



2023:

*The Year
of Resilience*

IMPACT
REPORT

LION
GUARDIANS



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OPENING LETTER FROM THE SENIOR MANAGEMENT TEAM

Dear supporters,

The year 2023 started with a major challenge for the Lion Guardians family. Our headquarters and home in Amboseli was taken from us as a result of the land-subdivision phenomenon that is taking place across the entire ecosystem. Our strength and unity as a team was truly put to the test.

After many long days of deliberations, together we decided to embrace the challenge of losing our camp and headquarters and turn it into an opportunity. From that moment on we were assigned responsibilities and every person played a crucial role in finding available land and our new home.

Thanks to our dedicated supporters, community leadership, and community members who are the pillars of our support, we did find a new home. As we moved and built our new camp, we continued with business as usual - mitigating human-lion-livestock conflicts, conducting our annual lion census, and supporting communities in our operating area.

Throughout 2023, we experienced many successes. In June, we were thrilled to host a few members of our Lion Guardians US Board and other new supporters. They were the first visitors to our new camp. The Board played a vital role in helping us acquire new land, and it was a true honor to have the opportunity to host them. In addition, throughout the year we enjoyed fruitful collaborations with Kenya Wildlife Service (KWS), Wildlife Research and Training Institute (WRTI), and Kajiado County, which enabled us to conduct a successful and collaborative lion census for the Amboseli ecosystem. These collaborations symbolize the importance of our continued efforts to monitor and protect the growing lion population.

Towards the end of the year, the entire Senior Management Team (SMT) was extremely excited about leading the development of the Lion Guardians Strategy for the next three years (2024-2027). This is the first time that we have developed the organization's strategy without the full involvement of the directors. Finally, to finish the year on a high, we received plenty of rain across the ecosystem that rejuvenated the dry lands. Communities, livestock, and lions completed the year happy and thriving.

- Lion Guardians Senior Management Team (John Merishi, Eric Ole Kesoi, Maria Saruni, Luke Maamai, Jeremiah Purka, James Silankei, Pauline Kamua, Nadia de Souza, and Philip Briggs).



OUR MISSION

TO PROMOTE SUSTAINABLE COEXISTENCE
BETWEEN PEOPLE AND LIONS BY COMBINING
INDIGENOUS VALUES AND KNOWLEDGE WITH
RIGOROUS SCIENCE AND COMMUNITY OWNERSHIP.

