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## MARCH 2008 NEWSLETTER

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## 1. Message from the Chief Operating Officer

This month we have been gearing up for a release of three lionesses into stage two at our Dollar Block site in Zimbabwe, followed by a male in the near future. Those lions are Athena, Nala, Narnia and Milo.

To find out more about our preparations for their release read our stage two update in this edition. Look out for our special report next month about how the released lions fair, or if you cannot wait that long, join our Facebook group for more regular updates.

In stage one another two of our lions have made their first kill, and others continue their strong hunting success. Our youngest cubs are growing up quick whilst others are retiring from walks to start their hunting campaign at night. Read our stage one update for details.

Also this month we take a look at the role of our lion handlers within the program; a team of dedicated individuals that work with the lions every day and night to make sure the program is working effectively, and safely. So who are they and what do they do?

We have now published our ethical fundraising policy, and also offer you further ways that you can support the program.

All of our staff were deeply saddened by the unexpected death of Amanzi; one of the most charismatic lions in the program's history. He will be sorely missed.

As ever, we thank you for your support as we continue to do our part in saving the African lion.

Kindest regards

**David Youldon**

ALERT Chief Operating Officer



## 2. What is ALERT?



**The African Lion & Environmental Research Trust (ALERT)** is a non-profit organization working with governments, wildlife authorities and private organizations to identify suitable release sites for African lions. ALERT will also provide infrastructure to those sites to facilitate the release and to protect local communities. It was founded in 2005 to support the work of the four-stage African Encounter Lion Rehabilitation and Release into the Wild Program, founded in 1999 at Antelope Park in Gweru, Zimbabwe.

ALERT also carries out scientific research through the **Conservation Centre for Wild Africa (CCWA)**, either in its own right or in conjunction with external conservation organizations and educational institutions. CCWA engages in a diversity of research and conservation related programs, not just for lions but on a wide range of African wildlife to ensure that we can pass on balanced ecosystems to future generations. CCWA is already undertaking a number of research activities throughout Zimbabwe's National Park system.

In addition, the **ALERT Communities Trust (ACT)** is a means to give back to communities bordering conservation areas such that they receive tangible benefits for supporting those conservation programs. A primary element of this is our community education and awareness program to further understanding of the importance and relevance of sound conservation practices. Local communities are involved in eco-tourism ventures related to the conservation programs, and money generated by those programs goes back into development schemes, agreed as priorities with the local community, such as building schools or providing medical supplies.





### 3. Stage One Update

On only their third *Night Encounter* and at just 19 months old, **Acacia, Amghela & Chengeta** still have a lot to learn.

Things started quickly however when Acacia spotted a herd of impala and led the trio towards them. Chengeta took a direct approach whilst Acacia flanked left and Amghela right. Due to their inexperience Acacia broke into a full chase having only stalked as close as 60m to her prey. The others also gave chase and they managed to get within 30m before the impala's speed gave them the advantage and the opportunity slipped away. As the lions grow older and gain experience they will learn to stalk nearer to their prey before commencing the chase.

Soon after though, the lions spotted more prey; a pair of ostrich. This time around the lions stalked to 30 metres before, again, Acacia broke into the chase, all three rushing headlong towards their prey. The ostrich split and Acacia went after the male whilst Amghela and Chengeta focussed on the female. The chase lasted a minute or so with Acacia giving up, followed by Chengeta. It was only then that we discovered Amghela with her jaws clamped around the throat of the female ostrich. The others joined her and the three polished off the bird with no aggression between them - after all, there was plenty to go around.



Acacia



Amghela



Chengeta

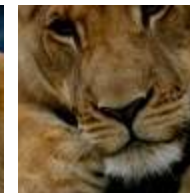


and the Ostrich

On separate afternoon walks both **Mana** and **Nandi** had close encounters; for Mana, she was coming down to a pool to drink when she heard rustling on the opposite bank. She immediately sprang into action, dashing into the reeds and reemerged with a one metre long monitor lizard in her mouth. This is the first time she had encountered such an animal and its thrashing to escape clearly took the then 14 month old Mana by surprise. In panic, she jumped back giving the lizard the chance to race back into the water and escape to safety.



