



# LION GUARDIANS ANNUAL REPORT

— 2012 —

[WWW.LIONGUARDIANS.ORG](http://WWW.LIONGUARDIANS.ORG)

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## Executive Summary

*This year presented a broad spectrum of successes and challenges. Collaborating closely with local communities and partners, we successfully expanded the program to a new country and into a new culture. In our Amboseli site, we faced extreme levels of conflict due to political unrest and the resulting retaliation against government policies. The wildlife suffered from a situation out of the control of local conservation organizations. Yet conservation partners came together to work with the local communities and the government to find a compromise that halted the protest killing of wildlife. The determination of the Lion Guardians to protect their lions from being killed during this tumultuous time was remarkable. Against all odds, they ventured out in hostile conditions and, in impressively creative ways, deterred their own communities from killing and severely impacting their population of lions. Despite all the hardship, the unity of collaborators, the strength of the Lion Guardians and the continued signs of recovery of the lion population renewed our spirits and enabled us to continue our successful fight for the lions of Amboseli and beyond. The numbers described in the following report tell the 2012 story of extremes: the number of hunts nearly doubled from the previous year and more livestock than ever before were reported lost; yet the Guardians brought home safely more livestock than ever before and worked with livestock owners to reinforce more bomas than ever before, all while the lion population grew.*

*Most exciting is the fact that the lion population on the group ranches of Amboseli is growing! Since 2010, we have observed a continuing cub boom, and we are happy to report that the majority of the cubs are surviving to sub-adulthood. Some of the female cubs born in early 2010 have already mated and are about to have cubs of their own. When conditions are favourable, lion populations can recover rapidly. Since our 2009 surveys, we have witnessed high numbers of cubs being born with a high survival rate. If this trend continues, we will be on the way to a doubling of the lion population in just a few years!*

*The project now has over 40 traditional warriors who have all been taught literacy and field-methods such as radio-telemetry, GPS, etc. A few short years ago (or for some, just a few months ago), these Guardians could not even read or write, and now they fill out research data forms on a daily basis and accurately operate GPS and telemetry units. The resulting research data provide accurate information and improved knowledge of a formerly little understood lion population. The Lion Guardians approach provides compelling evidence that incorporating local knowledge with modern research and wildlife management techniques, and engaging local communities in lion monitoring and management can result in an effective, efficient and reliable conservation tool applicable across broad areas.*

*Each year brings challenges and successes. We are pleased with the program's many accomplishments in 2012, and we look forward to more growth, expansion and success in 2013. Many thanks to our many supporters, friends, and collaborators – together we are securing a brighter future for African lions.*



Dr. Leela Hazzah,  
Director



Dr. Stephanie Dolrenny,  
Director of Biology



## Summary of Lion Guardians Measures of Success

Performance Measure	2012	
Number of LGs and area covered (in sq km)	40/4,200	
Number of lions killed in 2012 where LGs are present	3	
Number of lions killed <b>since 2007</b> for retaliatory or traditional reasons where LG program <b>was</b> operating	3	
Number of lions killed <b>since 2007</b> for retaliatory or traditional reasons in surrounding areas where LG program was <b>not</b> operating	90	
Confirmed number of lion hunts prevented or stopped by Lion Guardians <sup>1</sup>	56	
Number of lions monitored by Lion Guardians in the Amboseli ecosystem in 2012. Density is the number of adults and sub-adults monitored each year per 100 sq km	Adults & Sub-adults <sup>2</sup>	62
	Cubs <sup>3</sup>	51
	Density	1.5
Recovery rate of lost livestock	92% (11,533 found out of 12,571 lost)	
Number of lost herders and children found	15	
Number of <i>bomas</i> reinforced by Lion Guardians	351	
Percentage of sampled livestock <i>bomas</i> reporting no further depredation after being reinforced by Lion Guardians	92%	

<sup>1</sup> 42% of these were stopped in collaboration with KWS, Big Life and Amboseli-Tsavo ecosystem Game Scouts

<sup>2</sup> Sub-adults = 2-3 yrs of age, Adults = 3+ yrs

<sup>3</sup> Cubs = 0-2yrs of age (2012 number includes 25 recent births)

## Program Background and Lion Guardians Mission

Less than sixty years ago there were an estimated 400,000-500,000 lions ranging widely across the African continent. Today, experts estimate that fewer than 30,000 remain and these remaining wild lions are only found in less than 20% of their former range. Even in Kenya, a country well-known and visited for its wildlife and protected areas, the overall lion population is declining at an alarming rate despite decades of efforts aimed at conserving lions. As of 2010, fewer than 1,970 lions remained, leading one lion expert to predict that lions could be extinct in Kenya by 2020 if immediate effective action is not taken. The main reason for lions' decline is conflict with humans, specifically with pastoralists who retaliate against lions that have attacked their livestock, and with young Maasai warriors who kill lions in a ritualistic practice to demonstrate their bravery.





Wildlife conservation efforts in Africa have traditionally focused on elephants, rhinos and apes, with far less attention placed on lions and other carnivores. And many of those focused on carnivores have too often failed to adequately involve local people or to acknowledge their cultural values, and, in our view, have consequently been ineffective. In 2007, with Kenya's lion population collapsing, the founders of the Lion Guardians program decided that a new approach to conservation was needed. They proposed a solution that, if successful, would help both to preserve the cultural traditions of the Maasai and to ensure the survival of the lion.

The Lion Guardians approach involves recruiting young, non-literate Maasai warriors to become actively engaged in protecting lions rather than killing them. Enrolment in the Lion Guardians program becomes a life-changing experience for these young Maasai who have had no formal education. Taught to read, write and communicate in Swahili, and trained in wildlife management and conflict mitigation techniques, the Lion Guardians monitor lion movements, warn pastoralists when lions are in the area, recover lost livestock, reinforce protective fencing and intervene to stop lion hunting parties. Collectively these efforts lead to a reduction in the loss of livestock, which in turn enhances the livelihoods of the local people and builds tolerance for lions and other carnivores. Notably, these conflict mitigation efforts are founded on century-old traditional techniques and thus are easily understood and accepted by the community.

