assist each other. We are proud to form a partnership with ALERT’s CCWA division and look forward to a long and fruitful working relationship.”

It is likely that some of our proposed stage three release areas will be suitable for the release of both lion and cheetah, as well as a number of other species, which brings obvious cost savings to both organizations and reduces the need to fence multiple areas. Other benefits to our organizations will also be expressed as we pool our knowledge and expertise.







Historically cheetah were distributed widely throughout Africa – in all suitable habitats from the Cape of Good Hope to the Mediterranean – the Arabian Peninsula, the Middle East, Pakistan, India (extinct since 1952) and the southern part of Russia where they were declared extinct in 1989. Outside of Africa only a population of some 40 – 50 animals remains in Iran although a handful may be clinging on in western Pakistan.

The demand for skin's and humanity's continued expansion on the African continent coupled with an over emphasis of the cheetah's predation of domestic livestock have led to a shrinking of their distributional range and their total disappearance from much of the continent. Nowadays only a few small populations exist in West Africa where once optimal habitat has been degraded by human activities.

The largest current populations exist in East Africa's Mara – Serengeti eco-systems and in southern Africa's Namibia and Botswana. In Namibia around 95% of animals reside not in National Parks but on commercial farmland which brings them into constant conflict with land-owners.

There is a lack of genetic variation amongst cheetah, leading to the continued debate on whether the generally recognized five sub-species classifications are valid. Research data suggests that the species has undergone a number of severe population bottlenecks with the entire current population descended from a very few individuals. Some even go as far as stating that all cheetah are descended from a single female. Whilst this is unlikely, the genetic similarity between individuals poses problems for the species. Genetic relatedness can cause reproductive and morphological abnormalities, higher infant mortality and a susceptibility to disease.

Current estimates place the total population around 15,000 individuals. However those animals are also widely dispersed with no-one sub-population having significant numbers.

In general we think of cheetah as frequenting open plains, however they are equally at home in savannah woodland in which they exist in much of their distributional range. In fact, it has been suggested that cheetah have an easier time of it in these habitats due to the additional cover afforded them.



imire SAFARI RANCH

"What is man without the beasts? If all the beasts were gone, man would die from great loneliness of spirit. For whatever happens to the beasts, soon happens to man..."

...all things are connected."

*Chief Seattle*

## CCWA is proud to announce a partnership with Imire Safari Ranch...

**In 1972** Norman Travers, the owner of Imire Safari Ranch, 105km east of Harare in Zimbabwe, decided to try and restore some of the wildlife of Zimbabwe which had been exterminated. Norman pioneered the introduction of wildlife onto commercial farms and has been highly recognised for his enormous contribution towards the conservation of Zimbabwe's wild areas.

During the late 1980's, at the peak of the rhino-poaching era in Southern Africa, the Department of National Parks and Wildlife decided to remove the remaining 120 black rhino out of the danger zones of the National Parks and into the Intensive Protection Zones of Conservancies. Imire Safari Ranch offered their expertise and became guardians of seven orphaned rhino between the ages of 4 and 6 months. Initially all efforts were centred around stabilizing the calves condition, introducing them to the correct milk formula, and generally adapting them to their new environment. The black rhino have since bred successfully ....the total births on Imire are thirteen.

All in all Imire Safari Ranch have handled a total of 32 black rhino since the project began in 1987 and have returned 10 back to the Matusadona National Park in Zimbabwe where the females have bred successfully.

In 2007 Imire received a devastating blow when on the 7th of November, four armed poachers dressed in camouflage uniform, assaulted and tied up the rhino guards and opened fire on the 3 adult rhino present at the ranch in their pens. All 3 were killed - Sprinter, a male, DJ, a female who had recently given birth to a calf and tragically, Amber a pregnant female who was due to give birth in a week. Amber's unborn calf also died.

The 3 rhino had been dehorned 6 weeks previously in an effort to make them less attractive to poachers but nevertheless, the poachers tried to hack out the inch of new horn growth from one of the rhinos before being frightened off by the sound of a car approaching. Imire Safari Ranch were left with 4 orphaned rhinos calves including DJ's young calf, Tatenda.

In August 2008 it was announced that the perpetrators of this crime as well as other rhino killings at other locations, had been caught, prosecuted and sentenced to 28 years imprisonment.

Through our sister organization, African Impact, we have been supporting the black rhino program for some years now by sourcing voluntourists that bring much needed finance as well as hands-on assistance to this project. We hope to build on this co-operation over the coming years, to meet the challenges facing Africa's wildlife as a vital partnership.