Mana



Nandi

Five minutes later whilst still looking for her lost prey Mana came across a freshwater crab. She quickly learnt the dangers of such a creature after it latched its strong pincers firmly on to her nose.

Meanwhile, on the other side of the Park, 18 month old Nandi came across an ostrich. She went for the chase, leapt, and at that point seemed to realize what she was doing and had what can only be described as a mid-air anxiety attack. The result was a crumpled heap on the floor eating the dust of the now racing ostrich – better luck next time.

A week later Mana got her own back when, at the same pool, she found a crab – maybe even the same one, and promptly crushed it in her teeth, but not before it clamped itself on to her playmate **Lozi's** nose.



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**Sango, Sahara and Swahili** reached the age of five months and as such have started the weaning process. They have been getting meat in their diet for some time, but now we start to reduce the milk content of their daily feed until they are on a meat only diet by the age of six months. Also, through their daily walks the trio's confidence in the Bush has been coming on in leaps and bounds. They have always been very shy cubs but are finally beginning to relax and have even started to show interest in the occasional zebra they encounter!

### Girls vs Boys

Everyone knows that it's the females that do all the hunting right? Well, our latest hunting statistics might call that assumption into question!

Of the 141 *Night Encounters* conducted at Antelope Park so far we have found that mixed gender groups have a success rate of 42%. The female only groups are much better at 51%, but they are roundly beaten by the male only groups at 54%.

Also, on average the boys are taking slightly larger prey than the girls.



**Chaka**, now 18 months old, as well as **Mana** and **Msasa**, now 15 months old, have taken part in their second set of research walks, whilst **Nandi** and **Nduna** are about to start their second series. We will bring you the results next month to see if their characters have changed over the past three months since the last walks.

The walks are conducted by guides and voluntourists over a seven-day period around the third month anniversary of each lion. Each day the lions are assessed against different criteria with an average taken from the week in order to quantify certain character traits. We hope that these traits will become predictors of the lions' likely role in a release pride enabling us to better group lions together in the future.





With deep regret we must inform you of the death of **Amanzi**. He was the one lion that we received most requests for information about because he was so incredibly charismatic.

Amanzi was born in the midst of torrential rains to **Teddy** and **Anna** on 28<sup>th</sup> February 2006. His two sisters died the day after they were born from symptoms suggesting pneumonia and we took the decision to take Amanzi away the same day. When he was removed he was found to have mold growing between his claws making them rot and maggots eating into his stomach. He was carefully cleaned up, given antibiotics and named Amanzi, meaning “water” in the Ndebele language of Zimbabwe.

He was joined with the young males of **Lokothula**, **Langa**, **Landela** and **Ltalo** and was taken to our stage one site in Victoria Falls with Loko and Langa in August of 2006. Soon after we saw that Amanzi was not growing as he should; and his companions considerably overtook him in size. Amanzi started to struggle to keep hold of his meat during feeds and we decided to move him in with two young females, **Nala** and **Narnia**; the three living well together for some time. Over the coming months he suffered various minor ailments, but seemed to be doing well and was winning over the hearts of everyone who came into contact with him.

In December 2006 our consultant vets diagnosed him with Horner's Syndrome amongst a number of complications including his carnassial teeth not growing properly. He showed no signs of discomfort, but Amanzi was moved again to join **Nandi** and **Nduna**, then two young and skittish cubs. Amanzi's friendly nature made a huge difference to the two young lions that would follow him everywhere, giving them the confidence to experience the African Bush.



In July 2007 the three were returned to Antelope Park and through Amanzi's leadership his protégé's confidence blossomed; on their first walk at the Park they tried to hunt down four bush pigs that they encountered. Nandi and Nduna have continued to do well, with Nandi already making her first kill.

Amanzi did not grow and we had to keep moving him to live with ever younger social groups so that he could defend himself. Just before his death he was with cubs a year younger.



It was our intention given the number of problems he had, and the fact that he would never survive in stage two, to give him to a wildlife sanctuary where he would have provided companionship to a young female and receive the more constant care that we struggle to offer given the resources available to us in central Zimbabwe.

Unfortunately he died unexpectedly before we could move him. A representative from Zimbabwean Parks & Wildlife and a local vet were immediately called to confirm the cause of death and perform a post-mortem which provided evidence of a host of problems not identified during previous external examinations and blood tests.