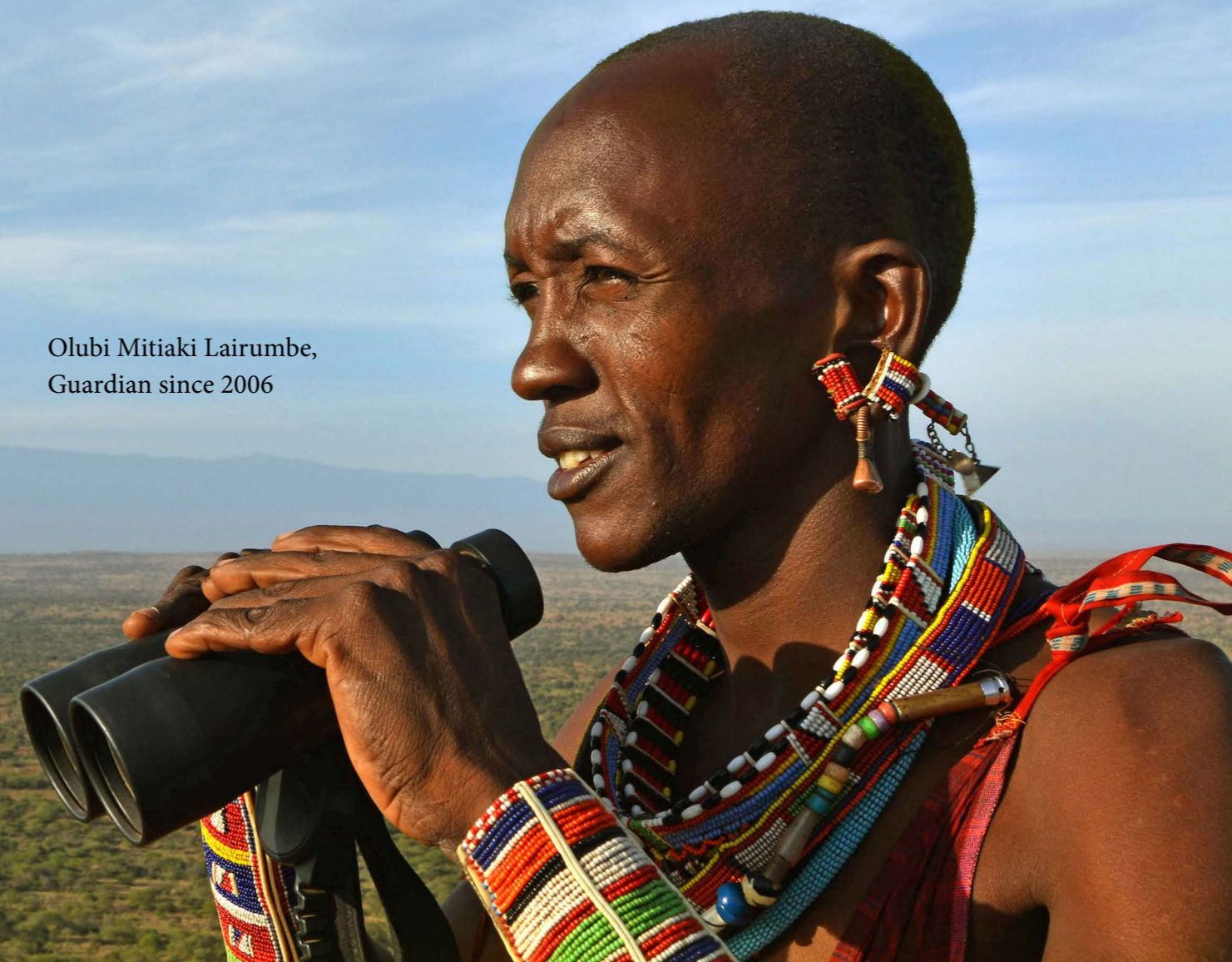
OUR VISION

A HEALTHY ENVIRONMENT
AND THRIVING
COMMUNITIES WHERE
PEOPLE AND LIONS COEXIST.

OUR CORE VALUES

- **PARTICIPATION AND COMMUNITY ORIENTED**
The participation of local communities as full and active partners in all of our work.
- **TRUST**
Relationships of trust within our organization, with our partners, our donors and supporters, and with all of the communities with whom we work.
- **SCIENCE-BASED**
Conservation programs based on science, and the integration of social and biological sciences, including traditional and Indigenous knowledge.
- **VALUING COEXISTENCE**
Strong links between local cultural values and conservation programmatic elements.
- **COLLABORATIVE**
Partnerships and collaborations are key to achieving long-lasting and broad conservation and livelihood impacts.

Olubi Mitiaki Lairumbe,
Guardian since 2006



WHO WE ARE



OUR MODEL

Lion Guardians is a conservation organization dedicated to finding and enacting long-term solutions for people and lions to coexist. Founded in 2006, Lion Guardians began with five Guardians in one small area within the Amboseli-Tsavo ecosystem in the heart of southern Kenya. Currently, there are Lion Guardians-based projects successfully running in several countries across Africa. In our core area of Amboseli, our operations span nearly a million acres.

Central to our mission is the belief that effective conservation requires a blend of Indigenous cultural traditions, community ownership, and rigorous scientific methodologies. Over the past two decades, we have worked towards our vision of transferring ownership of the organization to the communities residing alongside lions. Today, after two decades dedicated to conservation efforts at our core site, Lion Guardians has successfully transitioned into being majority operated and owned by local Maasai community members and Kenyans, ensuring the continued preservation of lions and their habitat.

Founded on local value systems, community participation, and science, Lion Guardians' conservation model is based on research and rigorous measures of success. Our approach involves recruiting young, traditional Maasai and other pastoralist warriors to learn the skills needed to effectively mitigate conflicts between people and wildlife, monitor lion populations, and help their communities live with lions. By actively engaging in our solutions-based conservation model, people who were once lion killers are transformed into lion protectors.