Currently, 40 warriors are employed as Lion Guardians covering areas of the Amboseli/Kilimanjaro ecosystems in southern Kenya/northern Tanzania, a key wildlife corridor between Kenya and Tanzania's dwindling lion populations, as well as in central Tanzania's Ruaha ecosystem. Since the program's inception in each of these areas, the rampant lion killings in response to livestock depredation or as manhood rite-of-passage have been all but eliminated in areas with Lion Guardians. Once again in 2012, as a sign of the increased stability of the lion population, each adult lioness in Lion Guardian areas has a new litter of cubs, and a large percentage of previous litters are making it past their critical first two years to sub-adulthood. As a result, the Amboseli lion population is increasing at a steady rate, making this important ecosystem one of the few areas in Africa where lion numbers are on the rise.

Large carnivores will only survive in Africa if they contribute to, rather than detract from, people's livelihoods. Since its inception, the Lion Guardians approach has demonstrated its merit as a successful, effective and sustainable environmental conservation model. Specific details on the background of the LG program, and our mission, objectives, aims, and measures of success are available on our website, [www.lionguardians.org](http://www.lionguardians.org).

For five years, Lion Guardians operated under the umbrella of Living With Lions, which allowed our program to flourish, expand and mature. In 2012 Lion Guardians became a fully independent, non-profit entity registered in Kenya. We are deeply grateful for the guidance and support we received from Dr. Laurence Frank and Living With Lions. We are also indebted to [Panthera](#), which accepted contributions from donors around the world on our behalf.

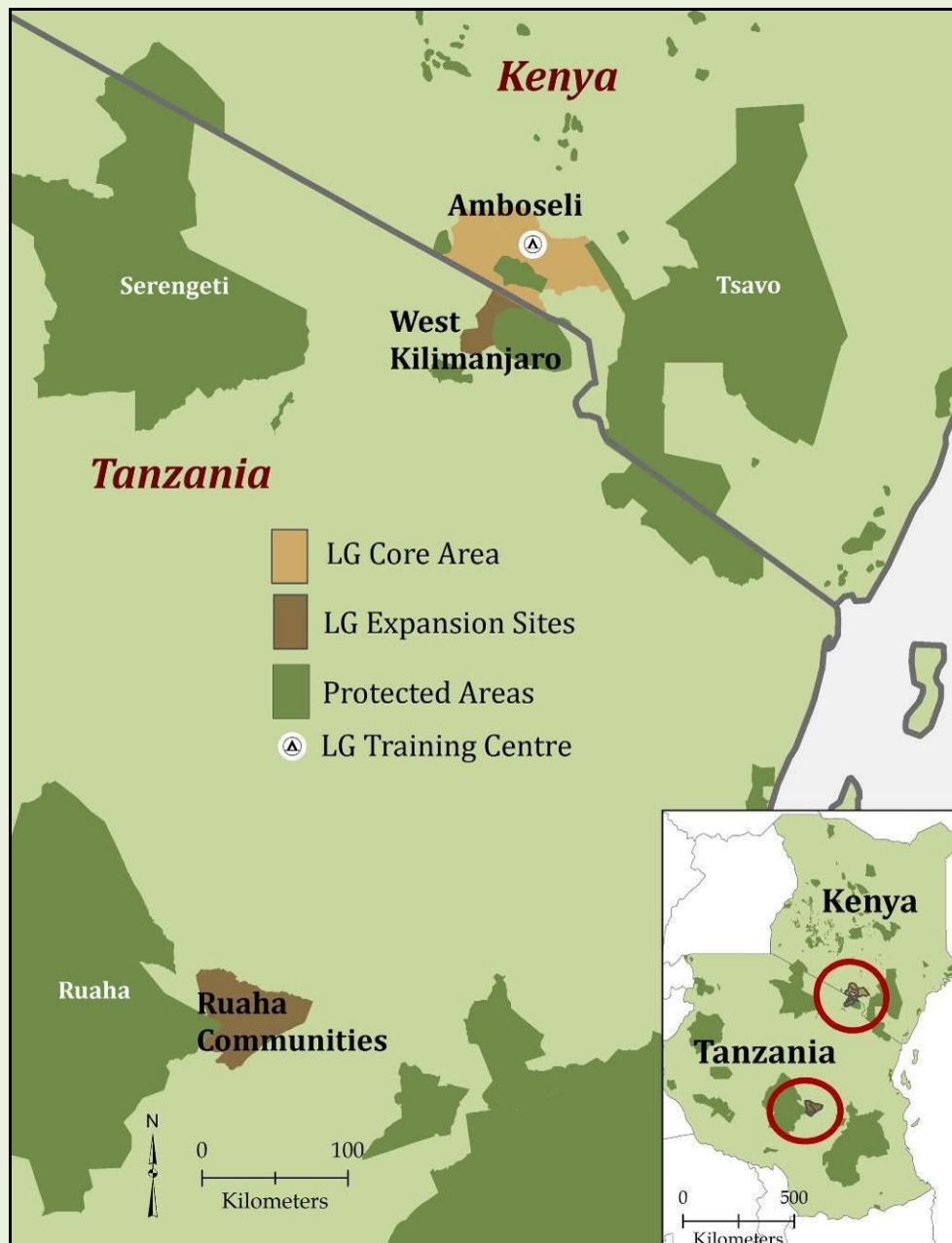


We now have a new U.S. fiscal sponsor. Wildlife Guardians, is a 501(c)(3) charitable organization in the U.S. whose mission is to promote the survival of the African lion and Africa's other imperiled native species in their natural habitats. Wildlife Guardians funds projects that eliminate illegal wildlife killing by reducing human-wildlife conflict and educating the local community on the plight of and the value of saving imperiled species, while at the same time advancing social and scientific research and policy. Wildlife Guardians supports our work throughout East Africa.



## Lion Guardian Expansions

In 2012 we were able to implement two expansions to increase the number of critical lion populations protected by Lion Guardians. Both expansions were into important areas of Tanzania (see map below). The first was to the unprotected areas outside of Ruaha National Park, home to the second largest population of lions in the world. The second was a logical southern extension of the current coverage area in Kenya's Amboseli ecosystem into northern Tanzania. These represent our first expansions into a new country and into a new culture (the Barabaig tribe in Ruaha); we are learning many lessons along the way.





## Ruaha, Tanzania

*By Victoria Shelley*

Our first expansion was into the communities northeast of Ruaha National Park in central Tanzania. The Ruaha expansion is an exciting collaboration between Lion Guardians, the [Ruaha Carnivore Project](#) and Panthera. Ruaha is Tanzania's largest National Park (22,200 km<sup>2</sup>) and together with the surrounding Wildlife Management Area, is home to an estimated 3,500 lions; this is said to be the second largest population of lions in the world. However, Ruaha is also surrounded by human communities where conflict between carnivores and livestock owners is common and lion killing is widespread.