Amanzi was a very special cub to everyone that met him and he will always stay in our hearts and in our memories.

His legacy will live on in Nandi and Nduna who, having learnt from Amanzi in a way that we could never fully emulate, now have the confidence to fully experience the wild around them and as such have a much higher chance of survival in stage two.

Thank you Amanzi and goodbye; you will not be forgotten.



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### Landela Does it Again!

On the night of 24<sup>th</sup> March the 4Ls of **Landela**, **Lokothula**, **Langa** and **Ltalo** went out on a *Night Encounter*.

The four were extremely active and we considered for a time that their playfulness would detract from the business at hand; hunting.

After 20 minutes or so the brothers calmed down and led us at a determined pace through the long grass.

A herd of wildebeest were spotted and all four instantly went into stalking position. Landela took advantage of a road with long grass between him and the herd to conceal a full charge from 150 metres away that intercepted the herd as it ran away from the other brothers who made a more direct and visible charge.

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.

Text book stuff that brings Landela's kill total to six and within spitting distance of the all-time leader board; and he is only 22 months old.



### All move...

**Echo & Etosha** (pictured above) have been moved to continue their stage one experience at our Victoria Falls operation.

The two brothers will be celebrating their first birthday on the 12<sup>th</sup> of April; we are sure that they will enjoy the freedom of the Big 5 Zambezi National Park within which their walks will now take place.

In the same move we also brought back **Amandla**, **Chabalala** and **Chando** (pictured left, top to bottom) to Antelope Park to begin their *Night Encounter* campaign.

Whilst walking in Victoria Falls the boys most notably managed to bring down a buffalo calf. However, before they could make good their catch the calf's mother returned chasing our trio away.

Amandla is fast approaching 20 months old, whilst the two brothers are about to turn 19 months.

In the near future the boys will be reintegrated with their siblings.



From top right to bottom left:  
Landela  
Langa  
Ltalo  
Lokothula





## Is there a need for a captive bred lion release program?

To answer that question, let's take a look at the state of wild populations;

Historically, lions were distributed throughout the Mediterranean, the Near & Middle East as far as India, and all of Africa. They were eliminated from their last European strongholds in Greece by 100 A.D. but survived until the 20th century in Syria, Iran and Iraq. The last lion in Iran was shot in 1942. The Asiatic lion subspecies now only exists as a population of around 300 in and around the Gir Forest of north western India.

In Africa, the last wild Cape Lion of South Africa was shot in 1865 and the last Barbary lion of Northern Africa was shot in 1922. Reduced numbers of lions are still present north of South Africa and Namibia and south of the equator. North of the equator they are found in a narrow belt south of the Sahara desert on the western side and extending further south to link with the southern hemisphere population on the eastern side of the continent.

Lions (*Panthera leo*) are listed as Convention of International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES) Appendix II and are regarded as 'vulnerable' by the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) Red List [Version 3.1 2001].

"A species population reduction of 30 to 50% is suspected over the past two decades (three lion generations). **The causes of this reduction are not well understood, are unlikely to have ceased, and may not be reversible.** This suspected reduction is based on direct observation; appropriate indices of abundance; a decline in area of occupation, extent of occupation and habitat quality; and actual and potential levels of exploitation."

"Myers (1975) wrote, "Since 1950, their numbers may well have been cut in half, perhaps to as low as 200,000 in all or even less". Later, Myers (1984) wrote, "In light of evidence from all the main countries of its range, the lion has been undergoing decline in both range and numbers, often an accelerating decline, during the past two decades". In the early 1990s, IUCN/SSC Cat Specialist Group members made educated "guesstimates" of 30,000 to 100,000 for the African lion population (Nowell and Jackson 1996).

Two surveys have provided the first current estimates of the African lion population, with some ground-truthing. The African Lion Working Group, a network of lion specialists affiliated with the IUCN/SSC Cat Specialist Group, conducted a mail survey and compiled estimates of 100 known African lion populations. Not included were lion populations of known existence but unknown or un-estimated size. The ALWG African lion population estimate is 23,000, with a range of 16,500 to 30,000.