Guardians and Master Herders L-R: Lonyori Moile, Joel Molinka, Kikanai Kupese, Sunte Ole Mpoko, Soipei Lootu



HIGHLIGHTS OF 2023




Lion Loisule,
born 2005,
Selenkay Conservancy

CONSERVATION LAND FOR FUTURE GENERATIONS

2023 started with unexpected news that would change the course of our conservation efforts. After receiving notice that we had to leave our old camp headquarters (land that we had lived on since 2012), we decided to turn the challenge of losing our camp into an opportunity. After an extensive search, in March 2023, Lion Guardians officially secured land and established a new home – a 189-acre plot of land in the Eselenkei Group Ranch, adjacent to the Eselenkei Conservancy and wildlife corridor. This land is prime lion habitat, with one of the highest density of lion use in the ecosystem. By securing this land for conservation, we also extend and safeguard native habitat for other megafaunas such as elephants, leopards, cheetahs, buffalo, and a fantastic array of smaller fauna that are declining rapidly across the continent such as the African aardwolf, armadillo, African porcupine, civet, African wildcat, and more.

We are excited about the opportunities that come with a new home, as it allows us to fully harness our conservation endeavors, continue strengthening our collaboration with our Maasai community partners, keep land available for wildlife, promote pastoralism, and continue safeguarding lions across the Amboseli ecosystem.



"Landscape is always constant while the human population keeps increasing. It is important that we preserve the space available for future generations and also for the sake of nature."

Kokoyo Moonka, Guardian



FIRST CAME THE DROUGHT, THEN CAME THE CONFLICT

In 2022, we predicted that one of the worst droughts ever experienced across East Africa would come to an end at the beginning of 2023. With the ending drought, human-lion-livestock conflicts would rise across the ecosystem. Oftentimes prey revitalized by the long-awaited rains compels lions to target the weaker herds, leaving livestock owners understandably less tolerant, especially after losing so many livestock during the long drought.


We based our predictions on a recurring pattern that we identified from our two decades of work in pastoralist areas, recognizing the link between conflict and the changing global climate. We have seen increased droughts that last longer than before, and when the rains do come, they are more intense (meaning we may get fewer rains but the rains are heavier). These intense rains and drought periods lead to huge losses of livestock for the pastoralist communities. By the end of the recent drought, many livestock owners had lost the majority of their herds and had spent all their savings attempting to keep their remaining few animals alive. When the rains did finally come, people initially celebrated only to see illnesses hit the remaining herds hard, leaving the community devastated, starving, and with very little tolerance for more loss.

In the first half of 2023, the predictions we made in 2022 materialized, and we experienced heightened conflict across the ecosystem. During the conflict, nine lions lost their lives within our areas of operation, and, to our knowledge, at least ten lions were killed adjacent to our areas of operation.

One of these losses was the legendary Loonkiito. Towards the end of his life, Loonkiito found himself living on borrowed time due to the favorable drought conditions for lions (i.e., weakened prey) and thanks to the invaluable support from his son, Ng'erbis, who further enhanced his ability to secure easy meals. However, when the drought broke and wild prey became harder to catch, Loonkiito became exceptionally thin and weak. Despite his reputation for avoiding bomas (livestock enclosures), in Loonkiito's final moments, he resorted to a desperate search for food. During the night, he entered a boma just outside the national park on Kimana Group Ranch, where he was speared by the homestead owner acting in self-defense to safeguard livestock and human lives.

In January 2023, we celebrated Loonkiito's 19th birthday, which likely made him the world's oldest wild lion. At Lion Guardians, we feel privileged to have witnessed and worked to protect [the life of this legend](#), and we are deeply saddened by the loss of all lions throughout the tense conflict period witnessed in early 2023.

Lion Loonkiito,
born 2004,
Amboseli N.P.

A Maasai herder, wearing a red shuka and holding a long wooden staff, leads a large herd of cattle through a dusty, arid landscape at sunset. The herd consists of various breeds of cattle, including brown, black, and white. The background features rolling hills and sparse vegetation under a warm, golden sky. The overall scene conveys a sense of traditional pastoral life in a challenging environment.