The reason for the killing is not always retaliation for killed livestock, but rather is to earn traditional rewards; a lion killer is rewarded by his family and friends with as many as ten cows and a wife for killing a lion. We visited the Ruaha communities in October 2011 and personally witnessed the high rates of lion killing. In the first week of our visit, seven lions were killed nearby in two separate incidents.

In spring 2012, Lion Guardians Kenya hosted four influential members of the Ruaha Barabaig community at our headquarters near Amboseli so they could experience the LG program first hand and hear directly from the Amboseli community members the benefits of the program. They returned home inspired and eager to introduce the LG program to Ruaha. After the elders held several community meetings describing and promoting the program to their peers, the entire community gave their blessing to start the project.

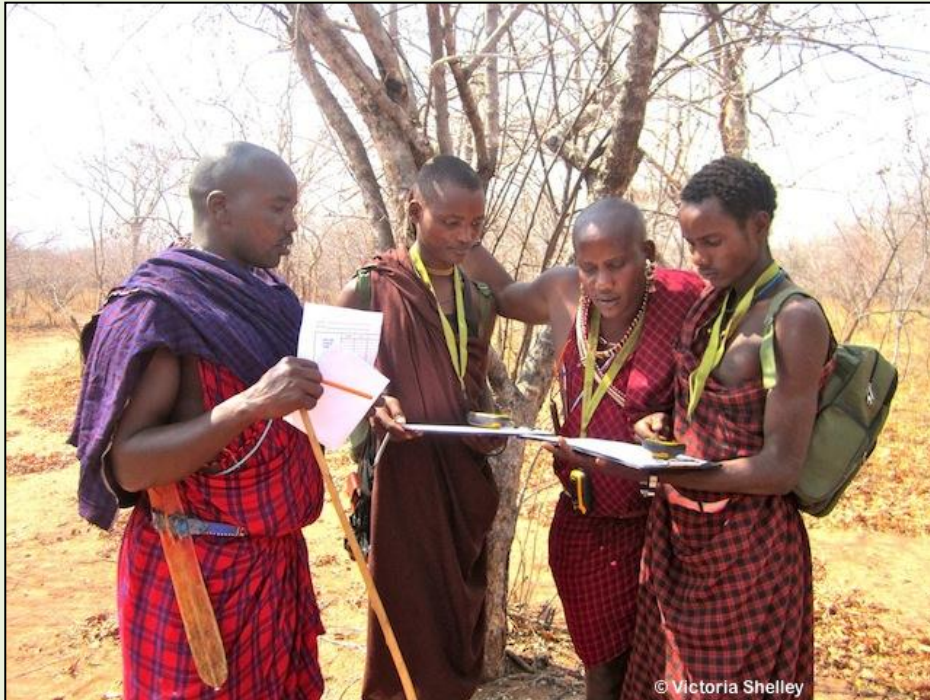


**The Ruaha Lion Guardian team in October 2012, after a training session; team members are (from left to right) Ema Kwashema, Stephano Asecheka (coordinator), Daudi Kinyoka, Tory Shelley (project manager), Mandela Dudmeka, Darem Philipo, and Gwagi Gaga**

In August 2012, we hired five young Barabaig men who previously were active lion hunters to be Ruaha's first Lion Guardians. We also hired an educated Barabaig to act as coordinator of the project. They are now protecting 113 km<sup>2</sup> of land outside Ruaha National Park. Since the start of the project Lion Guardians have recovered 293 lost livestock out of 299 reported to them (98% success rate!). They have also found three lost herders and brought them home safely.

These new Lion Guardians were trained by their more experienced Kenyan counterparts who went to Ruaha to teach the new Guardians the procedures and protocols of the project. First item on the curriculum was literacy. When they were hired, only one of the five was able to write his name; now all five can write their name as well as the name of the area where they work; they can also read and legibly fill out all data forms in Kiswahili. They were also taught how to use GPS units. The Kenyan Guardians shared with the new Ruaha Guardians their knowledge of tracking and the ways in which they could prevent lion hunts in their community, suggested possible strategies for working through community issues, and offered their views of the LGs' role in the community.





Kenyan LGs Timoine and Mokoi training the new Ruaha LGs Ema and Daudi

Following the inception of the expansion in August, ***no lions have been killed in the areas where we are operating***; while during the same five-month period in 2011, approximately 22 lions were killed by people from the areas where Lion Guardians are currently protecting. The community elders are in full support of the program and have decreed that there will be no lion hunting allowed as they recognize that having Lion Guardians employed in the region provides far more benefits for the overall community than do the individual benefits from killing lions.

We are encouraged by these results, and in 2013 we plan to continue the expansion by adding more LGs to the team to double the area protected while at the same time learning more about the lion population inside and outside of Ruaha National Park. This expansion would not have been possible without the support of the Ruaha Carnivore Project and Panthera. Read our blog to [learn more about the expansion](#) and to [meet the Ruaha LG team](#).

## Sinya, West Kilimanjaro, Tanzania

*By Philip Briggs and Luke Maamai*

In September 2012, after having finally secured our official permits from the relevant authorities, we initiated our expansion into the Sinya region of Enduimet, West Kilimanjaro, Tanzania. This region is essentially an extension southward of the Amboseli group ranches already protected by Lion Guardians. This is a critical region as lions use both sides of the border equally yet have been highly persecuted on the Tanzanian side. The communities have been waiting patiently since our first reconnaissance trip last year and we were received warmly when we returned to commence the project.

We first hired a Lion Guardians Coordinator from the area, and after holding a series of meetings with the leaders and community members, we were given the blessing to deploy suitable Lion Guardians candidates in four zones of Sinya currently experiencing high levels of conflict. After interviews with more than 30 warriors, we selected 10 to participate in a one-week trial. We selected the best candidate from each of the four zones based on tracking accuracy and strong work ethic. See our [blog](#) to read more about the new team.