The black, or hook-lipped, rhino were formally distributed widely, even being recorded on the slopes of Table Mountain. As European settlement of Africa increased the species was gradually eliminated from much of its range. By the end of the 19th century the southern black rhino population was no more than 150 individuals in the Hluhluwe and Mkhuze game reserves in South Africa's KwaZulu Natal province.

Special protection was afforded to the species and it was saved from extinction, but their population across Africa continued to decrease. Continent wide population estimates clearly indicate this decline: 1960 – 100,000, 1970 – 65,000, 1980 – 14,800, 1987 – 3,780 and in 1992 there were only 2,475 black rhino left.

Rhino horn is used in Arab and Asian countries for dagger handles and traditional medicines and has made it more precious than gold. Poaching is therefore the most significant threat to the species other than habitat loss through human development.

There is a significant genetic difference between black rhino across the continent with four sub-species recognized. Some sub-species have been particularly hard hit and face a high probability of extinction in the near future.

Translocation operations have been crucial in re-distributing the increasingly threatened species throughout its former range.

Black rhino differ from their white cousins in a number of ways. They have a hooked lip which allows them to browse rather than a wide lip which is better for grazing as the white rhino does. Black rhino are less sociable than white and are also significantly smaller weighing in as they do at only 1,000kg compared to 2-2,400kg for a white. The line of the back is different with black rhino missing the nuchal hump which is a well-developed and obvious feature in the in the centre of the back of a white rhino.

## The LAST ROAR: ALERT publications...

ALERT has produced a range of publications to provide our current and potential donors with all the information you could need in order to offer your support and get the most out of your involvement with our programs. We present here a list of those currently available either by downloading them from our web page at [www.lionalert.org](http://www.lionalert.org) or by email, by contacting us as [info@lionalert.org](mailto:info@lionalert.org).



### The ALERT Information Pack (2.50MB)

Our information pack is a comprehensive look at the aims and objectives of ALERT. We describe in detail why the Trust was founded, how our programs were conceived and how they have developed since we started operations.

This publication is packed with 52 pages of up-to-date information and incorporates the answers to some of the most commonly asked questions about the program, details of how you can support our work, the finer points of our animal husbandry techniques, information on our media coverage to date and, most importantly, an update on the progress of the project so far.

You can also read quotes from our founder, Andrew Conolly, our UK patron, Sir Ranulph Fiennes, our consultant ecologist, Dr. Pieter Kat, as well as a number of other experts and interested parties that have seen the project working first hand.



### Panthera leo: account of a species (1.80MB)

The African lion is an impressive creature to look at, but to understand it brings even greater respect. In *Panthera leo: account of a species* we bring you everything you ever wanted to ask about this, the most iconic of all African animals.

We look at their conservation status and current distribution before asking why lions have manes. What are the white lions of Timbavati? How fast can a lion run? And why are their pupils round unlike a domestic cat?

We delve into the lion's social group to discover why lions, alone amongst cats, have decided to live in prides and why do males kill cubs. How much do lions eat? How long do they sleep a day?

Twenty-one pages of stunning photography and info about the King of Beasts will enthrall you.

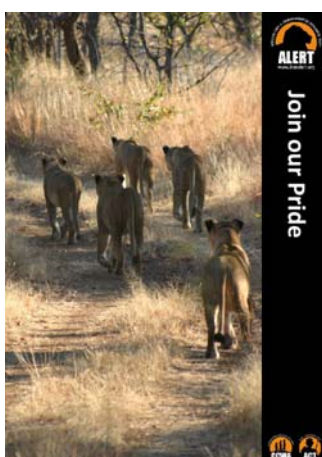


### Supporter's Pack (2.30MB)

Having discovered more about our programs, been captivated reading about the lion as a species and read the latest news direct from the projects in our newsletters, you may be wondering how you can go about supporting our work.

The ALERT Supporters' Pack provides you with a wide variety of ways that you can help Africa's wildlife and its people - from making a one-off donation to regular giving. You can support specific appeals, sponsor a lion, "buy" a piece of the Victoria Falls, join our pride membership program or come to Africa to work alongside our dedicated team.

No matter how much or how little you feel you can contribute, everything is useful in assisting us to meet our aims, and the options provided in this pack, which is constantly updated with new ideas, will offer a number of opportunities to help that will suit you and your circumstances.