"Even the Maasai from Tanzania and the Mara weren't spared, drought is the biggest evil of our livelihoods. It doesn't spare anyone, neither our loved livestock nor our beautiful land."

Olegei Lankoi, community member of Eselenkei Group Ranch

MITIGATION PUT TO THE TEST

Despite the increase in human-lion-livestock conflict, the Amboseli-Tsavo ecosystem and its intertwined human and lion communities demonstrated remarkable resilience in 2023. Combining the team's knowledge with local Maasai traditions, we had created a conflict mitigation toolkit that works. As a result, we were able to mitigate many incidents both before and after the conflict, saving numerous lions from certain deaths.

One technique we use to prevent conflict is mock hunts, where we enact Maasai traditions to chase lions away from areas of high tension (what we call "hotspots"). Mock hunts serve to both scare the lions and keep them away from people and livestock. In 2023, our team carried out 12 mock hunts across the group ranches, focusing our efforts on the worst boma offenders and chronic problem lions that consistently attacked bomas.

As part of our efforts to always improve our conflict mitigation toolkit, a recent priority was completing the Master Herders' training and deploying new Guardians - ensuring they were well-prepared to navigate the conflict and its aftermath. In 2023, we hired 15 new Master Herders and promoted six Master Herders to become Guardians, extending our coverage across the ecosystem. **This significant expansion of the Master Herder team to increase our knowledge of the region and respond to conflict is the biggest one made in years.**



[TUNE IN TO LONG-TERM GUARDIAN KISIMIR'S JOURNEY](#)

In addition to having our conflict mitigation teams in-place and trained, we added the following to our conflict mitigation toolkit:



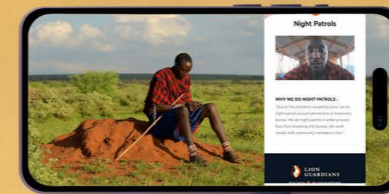
We purchased a new vehicle that was used to help the team respond to conflict as fast as possible and to train new Guardians and Master Herders on lion monitoring techniques.

We refurbished five satellite GPS collars. We use collars on our most notorious problem lions so the Guardians can keep better tabs on them and preempt conflict as often as possible.

We deployed 98 boma lights, which were distributed to the bomas that were experiencing high levels of conflict, and we purchased a thermal camera to help spot lions during night patrols before they jump into bomas.

TECH-BASED SOLUTIONS FOR COEXISTENCE

In 2023, we made significant strides in leveraging our tech-driven solutions for our conflict mitigation strategies.



In August 2023, we launched our Knowledge Sharing application. This app acts as a platform for sharing knowledge and lessons learned from almost 20 years in conservation. The app also documents traditional Maasai conservation knowledge and contains videos and audios in Maa (native language of the Maasai) for Guardians, Master Herders, and communities to access.

LiNC is an open-source database with artificial intelligence (AI) algorithms that are freely available to conservationists and researchers across Africa and beyond. Lion Guardians has focused on updating the software's interface, documentation, and security systems. In 2023, our team of developers worked hard to develop and implement an auto-cropper that can detect individual lions in the photographs to crop and label (e.g lion front face, lion left whisker, etc.). This is a huge leap as it allows users to spend less time preparing and processing images in order to upload them to the system.



TECH-BASED SOLUTIONS FOR COEXISTENCE

We officially launched our Going Digital program. We equipped Guardians and Master Herders with smartphones to digitally report and record their locations and observations, without needing a third party (previously they reported to a central radio room who then recorded their data).

Now Guardians give us real-time updates on their exact locations and sightings. This helps us to more effectively manage and strategize; for example, we can see when an area has not been recently accessed, which enables us to make better decisions on where to deploy Guardians and Master Herders to keep track of lions and safeguard livestock.