The new Sinya Guardians being trained by more experienced Kenyan Guardians; (from left to right) Kisimir Olomayiani (Kenyan LG), Meitiaki Saringe, Sinjore Leboo, Yohana Lentii (coordinator), Kirisia Loonina, Sherai Saab

Kisimir Olomayiani, a senior Lion Guardian from the Amboseli Ecosystem (far left in picture above), conducted intense training with the new recruits for six weeks. Specifically, this training included basic reading and writing skills, filling out data forms for lion spoor and community work, and technical training on the use of GPS and radio-telemetry units. Training has proceeded at an excellent rate, and the new Lion Guardians are confident in their newly acquired skills. They are now able to work independently, fully executing their duties and responsibilities. Almost immediately they were able to stop a hunt of 150 angry warriors out in search of lions. Unfortunately, two lions were killed during a separate hunt after they preyed on livestock. With such a small team of only four Guardians, it was very difficult for them hear about the secret early-morning hunts. We hope that with increased support we can hire additional Lion Guardians to help further reduce conflict and killing.

### Stories from the field

An interesting incident occurred during the West Kilimanjaro/Sinya trial period. We responded to a report by candidate Meitiaki and upon reaching the place where he had located a group of four lions, we saw that a herd of cattle were about to walk directly into the thicket where the lions were lying. We rushed to the place and rerouted the herd before they entered the thicket, with only a few meters to spare! This incident showed the candidates and the herders exactly how the Lion Guardians program could benefit their communities, by preventing conflict before it happens. The



story of how we rescued the herd of cattle from an imminent encounter blazed through the communities like wildfire and the concept of our preventative approach to conflict was instantly fully understood.



Kisimir (Kenyan LG) demonstrates how to use a GPS to new Guardians Meitiaki, Sinjore, Kirisia and Sherai

We would like to thank the stakeholders in the region for their collaborations and the necessary support required to start a new project: Enduimet Wildlife Management Area has welcomed us and given us permission to work in the area; the African Wildlife Foundation has been instrumental in providing essential logistical assistance and support by helping to organize many of our meetings with the local communities, and expertise enabling us to obtain permission to operate in the area; Big Life Foundation/Honeyguide and Shu'mata camp have provided additional logistics, and the Kenya Wildlife Trust, Maliasili Initiatives and the Rufford Small Grants program have helped fund the expansion.

## Maasai Mara Recce Trips

*By Philip Briggs and Luke Maamai*

In January and August we made two separate reconnaissance trips to the Masai Mara, Narok District to survey potential sites for expansion. We focused on pinpointing areas where rates of livestock and predator conflicts are highest and determined which areas were experiencing on-going lion killing by local Maasai. These trips were highly informative; we learned much about the culture, community, conflict, killing techniques, livestock husbandry practices, and the conservation and benefits of the areas. This helped establish a baseline of where and how our model would best suit the areas surrounding the Masai Mara Reserve. Don Young was instrumental in providing his assistance and experience of the region to facilitate our visits.

## Lion Guardians Training Center

*By Philip Briggs and Luke Maamai*

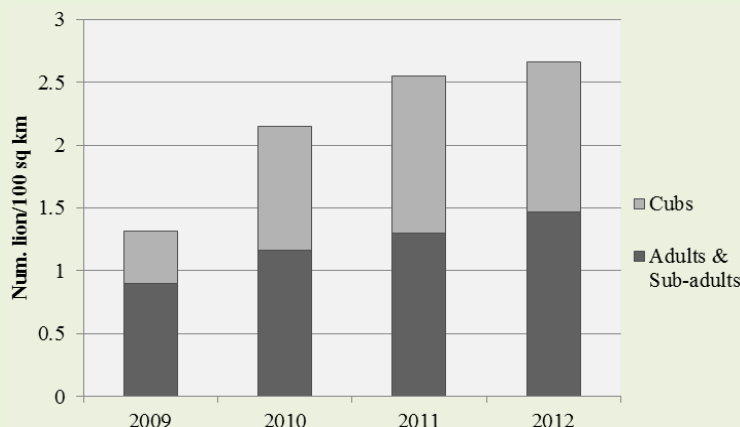
In December, we started construction on our new LG Training Center, which is centrally located in our core program area (see the map on Page 4). This new camp will serve multiple functions. It will become our new base of operations where, among other things, we will host and show community members, from both nearby areas and potential expansion sites, how the Lion Guardians program works on the ground and give them the opportunity to talk first-hand to the Guardians and local communities benefiting from the program. It will be the site where current Lion Guardians can train new Lion Guardians on our program's methods. In addition, the new facility will provide the new recruits with the opportunity to feel a part of a larger initiative and 'family'. This greatly facilitates the exchanging of ideas and techniques for stopping hunting/poaching parties, mitigating conflict, and increasing local tolerance towards carnivores and wildlife. At the training facility, recruits will meet and learn from experienced Lion Guardians as role models representing what they themselves can become.



## Monitoring of Lions & Scientific Data Collection

*By Stephanie Dolrenry & Philip Briggs*

Our efforts to monitor the lion population continue to be successful and insightful. We are pleased to announce that the lion population is growing at a steady rate (see figure below). Of the 27 cubs born in 2011, an impressive 85% have survived through 2012 with 25 additional cubs born in 2012.



The cubs born in early 2010 became sub-adults at the beginning of this year and two of them, Nenki and Meoshi, the daughters of Selenkay, have both already given birth; it is exceptional to observe females mating and giving birth before their third birthday. They are both still in the company of their mother and associates, contributing to the trend of increasingly larger prides in the region; in years past we rarely saw more than one female and her cubs together. Unfortunately, our largest pride of two males, three females and nine cubs was broken up this year when Sikiria, the pride male, was speared to death after having killed livestock while on a neighboring group ranch (see insert on page 11). But we are now observing a new pride centered on one of the Lion Guardians' favorites lions, the well-behaved lioness Nimaoui. She has always been observed on her own or with one or two males, but never with another lioness. In December 2009, she had her first litter of cubs and two of the three survived to adulthood. They are both still with Nimaoui and her new litter of two little male cubs. Coalition pair and fathers, Kasaiyo and Lormanie, occasionally join them; Nimaoui is no longer a lonely lioness.

After several years of documenting very few 'new' (previously unknown) lions to the area, during 2012 we observed two single and one pair of new males moving into the area. In addition to the three males that moved in during 2011 and have remained in the area, this influx of males is enhancing the gene pool significantly and keeping the lion population healthy. This is great news for young females of the region such as Nenki and Meoshi, but means extra competition for pride males such as Kasaiyo and Lormanie!