The second survey was carried out by Philippe Chardonnet and sponsored by the International Foundation for the Conservation of Wildlife and Conservation Force. He also compiled estimates for 144 individual African lion populations, grouped into 36 largely isolated subpopulations. His methodology included extrapolation of estimates of known populations into areas where lion status was unknown, and his total figure is larger: 39,000 lions in Africa, range of 29,000 to 47,000."

"Like lion numbers, **habitat for lions is also suspected to have declined over the past two decades.** Since the 1960s, the human population, land cultivation and numbers of livestock have steadily increased (Ferrerias and Cousins 1996, Chardonnet 2002). Myers (1975) suggested lion range to total two million square miles or 5,178,000 km<sup>2</sup>, remarking that extent was likely only about half of lion range in the 1950s. The African Mammal Databank project estimated the lion's potential area of occurrence at approximately 10 million km<sup>2</sup>, while noting that much of the most suitable habitat is fragmented and unprotected. The most detailed range calculation is Chardonnet's (2002) estimate of approximately three million km<sup>2</sup>, with about half having some form of protection, from national park to hunting reserve. Overall, habitat for 18% of African lion populations is described currently as declining. (Chardonnet 2002)"

"The increase of agriculture and pastoralism has reduced the lion's wild prey base. Lions can be serious problem animals when living alongside humans, as is increasingly the case. Lion predation on livestock is the main form of conflict. The economic impact of stock raiding can be significant: Patterson et al. (2004) estimated that each lion cost ranchers in Kenya living alongside Tsavo East National Park US\$290 per year in livestock losses. The scavenging behaviour of lions makes them particularly vulnerable to poisoned carcasses put out to eliminate predators. Lions also kill people."

**"Lions are generally perceived by Africans as having a negative value"**

Source: 2007 IUCN Red List of Threatened Species. <[www.iucnredlist.org](http://www.iucnredlist.org)>



“Throughout much of Africa, the lion is perceived by local communities as having negative economic value, either through loss of life and livestock, or through loss of income-generating opportunities restricted by protection of the habitat and wild prey lions need to survive. Because **area-specific lion conservation measures have often been developed without consultation and active participation of local communities, their needs and capacities have not been taken into account, and there is a resulting lack of support for lion conservation** and often a management failure.” (Conservation Strategy for the Lion (*Panthera leo*) in Eastern and Southern Africa 2006). “Outside reserves, legal protection may have questionable value when it concerns a species that comes into conflict with people, often in remote areas with poor infrastructure. Under such circumstances, **legal protection may serve only to alienate people from conservation activities.**” (2007 IUCN Red List of Threatened Species. <[www.iucnredlist.org](http://www.iucnredlist.org)>)

And what of other species? African wild dogs and cheetah amongst many others are all struggling to survive due to habitat loss, decline in their prey base and through conflict with humans.

**Given the recent, rapid reduction in lion populations across Africa it is ALERT's opinion that habitat protection methods implemented at the cost of hundreds of millions of dollars over the last 30 to 40 years have so far failed the lion and many other species.** Further, as stated by the IUCN, “the causes of this reduction are not well understood, are unlikely to have ceased, and may not be reversible.”

Of course ALERT believes in habitat protection, and there have been many success stories to applaud, but given we are clearly failing the lion we believe that a range of solutions must be found before the lion becomes critically endangered. Those habitat protection methods that have worked in the past should be extended, and ALERT is already involved in this, funding anti-poaching units for example; we hope with greater funding to further enhance our role in this area in the near future through education, research and working with communities to reduce livestock lion conflicts.