In 2021, in partnership with Technology for Conservation (T4C), we designed a tracking system utilizing LoRaWAN technology to enhance our team's ability to quickly locate problem lions. This technology is significantly cheaper than traditional satellite collars. The LoRaWAN gateways will be installed across the ecosystem and pick up signals from problem lions' collars (fitted with LoRa tags). Knowing where the problem lions are will allow our teams to respond with greater speed when they wander into high-risk areas, increasing our ability to proactively mitigate conflict. In 2023, we procured the necessary hardware and identified developers to support the installation of the LoRaWAN gateways.



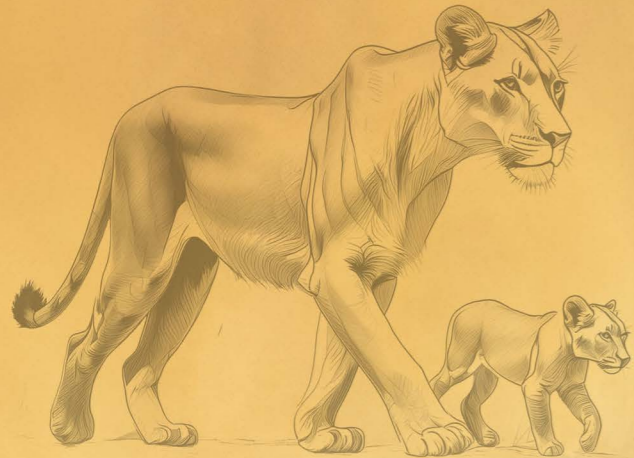
RESCUING LIONS ON THE BRINK

In recent years, a historical threat to lions has resurfaced. We have noted that there has been a significant uptick in the use of lacing prey carcasses with poisons to kill carnivores. Traditionally, Maasai do not use poison as it is seen as cowardly. But, over time, culture changes.

The key to tackling the complex poison issue is, first and foremost, a quick and effective response to any incidents within our operating area. Below, we share Noldupai's story, and to learn more about saving poisoned lions, click [here](#).

On June 2nd, 2023, Guardian Sonkoi Kemonyeny reported that Noldupai and her pride, consisting of two lioness mothers (matriarch Noldupai, her daughter and first-time mother Natasha) and seven cubs, had ventured into Osewan, an area outside our operations. Immediate concern arose as this area is notorious for lion poisoning incidents. Since Noldupai is a chronic problem lion, she was collared

years ago, therefore fortunately, Guardian Sonkoi could utilize tracking technology to locate the pride's exact whereabouts. While tracking Noldupai, he came across a cow carcass near the lions that had been laced with poison in the neighboring Matapato community. Our team's fears that Noldupai had been poisoned became a reality.



Without hesitation, Guardian Sonkoi sprang into action and alerted our monitoring team that Noldupai and her pride were at risk of death after feasting on a poisoned carcass. The team promptly responded, alerting vets from the Kenya Wildlife Service (KWS) and other conservation stakeholders in the area. By the time the KWS vet arrived, five of the lions were on the verge of death. After many long hours of administering life-saving treatment, together, the teams were able to save all but one of the cubs. The teams remained with two of the lions throughout the night, as they required further monitoring to ensure their recovery. Fortunately, both lions recovered the following day, and the teams continued to keep a vigilant watch over the pride in the days following.

Due to the upswing in poisoning events we are experiencing along our borders, throughout 2023 we conducted in-depth poisoning training for each Master Herder that was promoted to Guardian, and we gave existing Guardians refresher training to ensure that the team was properly equipped with the knowledge needed to respond quickly to poisoning incidents.

Lioness Natasha in recovery, June 2023



RESILIENT COEXISTENCE

There were many instances in 2023 when we saw how our two-decade-long effort to establish sustainable coexistence between lions and the people that live among them is working. Thanks to our conservation efforts and the strong tolerance of communities, the Amboseli ecosystem continues to support a robust lion population despite experiencing intense conflicts where communities suffered losses and lions were lost. In 2023, we recorded the highest-ever lion population density across our operating area while conducting our annual lion census.

As the lion population has increased tremendously over the last 19 years (i.e., we have documented a six- to seven-fold increase in the lion population; see figure 1 below), there has been a corresponding increase in livestock depredations by lions. Our primary metric for tolerance (retaliatory hunts) remains low despite experiencing more lion attacks on livestock in 2023, demonstrating that communities are staying resilient and choosing coexistence.