One pride male who has taken on extra duties this year is Pua. In late 2011, Nosioki, a collared lioness, was poisoned along with one of her and Pua's ten-month-old cubs. Surprisingly, the other cub, Oloishiro, survived the incident. After some time on his own, he managed to link up with his father. Pua, estimated to be over 10 years old, is, to our knowledge, the oldest male lion currently in the ecosystem and although it is quite unusual for a young cub to travel with only an adult male, the two took up company. Oloishiro endured the devastating loss of his mother at an early age but thanks to Pua's paternal assistance, he has now managed to survive to sub-adulthood.

Conversely, this year we saw a good lion go bad. Noldoinyo, a lioness who over the past three years has rarely taken livestock, began habitually attacking cows. Her previous good behavior was particularly notable because during early 2010, when a severe drought hit and nearly every lion was regularly attacking livestock, Noldoinyo was raising five



cubs (four males, one female) mostly on her own – but still preyed on livestock less frequently than the other lions. Since the beginning of 2012, she and her five sub-adult offspring have been systematically taking lost livestock from the bush. We are trying to understand why, after years of peaceful coexistence, Noldoinyo has turned to livestock when, conversely, other lions have returned to wild prey after subjecting the communities to a difficult period of increased livestock depredation following the 2009 drought.

The Lion Guardians have continued to routinely conduct spoor counts along transects in their community areas. In 2012, they completed over 2,000 transects, surveying over 25,000 kilometers for tracks of lions and other predator and prey species. Their data are useful for analysis of population trends, and also understanding patterns of lion use of Maasai communities. We thought lions would actively avoid the areas immediately surrounding *bomas* and areas frequented by the warriors who hunt them, but from our data we have found that although lions do use the *boma* areas less frequently than other areas farther away from people, they still very regularly come near to homesteads.



**Lion Guardian, Ngida, tracking lions in his zone adjacent to Amboseli National Park**

Once Lion Guardians make reports about lions, the monitoring team verifies the accuracy of a sample of these reports. Ideally the reporting Guardian should count the number of lion tracks accurately, correctly identify gender of the lions, and identify which specific individual lions are present. Over the past three years we verified over 300 reports, which represents a majority of those filed, and have been very impressed with the consistency and precision of the Guardians. Having recently expanded the project into Sinya, Tanzania, we were able to verify reports of new volunteers who were making lion reports. These volunteers were untrained warriors without any formal training on how to count lion tracks or predict genders; they were only using their traditional ecological knowledge. We wanted to compare the difference between a raw untrained warrior and a trained Lion Guardian; the results were surprising. A trained Lion Guardian is able to accurately count tracks 90% of the time and identify gender 92% of the time. The untrained warrior's accuracy registered at 50% and 67%, respectively. Now that the new Sinya Guardians have been selected and their intensive training has begun, we expect their report accuracy to rise to similar levels of precision as those of their peers in the Amboseli region. These types of data help inform us of the effectiveness of our work at training and educating local warriors to become Lion Guardians.

In summary, we have continued to closely monitor and study this lion population that lives surrounded by humans and their livestock. After years of hard work by both biologists and LGs, we are finally able to reliably calculate growth rates and survival rates and to know the lions of the Maasai lands of Amboseli and beyond. Over the next



year we will expand the methods we have developed in the Amboseli region to our new sites in Tanzania so we can achieve equal understanding of, and bring equal protection to, the lions in those regions. Additionally, we have implemented several new methods that focus on studying the specific livestock depredation behavior of individual lions, and lion response to different mitigation measures used post-depredation. We hope to continue uncovering and implementing the most effective mitigation techniques for peaceful coexistence between pastoralists and lions.

## Conflict, Community, and Coexistence (and politics!)

*By Eric Ole Kesoi & Luke Mamaai*

This year livestock depredation by large carnivores was rampant both within areas covered by the Lion Guardians program and those outside. This was mainly due to the high number of livestock 'lost' - i.e. left out in the bush overnight to graze. The Lion Guardians and other stakeholders within the Amboseli ecosystem worked in close collaboration to mitigate this conflict and their intervention played a critical role. However, a single incident in July threatened this success and even the very existence of Amboseli as a National Park. A rogue buffalo killed a young



herder and when the community asked the government for compensation, it was snubbed by government officials (Kenya Wildlife Service, KWS) and the community became enraged. A series of meetings were held in which current and past grievances against KWS were brought forward. At the core of these grievances was the fact that the group ranches adjacent to Amboseli National Park, ranches that support 85% of the total area wildlife population and

### Death of a King

The greatest loss to the Lion Guardian program this year was the killing of Sikiria, a collared male lion we have been monitoring for years, on neighbouring Kuku Group Ranch, an area with no LG presence. Sikiria was collared on Eselenkei in 2009. Since then his travels have taken him far and wide, covering nearly 7,000 km<sup>2</sup>. To our knowledge, he has one of the largest documented ranges outside those of the desert lions of Namibia. Sikiria had always been a problem lion but the Lion Guardians, in conjunction with other stakeholders within the Amboseli ecosystem, all contributed to his protection until he met his fate. In late June, Sikiria attacked a herd of cows mid-day deep inside Kuku, killing one of them. The cows were being herded by three warriors who they immediately took arms and speared him. In response he seriously injured two of the warriors while the third ran home calling for reinforcements.



Many warriors came to their rescue and speared Sikiria to death. We will miss Sikiria but will never forget him. Over the past few years, he has mated with more than six females, siring over nine cubs. Sikiria will not only be remembered for a record-size range, but also for leading one of the first and largest prides found in community areas, a total of 14 lions in one family group.

thereby incur heavy costs related to living with this wildlife, receive less than 3% of the total revenue generated by tourism in the park.

With the dates for a national election drawing near (set for March 2013), local and county politics took center stage and the community relationship with KWS broke down quickly. As a way of getting immediate attention, the community was incited by its leaders to target key wildlife species for killing, and all community members working for the conservation organizations were ordered to not interfere or intervene with the deadly mission. As a result, for almost one and one-half months, a dark cloud of uncertainty fell over the larger Amboseli ecosystem. During this period, the region experienced numerous hunts that resulted in the death of at least five elephants, three buffalos and one lion. The human cost of the conflict was also significant as several people were injured, mostly by wildlife officials, 31 of them badly enough to require admission to medical facilities and 44 warriors were arrested.