But new ideas are necessary to compliment those existing methods if we are to have any real long term success in habitat protection. **ALERT supports the notion that only through local community support can the lion, and other species in Africa, survive. If the livelihood of communities bordering conservation areas is intrinsically linked to the health of that environment then the community will have reason to protect it, motivated by Africans to the benefit of Africans.**

**But can the lion wait for us to get habitat protection right? Will the numbers be so low; populations so widespread and genetic diversity so narrowed within the next 20 years leaving the species in crisis? We, as well as many, many others, believe there is a very real possibility of this nightmare scenario.**

ALERT therefore feels it is our responsibility to perfect a solution to the problem of how to reintroduce lions into areas that need them when that need arrives; and we feel that we should perfect that solution now before it is too late. Where will these lions come from?; when lion numbers are at critical level, inbreeding is rife and disease such as TB, already a devastating problem in some supposedly viable populations, is riddled throughout the population, our eyes will inevitably have to turn to a new source – captive bred lions are a viable option. As we have always stated, if at a time when we have proven our release protocols there is no need for the program, then it will be scaled back until it is needed. Controls are possible in every stage of the release program to reduce production if necessary; through removal of breeding males from females or temporary contraception, not through culling or giving over lions to hunters as has been suggested by some. We will take things slowly in order to make sure each part of our release program is effective and properly researched, but the evidence is too great to deny that action must be taken now to ensure the future of the African lion.

***“...we can begin programs of lion reintroduction in a wide variety of depopulated areas. Such programs will not only be immediately positive, but will also place lions squarely in the category of animals like rhinos whose plight seems to be better appreciated by the international conservation community. This is why I am appreciative and excited to be involved by the initiatives taken by Andrew and Wendy Conolly. Through years of self-funded and determined effort, they have developed a program of re-introduction that has a very good chance of success. Predators of any description are notoriously difficult to reintroduce, but now we have at least a workable plan. ....the future of African lions is in African hands. Let us salute those who have been steadfast to ensure this future, and recognize that any action is better than the currently looming extinction of an African icon if we do nothing.”*** Dr. Pieter Kat – ALERT consultant ecologist

**“There is probably no other species whose distribution range has shrunk over historical times to the extent shown by the lion” (Smithers, 1983)**

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## A Day in the Life of a Lion Handler

This month we pay tribute to a dedicated group of individuals without whom the release program simply could not function; our lion handlers.

At both our stage one locations at Antelope Park and Victoria Falls, as well as at Dollar Block, our stage two release site, the principal role of the lion handler is to ensure the safety of the guides, staff, voluntourists and guests that come into contact with the lions; a task they have completed with the utmost professionalism and success over the years – but that is not even the half of their role.

Their day starts off with a morning meeting at around 6am during which the day's activities are planned out. And then it is off on a lion walk. Not only does the lion handler look out for the safety of the walk, but also there are questions about the program to be answered to guests or training to be given to our voluntourists. Some walks may last a couple of hours whilst on other days they could be out for five or six hours.

To the lions, the handlers are the dominant males of the pride whereas the guides are more like the females. As such, the guides tend to lead from the front and are the focus of the cubs' attention for greeting and play. The handlers tend to stay more at the rear and their presence is intimidating to the cubs; when a cub starts to get a little frisky, a lion handler will use their stick to point at the cub and say "no" in a commanding voice. This is usually enough for the cub to calm down. Or if a cub is refusing to move, a handler can walk up behind it and the cub, feeling intimidated, will (almost) always start to walk in the direction of the pride. It is this difference in roles taken by the guides and the handlers that allows us to bring the cubs to different parts of the Park so that they can constantly experience new things about their natural environment.

After the walk there are cubs that need feeding. The meat needs to be prepared and distributed to the lions along with any medications that any of the cubs might need. With so much daily contact with the lions it is often the handlers that are first to notice if a cub is sick and can then work with the Lions' Manager to resolve the problem. Then there is cleaning or enclosure maintenance, working with the adult lions at breeding program or with the youngest cubs on their first walks. And all of this is done with the aid of voluntourists who need supervision and training all the time.

In the afternoon there is another lion walk and then on to a *Night Encounter* which might be out with the lions until 11 or 12 at night. It's a long day!

Down at Dollar Block there is no hands on work with the lions obviously, but the handlers are involved in tracking the released lions and assisting with data capture for the research programs as well as implementing our strict safety protocols.

It's a demanding yet rewarding job requiring commitment and long hours; it is also a potentially dangerous job, and **for their utmost dedication ALERT salutes these individuals; our lion handlers.**

Antelope Park & Dollar Block: **Makeyi, Thomas, Bias, Ephraim, Everest, Ishmael, Tinofa, Markson & Ticha**

Victoria Falls: **Lewis, Herbert, Sandas, Dereck, Lenard**





## 6. Ethical Fundraising Policy

ALERT seeks funding and support from individuals and organizations either through direct contact or through an approved agency. Our new code of ethics has been created to foster respectful and productive fundraising with our communities. ALERT 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. This document outlines key principles and practices in relation to fundraising and the stewardship of all forms of support and funding. Key references on ethical fundraising and financial accountability codes have been used in developing the policy.