### Join Our Pride (0.43MB)

ALERT is giving individuals the opportunity to join our pride with our membership scheme. We have provided three levels of membership to suit the individual; the Lion Package (£59.00 per year), the Lioness Package (£39.00 per year) and the Cub Package for under 15s (£19.00 per year).

In return for making regular donations pride members will receive a number of benefits including (dependent on membership level) copies of all ALERT publications, discounts on any ALERT sponsorship scheme, such as our Sponsor a Lion program, free ALERT branded merchandise, high quality photographs, amongst other benefits.

Joining our pride allows members to be ambassadors for Africa, and will receive the greatest of all benefits; the personal knowledge that they are part of the ongoing solution to the challenges facing Africa's wildlife and its people.





### Corporate Pride (1.40MB)

ALERT welcomes support from the corporate sector - via membership, staff volunteering and secondments, sponsorship, licensed and affinity products, gifts in kind, to name but a few.

Becoming a Corporate Pride member is a clear demonstration of an organizations commitment to environmental sustainability. They will be supporting conservation projects that benefit wildlife and improve people's lives. Being a member can help to make staff feel good about the organization they work for, and give a positive impression to customers, suppliers and the communities in which they operate.

Corporate members receive a number of benefits in return for their support that could include discounts on attending ALERT events, joint press releases to advertise our partnership and discounts on volunteer placements that can be offered to staff as rewards or incentives.

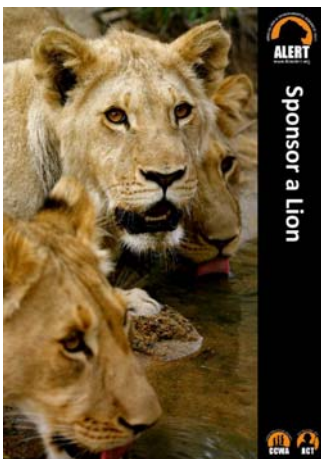


### Friends of Victoria Falls (0.41MB)

Invasive alien plant species (IAPS) are invading the Victoria Falls National Park and replacing native vegetation that will eventually result in the local extinction of these indigenous species. The Park contains a unique eco-system comprising a riverine jungle with ilala palms, ferns, figs, liana vines and mahogany.

As a friend of Victoria Falls supporters will be able to sponsor a piece of land between one and 100 hectares within the 2,300 hectare National Park. Funds from such sponsorship will go towards our program to eradicate the IAPS as well as enhancing the education centre to better inform visitors to this natural wonder of its ecological importance.

Friends will get regular updates on the progress of the project as well as an information pack giving them more information about the Park and the importance of the work they are supporting.

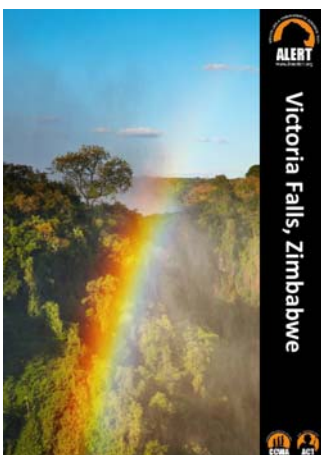


### Sponsor a Lion (0.64MB)

By sponsoring your very own lion you will be taking direct action to help replenish lion populations across Africa. Sponsorship funds will be put towards sourcing and securing suitable release areas for stage two, three and four; building the necessary infrastructure for release areas such as building or upgrading fence lines and stocking the area with appropriate prey species; disease testing and vaccinations for the lions pre-release, radio tracking equipment and other research tools to monitor the lions after release.

For supporting a lion, sponsors will receive a range of benefits including stunning photos of their sponsored lion within the natural environment, a complete biography of their lion and regular updates so you can follow the personal story of the lions they are supporting.

The sponsor a lion program also makes a unique gift.



### Project Packs (ca. 1.00MB)

These information packs provide complete details of all the programs operating at any of our project sites; looking at the conservation objectives and methods implemented to meet those objectives.

The packs are regularly updated with the latest program additions as our work is extended and developed in each location.

The packs also give information on specific projects that can be supported, whether that be our lion release program, the installation of a new waterhole, our conservation education program or how we are providing assistance to the most disenfranchised members of society.

These packs are an invaluable source of information about what ALERT, CCWA, ACT and our partners are doing on the ground.

Note: We are still preparing some of the information packs which will be made available once complete.