During the most intense conflict period in July, when tension ran exceptionally high, there were approximately 40 lion hunts. Only one, however, in an area adjacent to Amboseli Park, was successful. During this difficult time, we worked closely with other conservation groups, such as Big Life Foundation and the various game scouts from the group ranches to limit the damage where possible (Big Life's Richard Bonham flew his plane daily to identify where hunts were taking place).

One of the most remarkable things during this time was the dedication and courage exemplified by the Lion Guardians. Although we asked them to stop work (as mandated by their community leaders) in order to protect them from harm, they were out every day in the bush stopping their peers from going after "their" lions. Each Lion Guardian had his own creative technique to stop hunts: the shyer ones would pretend they were gathering with their peers to hunt the lions and, once integrated within the group, would lead the warriors in the opposite direction of the lions. Another told his peers that the collared lion they were following had a camera attached to the collar that would automatically take pictures and send them to KWS. On one specific hunt, five Lion Guardians came together and, between dodging buffalo and elephant stampedes, used traditional mitigation techniques to convince the warriors to return to their homes - which amazingly worked! We have always realized the strong bond between the Lion Guardian and "their" lions but we never truly understood the extent the Guardians will go to protect them. So although this was a very difficult time in Amboseli, it provided us with a rare opportunity to observe the full magnitude and value of the LG program in protecting lions. In addition, it exemplified the importance of collaborating with partnered groups (like Richard Bonham/Big Life) during such turbulent times in the ecosystem.



**A lion hunt being stopped by Lion Guardians during the political turmoil in 2012**



In July a meeting attended by KWS, top leadership and elected representatives of Amboseli-Tsavo group ranches helped return things to normal. As a result, KWS increased the revenue sharing to the group ranches adjacent to Amboseli park from 13 million to 20 million Kenyan Shillings per year (a 53% increase bringing it to a total of approx. \$235,000), and the communities are eagerly awaiting the passage of the **2011 Wildlife Bill** which is currently stuck in parliament. Even though the increase in revenue sharing did not meet communal expectations or demands, the killing spree stopped and tolerance levels normalized.

In an effort to continue to mitigate conflict across the ecosystem, Lion Guardians engaged in various activities in their community. A total of 351 *bomas* were reinforced by the LGs. At the end of the year, we sampled 35% of these *bomas* to ascertain whether they experienced further depredation post reinforcement, and out of these less than 8% of owners reported further depredation after LG help. The LGs also helped stop several crimes: one LG stopped the rape of a schoolgirl on his way home from his daily patrols; another Guardian saw and reported to the local authorities a team of armed bandits who were then later apprehended in the nearby town of Mbirikani.

Lion Guardians also played a major role in recovering lost livestock, many of which could have been killed by carnivores if left unrecovered. Traditional livestock husbandry practices are eroding as more and more children are going to school and many warrior age herders go to cities to try to find work, leaving only the children too young to attend school available to herd. These young children often lose their livestock and get lost themselves! This year the LGs found 15 lost herders and returned them to their homes safely.



Lion Guardian Mokoi recovering a lost calf

In the Amboseli area alone, 12,272 livestock were reported lost to LGs, they managed to safely recover 11,240 (7,097 goats/sheep and 4,143 cattle), a recovery rate of 92% that translates into over \$1 million of potential loss to the community avoided because of the LG's help!



Lion Guardian Parkesian helping to find a lost herd of livestock





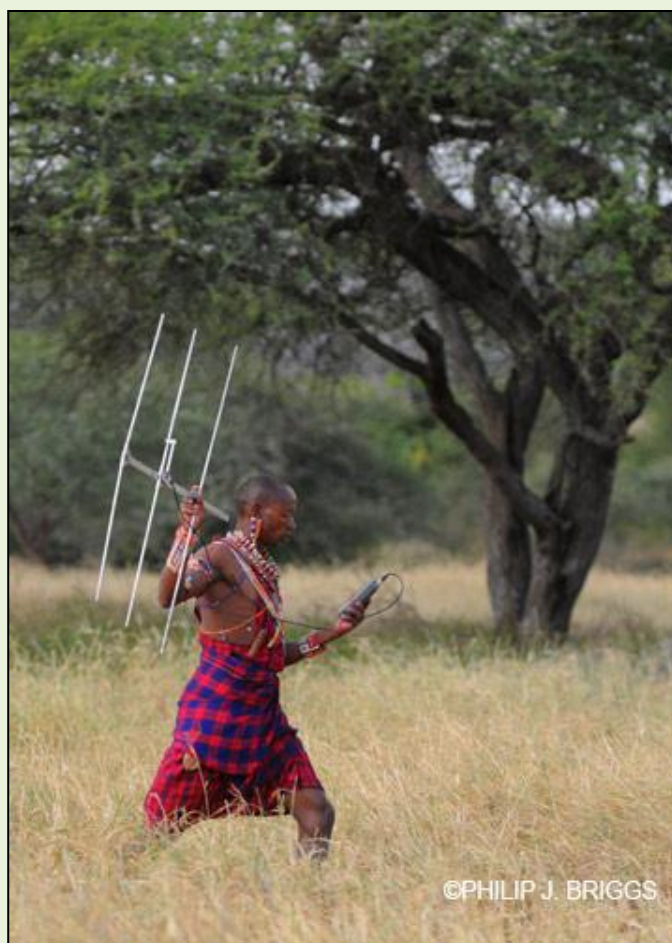
## The Lion Guardian Games and Awards

*By Eric Ole Kesoi*

The third Lion Guardian Games were held on the expansive plains at the foot of Chyulu ranges and was made possible through the generous support of Eco-Sys Action. The Lion Guardians, who had been looking forward to the games with great anticipation and excitement, were not disappointed because, true to its nature, the Games lived up to their expectations. Drawn from all four corners of the Amboseli ecosystem, the Guardians exhibited the competitive spirit of true traditional Maasai warriors. Surprisingly, from all the winners of the previous two games, only one Lion Guardian managed to defend his title while the rest were dethroned.

This year, we added a new event called “the receiver challenge” to test the Guardians’ telemetry skills. The challenge required the participants to follow radio signals from a lion’s collar that had been placed over the neck of a goat and hidden in the deep bush. Three Guardians (one selected from each ranch) competed to find his respective goat and herd it back to camp.

Overall, Eselenkei Group Ranch won four of the six competitions, keeping the group championship title they won last year. The most coveted recognition among the LGs are the special awards that are given to those individuals who have had an immense impact on the program through their hard work, determination, tenacity, and creativity to step up and stop lion hunts and help their community in times of need.