### **Purpose of this policy**

To ensure that ALERT, and any agency acting on our behalf, adopts ethical practices in raising funds, keeping records, handling disputes and maintaining the privacy of donors, and to ensure that the Trustees are kept fully informed of such practices and can be confident that such practices are being adopted.

### **Procedures and principles in relation to fundraising**

#### Donors' Rights

- a) All donors (individuals, corporations, and foundations) are entitled, if so requested, to promptly receive an official receipt from ALERT for the amount of the donation. If tax deductibility is requested the official receipt will meet the appropriate Taxation Office standards to qualify as a tax deductible receipt;
- b) All fundraising by ALERT and any of its agencies will disclose ALERT's full name, logo and the purpose for which funds are requested as well as the percentage of the funds given that will go directly to furthering ALERT's aims and objectives, and what percentage will go to administration costs or commissions payable to independent fundraisers working on our behalf. Printed solicitations (however transmitted) will also include ALERT's address and other contact information;
- c) Donors and prospective donors are entitled to the following, promptly upon request:
  - Details of ALERT's, or any of its approved funding collection agencies' registration number or appropriate documents indicating endorsement as an income tax exempt charitable entity and endorsement as a deductible gift recipient (if appropriate) as issued by the appropriate Taxation Office;
  - A list of the names of the current trustees;
  - A copy of ALERT's ethical fundraising policy document;
- d) Donors' and prospects are entitled to know, upon request, whether an individual soliciting funds on behalf of ALERT is a volunteer, an employee, or hired contractor;
- e) Donors will be encouraged to seek independent advice if ALERT or any of its approved agencies has any reason to believe that a proposed gift might significantly affect the donor's financial position, taxable income, or relationship with other family members;
- f) Donors' requests to remain anonymous will always be respected;
- g) Donors' privacy will be respected. Any donor records that are maintained by ALERT or its approved agencies will be kept confidential to the greatest extent possible. Donors have the right to see their own donor record, and to challenge its accuracy. All requests from donors or prospects requiring that fundraising contact cease will have the request honoured by ALERT and its approved agencies;
- h) ALERT and its approved agencies will UNDER NO CIRCUMSTANCES exchange, rent, or otherwise share its fundraising list with other organizations;
- i) Donors and prospects will be treated with respect by ALERT and its approved agencies. Every effort will be made to honour their requests to: limit the frequency of contacts; not be solicited by telephone or other technology; reduce or cease receiving printed or electronically transmitted material concerning ALERT;
- j) ALERT and its approved agencies will respond promptly to a complaint by a donor or prospective donor about any matter.

#### ALERT Fundraising Activities

- a) ALERT and any of its approved agencies will:
  - act truthfully and fairly in all its communications, dealings and appealing for funds;
  - accurately describe ALERT's activities and the intended use of donated funds;
  - be balanced and not apply excessive pressure or imply that funds must be donated;
  - reserve the right to refuse donations from organizations and individuals with practices inconsistent with the ideals of ALERT;
  - adhere to the spirit as well as the letter of all applicable laws and regulations pertaining to fundraising practices.
- b) ALERT Financial Accountability:
  - ALERT's financial affairs will be conducted in a responsible manner, consistent with the ethical obligations of stewardship and legal requirements of government regulations;
  - Any independent fundraisers earning commission from carrying out fundraising on behalf of ALERT may reclaim an agreed maximum percentage of the donation amount as commission upon presentation of official copies of receipts;
  - All donations will be used to support ALERT's mission, aims and objects. If the gift is restricted or designated it will be put to the area selected. All donations will in good faith be used for the purposes for which they are given;
  - No more will be spent on administration and fundraising than is required to ensure effective management and ALERT resource development;
  - The cost-effectiveness of ALERT's fundraising program will be reviewed regularly by the Trustees;
  - If ALERT's mission or objectives change or the purposes to which a gift/s are put changes the donor, where practicable to do so, must be contacted to seek their permission for any change in the designation of their original gift.