FIGURE 1: GRAPH DISPLAYING THE CONTINUED GROWTH IN THE LION POPULATION SINCE 2004.

SUCCESSION

From our early years, the founders of Lion Guardians envisioned a future where the organization would be owned and operated by the communities that live alongside the lions. In line with this objective, our operations have been run by the organization's Senior Management Team (composed mostly of local Maasai) since 2013. This year, the SMT showcased the strength of community leadership at Lion Guardians by effectively navigating a challenging conflict period, providing support to communities, and overseeing the relocation and construction of our new camp headquarters – crucial steps towards ensuring the sustainability of our conservation endeavors.

John Merishi, SMT Head of People and Culture ~

I was born and raised in the Amboseli ecosystem. My upbringing was deeply intertwined with the rich ecosystem of wildlife surrounding my community. My family are traditional Maasai pastoralists and from a young age I would help them herd livestock to and from pastures and waterways on our ancestral lands. **This instilled in me a profound connection to the land and its inhabitants.**

Throughout my childhood during the late 80's and throughout the 90's, I rarely saw lions. The few lions that lived around the community were generally shy as they feared being hunted by Maasai.

Traditionally, Maasai would hunt lions in relation to them attacking livestock or for prestige, as lion hunters were seen as brave warriors. I realized that the lion population was disappearing.

It was these experiences – my awareness of the collapsing lion population, alongside my commitment to safeguard the wildlife that had long been my neighbors in the shared landscape we called home – that inspired me to pursue a career in conservation.

In 2015, I joined Lion Guardians. What drew me to Lion Guardians was the founders' vision of a future where the organization would be fully owned and operated by the communities coexisting with the lions. This forward-thinking approach resonated deeply with me, as it promised not only to safeguard the lion population and protect our precious wildlife, but also to contribute to the well-being of my people.

Today, I work on the Senior Management Team as the Head of People and Culture. I am proud to work for an organization that has been at the forefront of protecting lions and I am proud of the local communities for taking greater responsibility to protect the lions and wildlife within their lands.

Guardians (from left) Kimoson Nkalai and Sankuyan Ole Mingati join John Merishi (right) in the field



SUCCESSION

To ensure that the team is fully equipped and supported, the directors and the senior management team created an organizational arrangement with an embedded performance management system that the team christened “We Empower Each Other” (WEE-LG). WEE-LG has now been fully operational for one year, and in 2023 achieved the following:

- Each member of the SMT is paid at market or above market rate (equity), and each received a salary raise based on how they performed in line with WEE-LG goals.
- The SMT was given a substantial collective bonus for meeting (and exceeding) the organization’s financial metrics.
- Performance assessments were conducted throughout each quarter of 2023.
- Our camp and field staff completed computer and literacy training as part of our capacity-building program.
- In the second quarter of 2023, the SMT hosted a week-long retreat at our new camp for both local and Nairobi-based members to design and build Lion Guardians’ three-year strategy.

Strategic Planning meeting from L-R: Maria Saruni, Nadia de Souza, Magdalene Mutero, Kisimir Masama



A CHANGING ECOSYSTEM

Today we are facing uncertain times. Cultural change is affecting people's values towards wildlife and conservation; we have more lions and less space as a result of subdivision and fencing that limits space for wildlife and escalates conflict; climate change is affecting people's livelihoods; lion behavioral changes are intensifying human-lion interactions; politics are changing and institutional setups and decision-making are unclear. While we recognize the challenges that go hand-in-hand with the changing environmental and socio-political landscape, we also recognize that our unique approach to inclusive and science-informed conservation, our in-depth knowledge of our lions, and our rootedness in the local communities puts us in a unique position to leverage these opportunities.

Our plans for 2024 are:

- Develop a plan for a veterinary support system to provide healthcare and treatment for lions and community livestock.
- Investigate how best to secure land for long-term conservation and pastoralism.
- Widen the net of community members involved in conflict mitigation by launching a "herder training program" where we work with knowledgeable elders from the community who train and teach young herders on best traditional practices and other aspects of conservation.
- Hire more Guardians and/or Master Herders in every zone across the landscape and provide additional poisoning training for the Guardians responsible for patrolling high-risk areas.
- Continue to roll out our Knowledge Sharing application to other communities and conservation stakeholders.