**Kamunu (the winner!) during the receiver challenge**



## 2012 Award Winners



Directors Stephanie and Leela present Lion Guardian Kamunu with his award for Greatest Program Impact while Luke, program manager, happily observes

**Greatest Program Impact** -- **Kamunu Saitoti**, from Eselenkei, has shown eloquence and impressive leadership skills. He is seen as a leader by the other Lion Guardians. His ability to improve communal tolerance towards carnivores in a conflict-prone zone placed him above the rest.

**Most Reliable Award** -- **Leparakuo Shuaka**, from Eselenkei, was rewarded for continuously being quick to respond to conflicts, effective monitoring of his zone, readiness to work at all hours of the day, finding four lost young herders this year, and for his flexibility at work (sometimes working throughout the night if needed).

**Most Improved Award** -- **Jackson Leposo**, from southern Olgulului, quickly mastered the use of telemetry, improved his writing skills, and demonstrated that he is one of the most reliable LGs with regard to collection of accurate data as well as phoning in the highest number of reports all year.

**Community Impact Award**-- **Masarie Ologela**, from Mbirikani, in 2012 fenced and/or repaired 32 bomas that had been visited by carnivores, none of which experienced any further incursions, and recovered 1,323 out of 1,390 lost livestock in 2012.

**Innovation Award**-- **Samanya Lerionka**, from Olgulului, managed to stop 14 lion hunts in 2012 by using innovative and creative techniques such as telling a hunting party that if they kill a collared lion the collar will take a picture of the killers and send it directly to the authorities.

**Beyond the Call of Duty**--**Mingati Makarot**, from Mbirikani, organized fellow Lion Guardians to venture into conflict prone areas beyond the jurisdiction of the project in search of a collared lion who had gone missing for months (and found him!), took the lead on training new LGs in his zone, held multiple project meetings at his home, and stopped multiple hunting parties.

## Warrior Transition

By Eric Ole Kesoi and Luke Maamai

In April, several meetings were convened by the new warrior (*murrān*) age-set (*Ittuati*) requesting the handing over of the reins of power from the three senior *murrān* traditional chiefs in the ecosystem. Each traditional chief convened an official meeting and in the presence of both junior and senior *murrāns* as well as elders announced the official hand-over. Subsequent community meetings were held in every zone where the new age-set was given counsel. The new warriors were permitted by elders to begin the life of *murrān* and to abide by all the traditional rules (e.g., they cannot eat anything with fat in it that is cooked by a traditional Maasai woman, etc.). They were alerted to the changing times and expectations of *murrāns* by their community and reminded of existing laws of the land. They were strongly prohibited from lion killing in particular and other retrogressive cultural practices in general. There will be one last ceremony, *Ongesheer*, probably in late spring, which will officially mark the end of the older warriors transitioning into elders.

In keeping with the Maasai tradition regarding the institution of *murrānism*, now that the senior *murrāns* have conferred their responsibilities and powers to the new age-set this year, we have started incorporating some of the *Ittuati* from every group ranch into the Lion Guardians program; we now have a total of five *Ittuati* spread out throughout the ecosystem. It will be very important to continue to hire the new warriors, as they will be able to prevent traditional lion hunts from happening. However, keeping the older more experienced LGs is also exceptionally important in terms of preventing retaliatory lion killing, as the new warriors are still too young and inexperienced (and of course lack overall respect that is gained only with time) to deal with these complex situations.



New *Ittuati* Guardians Nchama and Noah with older LGs Kapande and Olubi

## Academics, Media, and Visitors

By Lisette Gelber & Philip Briggs

Stephanie successfully defended her PhD dissertation in January 2013. Congrats Dr. Dolrenny!

Leela and Stephanie have been working to analyze and write-up the years of research they have been conducting in the Amboseli area. This past year they submitted four papers for peer-review on subjects ranging from evaluation of conservation interventions to lion use of areas near Maasai *bomas*. Currently, one is in press that focuses on how Maasai experiences during drought situations affect their tolerance toward lions.

In October, Leela gave talks at the Human Dimension of Wildlife conference in Colorado, and also spoke at the international conference 'Involving Local Communities in Nature Conservation - Developing a Toolbox' held in Italy.

Lugard Lenaiyasa completed a summer internship with us, which focused on an ecosystem wide survey and evaluation of the LG program.

In the spring, we launched our new website [www.lionguardians.org](http://www.lionguardians.org). We encourage you to regularly visit the site to get the most current news on the lions and Lion Guardians. You can also keep up to date by reading the [Lion Guardians' blog](#) that describes their work in the field and their efforts to protect and monitor **more than 100** lions.

Don't forget to follow us on [Twitter](#) and [Facebook](#) too! We also issued our first [Newsletter](#) in October.

Following the May 2011 visit of [Maliasili Initiative's](#) Executive Director Fred Nelson, Andrew Williams (also with Maliasili Initiatives) visited in August 2012 to conduct a SWAT session to assist in the development of a long term strategic plan for LG. This was followed by a meeting in Washington DC. The final document will be ready by early 2013.

In April, Lion Guardians was selected from a field of 208 nominees as the winner of the highly prestigious [St Andrews Prize for the Environment](#). Awarded annually, the St. Andrews Prize is a joint environmental initiative by the University of St Andrews in Scotland and the international energy company ConocoPhillips, an initiative that aims to find practical solutions to environmental challenges from around the globe. The prize is awarded to the project that best displays a combination of good science, economic realism and political acceptability.

Lion Guardians was also chosen as one of six lion projects featured by the new Association of Zoos and Aquariums Lion Species Survival Plan conservation website which is under development.

Africa Geographic published an article called 'Guardians of the Lions' about the LGs written by journalist Anthony Ham (Volume 20, Number 4, May 2012) and our own Philip J. Briggs took all of the photographs([download here](#)). Lion Guardians is also featured in the new Lonely Planet Kenya travel book (see pg. 95).