## 7. Stage Two Update

### Forming a release pride

We have started the process of forming our next release pride. There are to be seven females in this pride, comprising **Kwali, Paka, Ariel, Cleo, Amy, Melanie** and **Elsa**.

The former three have been living with each other for some time, as have the latter four, but the two parts of the pride have not met before.

Amy and Melanie are large females that are the brute force behind their group and they attack any other lion that enters their enclosure, although not seriously – they just rough them up a bit. This was the case when **Chipo** was added to the group, although the girls left **Amber, Zuva** and **Emma** alone when they were added. These four are being kept back as future breeding females but will be kept with the release pride until they are all together, and then split off into their own enclosure.

Because of Amy and Melanie we decided to go with a gentle introduction starting with Kwali, Paka and Ariel being introduced to Elsa, Cleo and Amber only to start with. The remaining girls were moved to a neighbouring enclosure and Kwali, Paka and Ariel walked from theirs to meet Cleo, Elsa and Amber. The two groups of three lions were fed at different ends of the enclosure. Over the next 24 hours Cleo repeatedly tested the youngsters, but once Amber and Elsa had decided to accept them Cleo soon settled down. No injuries were sustained during this introduction.

A couple of days later Zuva was added without incident. We will now leave the group to settle before introducing Amy and Melanie, one at a time in the next couple of weeks.





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## Release at Dollar Block

In consultation with a number of ecologists a decision was made to remove Luke and Maxwell and to replace them with one older male, whilst also adding three females to the existing pride of Phyre, Ashanti and Kenge.

Due to the onset of the rainy season these changes were delayed until March 2008, during which time the three females at the site were allowed to continue to support themselves. They have been hunting successfully, even managing to bring down and kill an adult female giraffe.

Following a period in the holding enclosures to bond Nala, Narnia and Athena to the existing females, the newly formed pride will be released in early April 2008 – watch out for our April newsletter for the story of their release; if you cannot wait for that, then join our Facebook group for more regular updates.

We have decided to release only the females to start with to allow them to become self-sustaining hunters and socially stable before the male is introduced. The male, in this case Milo, will be brought soon after to a holding enclosure adjacent to the release site. We expect that when the females are ready for him to be released we will observe a lot of interactions with him through the fence.

The three females to be released are Athena, sister of Ashanti, as well as Nala and Narnia, two sisters aged 2 years and 6 months. All three have very good hunting pedigrees. Athena when part of the 4AK group achieved a 67% hunting success rate, she herself making three of the kills. Nala and Narnia are hunting supremoes having made 18 kills between them from wildebeest to ostrich and achieving a 52% success rate on *Night Encounters*. Nala holds the position for the most kills of any lion in the program's history and is fourth in terms of percentage success rate. It is our belief that these three females will compliment the already formidable team of Ashanti, Kenge and Phyre.

To coincide with the release we have invited an independent researcher from the University of Zimbabwe to study the pride. The study will monitor the captive bred lion's adaptation into a semi-wild environment to assess their killing rates and prey selection, to record their group behaviour to determine if a pride has been formed and to assess and evaluate the contribution of captive bred lions to lion conservation in Zimbabwe. This is the first of a number of studies that we are hosting in order to provide an independent review of the program that will assist us in perfecting our release protocols.

From top right to bottom left:  
Milo  
Kenge, Phyre & Ashanti  
Athena  
Nala  
Narnia



(from left to right) *The three lionesses were darted and loaded into carrying crates for transport to the release site under the supervision of consultant vets Dr Keith Dutlow & Dr Lisa Marabini with the assistance of experienced Antelope Park. An official from the Zimbabwe Parks & Wildlife Management Authority was also on hand to monitor the move. The crates were unloaded one at a time and the lions released into a large holding enclosure adjacent to the release site. Athena explores her new home.*







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African Lion & Environmental Research Trust is a registered charity in the United Kingdom at 39 St. James's Place, London SW1A 1NS. The Charity Commission number is 1120572. Contact email [alert@africanencounter.org](mailto:alert@africanencounter.org)

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