Guardians (from left) Sankuyan Ole Mingati and Kimoson Nkalai

- As part of WEE-LG, aim to ensure that the local team is well-financed and is confident in their abilities to lead the organization by focusing on the following goals: internal communication systems are strong and effective; the SMT can fundraise and funding is diversified; Lion Guardians has strong and durable partnerships with key local stakeholders; and communities have more options for income generation.

RESILIENCE FOR THE ROAD AHEAD

The resilience of the people and the lions of the Amboseli-Tsavo ecosystem was tested in 2023. The Lion Guardians team demonstrated remarkable determination, persisting through challenges while establishing a new home for Lion Guardians, and continuing to safeguard lions. Communities showcased resilience in choosing tolerance over retaliation amid post-drought hardships, and lions didn't just maintain high densities despite experiencing losses, they increased in numbers. Faced with ongoing and future changes, we emphasize the need for collective resilience. Looking ahead, we are committed to expanding conflict mitigation, supporting local communities, ensuring the protection of the growing lion population, and exploring additional solutions for peaceful coexistence – all of which are critical steps towards our long-term mission of conserving lions and preserving communities for the generations to come.



2023 FINANCIALS: REVENUE AND EXPENSES

Our fiscal sponsor, Lion Guardians U.S. also known as Wildlife Guardians, accepts donations on behalf of Lion Guardians for our on-the-ground operations across East Africa. Below, we outline the 2023 revenue designated for Lion Guardians and our expenditures, categorized by program area. Please be aware that these financials represent the expenses associated with our field operations across the Amboseli-Tsavo ecosystem. Furthermore, our fiscal sponsor, Lion Guardians U.S., covers expenses that aid broader community-based conservation efforts in Africa.

EXPENDITURE		REVENUE	
Land & Camp Relocation	\$588,863	\$783,550	Restricted
Lion Guardians Amboseli	\$417,450	\$346,006	Unrestricted
Science & Research	\$78,967	\$77,776	Gain/Loss on Exchange
Impact Scaling	\$16,391	\$1,207,332	Total Revenue
Supporting Pillars & Special Projects	\$45,923	\$59,736	Change in Net Assets*
Total Expenditure	\$1,147,596		* Which goes directly to supporting our long-term sustainability model and reserve

Crunching numbers and counting notes, Junior Accountant lion cub Naju and siblings balancing their books ;-)

IT TAKES A COMMUNITY TO
CONSERVE LIONS & PRESERVE CULTURES
– WE ARE GRATEFUL YOU ARE
PART OF OURS.

ABOUT LION GUARDIANS

In the last 50 years, it is estimated that at least 50% of Africa's lions have disappeared, and retaliatory killing is one of the main drivers behind the significant decline. As human populations in Africa rise, lions routinely come into direct conflict with people over increasingly limited resources. Every year, conflicts intensify due to the continuing depletion of wild prey, habitat loss, and poor livestock management, further threatening lions' future survival.

Lion Guardians is a conservation organization that promotes the coexistence of people and lions by embracing cultural traditions and innovating novel, science-based solutions. Our innovative approach has helped to reduce lion killing by more than 90% at our core site in the Amboseli-Tsavo ecosystem, where we are proud to protect one of the continent's few free-roaming and growing lion populations. We continue to increase our impact globally and across wildlife species by answering critical scientific questions that drive innovative solutions and sharing our knowledge with others from across the globe. Since 2007, we have trained and supported hundreds of African conservationists at different sites to monitor and protect threatened wildlife populations and mitigate human-wildlife conflict.

ADMINISTRATION



Wildlife Guardians (DBA: Lion Guardians U.S.) is a charitable non-profit organization based in the U.S.A. (EIN 36-4712624); and the fiscal sponsor for Lion Guardians Limited.



Lion Guardians Limited is a non-profit limited liability company registered in Kenya, running and managing field operations.



www.lionguardians.org