We are making a short educational film aimed specifically at giving communities a complete understanding of what the program provides. The film, which will be in two versions of Maa and Swahili (with English subtitles), will be brought to potential expansion sites and shown in areas where LGs currently work to further explain the program. This will provide opportunities to engage communities in discussions about conservation so we can better understand how to target our efforts. Kire Godal (Malaika production) is filming and producing the movie, with the help of Philip J. Briggs. The film will be complete by March 2013. The BBC visited for several days to film a segment on Lion Guardians which will be included in the documentary series hosted by Sir David Attenborough called "Africa". Sir David met with some of the Guardians, including Olubi, who was the main feature of the segment. The first episode of the six-part series aired on January 2nd, 2013, on BBC One in the UK and January 8<sup>th</sup>, 2012 on Discovery Channel in the US; the Lion Guardians will be part of the final episode which focuses on conservation efforts in Africa. Video footage, taken by our own Philip J. Briggs, of a lion grabbing a remote camera and running away with it in her mouth, will also be included in the production.

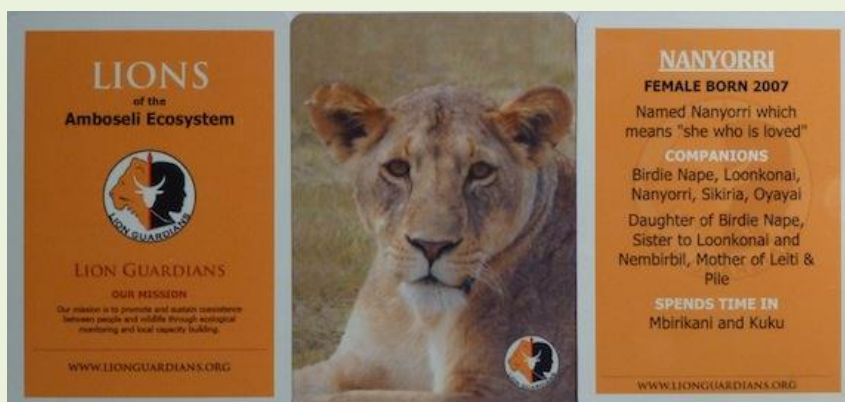
**Sir David  
Attenborough with  
Lion Guardian  
Olubi Lairumbe**







Thanks to the support of Mari Snyder Johnson, we have created decks of cards with pictures and background information on 53 of our favorite lions in the Amboseli Ecosystem. These decks will be distributed throughout the communities to foster interaction and familiarity with the lions.



## Looking Forward

*By Leela Hazzah and Stephanie Dolrenry*

We are very excited about Lion Guardians' strong momentum and in 2013 we intend to focus on strategically scaling up our program while also maintaining our positive results in our current working areas. The Lion Guardians training center, the new LG education film, as well as our focus on hiring additional higher level staff, will enable us to grow the program efficiently and effectively. Our core program in Amboseli is being capably run by local coordinators and we hope that over the next few years, which will be filled with intense training and experience, our new expansion sites will need less and less external supervision as well. In addition, our tenured Lion Guardians, with their perfected skills and knowledge, are proving to be huge assets because of their natural ability to train new Guardians at expansion sites, and their exemplary performance this year showing that they are ready to transition to higher positions, such as LG coordinator. Over the years, we have discovered that dedication, passion, and local knowledge supersedes formal education, and that our most gifted conservationists are those men who have devoted many years to saving lions in their communities as Lion Guardians. Therefore, a major push next year will be to focus on capacity building at all levels of our program.

Furthermore, in our drive to apply and share the Lion Guardians model as broadly as possible, we will continue to visit and evaluate potential expansion sites, especially in areas that are experiencing rapid decline in lion numbers due to conflict with pastoralist groups. We also plan to invite various conservation groups from East and Southern Africa to visit our training center with their teams, so that we can provide them with training on our community conservation and carnivore monitoring techniques.

Finally, we are planning to hold a series of meetings with the many other lion conservation projects in East Africa to develop an umbrella organization that will provide a platform for sharing ideas and methodologies, allow the group to apply for large-scale funding, an approach that could provide access to funding otherwise unavailable to smaller organizations, and encourage a higher degree of accountability and transparency between organizations. This should help ensure that the most sound conservation efforts are being executed on the ground, thereby offering the best possibilities for saving the greatest number of lions throughout East Africa.





## Acknowledgements

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Our work is impossible without collaboration in the field. In 2012 the following partners contributed to the success of the Lion Guardians program: Kenya Wildlife Service, Big Life Foundation, Porini Ecotourism, Kenya Wildlife Trust, African Wildlife Foundation, Enduimet Wildlife Management Area, Ruaha Carnivore Project, Amboseli Trust for Elephants, and Tazama!Trust. Ol Donyo Wuas Lodge, Porini Amboseli Camp, Ker and Downey, and Shu'mata Lodge have also been incredibly helpful by providing logistical assistance.

We, of course, want to note our immense appreciation of our donors without whom essentially none of our work in 2012 would have been possible. We owe a great deal of thanks to you for your support of our expansions and for your continued support of our work in Amboseli. We would also like to acknowledge our many personal friends and donors who provide our team with valuable time and advice. And finally, we would like to thank all of those who provided us with advice, pro-bono or discounted services, gave anonymously or gave at other levels not individually recognized below, as well as our many faithful blog readers and Facebook fans – all help and support is meaningful and helps us spread the word.

### **\$100,000 and above**

Living With Lions  
St. Andrews Prize for the Environment

### **\$20,000 - \$99,999**

Kenya Wildlife Trust  
Maliasili Initiatives  
Panthera  
The Woodtiger Fund

### **\$5,000 - \$19,999**

Tia Flanagan, Parker & Annie Bosche,  
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Mari Snyder Johnson  
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Shu'mata lodge guests

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Susi Ma  
T. James Construction (Todd Oliver)  
Taylor Jones  
Teresa Norton  
The Benindi Fund  
TJ Girard  
Tom Schultz  
Tom Watson  
Velda Brown



***Wishing you all a happy, healthy, and peaceful 2013***

## *The Lion Guardians Team*



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Philip Briggs  
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Masarie Ologela  
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Metito Rikoyian Nkii Lokileti  
Mingati Ole Makarot  
Mingati Ole Munke  
Mokoi Lekanayia  
Nchaama Parsioko  
Ng'inda Tinayo  
Noah Solonga  
Olubi Lairumbe  
Parkesian Ole Saitoti  
Perkepu Nketuma  
Pilenanka Medidingi Mankokoyo  
Samanya Lerionka Kombe  
Sitonik Mulii  
Sunte Mpoko  
Timoine Olamayiani

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Stephano Asecheka  
Victoria Shelley

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Sinjore Leboo  
Yohana Lentii