

# LION RANGERS

Supporting Communities, Conserving Lions



# ANNUAL REPORT 2018

## Summary



At the end of its first year the Lion Ranger program is moving full speed ahead – ensuring conservancy farmers and desert lions can coexist in northwest Namibia. We have had great success deploying teams into the field and increasing our information-sharing capacities concerning lion movements and potential conflict. The enthusiasm from communities, government, NGOs, and the private sector is beginning to be matched with commitment and results. The drive for conserving the desert-adapted lions of northwest Namibia has never been stronger and the need to limit human-lion conflict never clearer. In early 2019 we are commencing operations in five additional conservancies, bringing our total to eight, encompassing ~20,000 km<sup>2</sup>. This expansion is due to local requests for Lion Rangers – word is spreading – and the trust of the Namibian government to further empower communities to manage predator populations. In the upcoming months we will have two further trainings, and lead a multi-stakeholder group in the first-ever northwest Namibia lion and predator population survey! This in addition to our continued work responding to human-lion conflict and assisting conservancy farmers and communities.

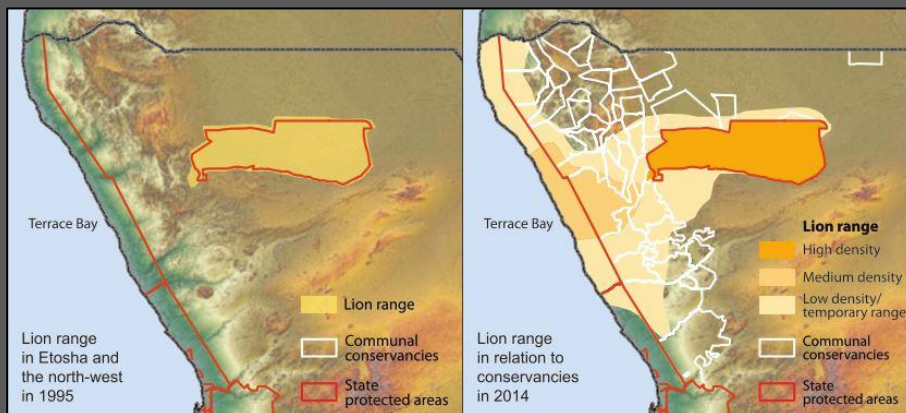
## Background

**The Kunene Region** of northwest Namibia supports a unique population of free-ranging desert-adapted lions inhabiting rural communities outside protected areas. Despite frequent incidents of human-lion conflict, it is among the few places where human land-use and positive lion conservation outcomes align. Namibia has received international recognition for successful conservation leading to significant wildlife increases, especially in arid areas. However, new challenges have arisen: the success of Namibia's community-based natural resource management (CBNRM) program has led to intensified human-lion conflict across northwest Namibia.

Historically lions occurred throughout northern Namibia, but autocratic apartheid politics, land reform, and the growth of agriculture since the 1970s, caused a population crash. From a low of approximately 20 individuals in 1997, to an

estimated population of 112-139 in the northwest today, desert-adapted lions have achieved a remarkable recovery. This effort has been spearheaded by conservationists, government officials, and local communities working together to ensure the survival and viability of northwest Namibia's lion population.

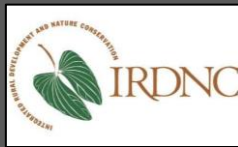
Corresponding to their population's recovery, desert lion range has grown:



from roughly 7,000 km<sup>2</sup> to roughly 40,000 km<sup>2</sup>. Desert lion range now connects a western subpopulation to Etosha National Park in the east. This expanded range falls primarily within communal conservancies. Increased overlap between desert lion home range and communal farmers is generating a high frequency of human-lion conflict. When conservancy residents lose livestock to lions so-called 'problem lions' are often destroyed, as is a Namibian's right under law. Retaliatory killings are the single biggest threat to the desert lion population. Since 2000, 89% of recorded desert lion (non-cub) mortalities have followed human-lion conflict incidents.

## Organization

The **Lion Ranger program** unifies communal, governmental, and non-governmental stakeholders around the shared goal of communities sustainably managing human-lion conflict in northwest Namibia. The program is founded on the shared work of the Namibia Ministry of Environment and Tourism (MET), Integrated Rural Development and Nature Conservation (IRDNC), the Namibia Nature Foundation (NNF), Desert Lion Conservation, AfriCat North, and the University of Minnesota Lion Center and incorporates staff from the core lion-range communal conservancies. The Lion Rangers are conservancy-employed game guards who receive special training and equipment to lead efforts in combating conflict between humans and lions on communal land.



## Mission

The **Lion Ranger program goal** is the long-term sustainable management of human-lion conflict by communities in Kunene to ensure continued desert-adapted lion survival and community benefit. The number one threat to Kunene lions is retaliation following human-lion conflict. The Lion Ranger program aims to reduce conflict and increase the flow of benefits to communities.

## Conservation Strategy

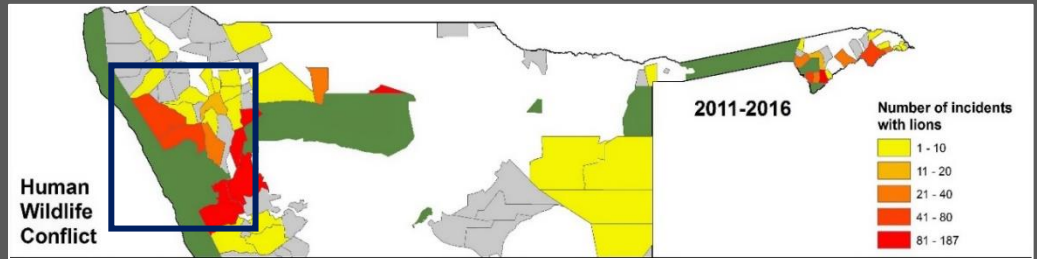


The program seeks to sustainably conserve desert lions by limiting conflict between lions and rural communities and building predator monitoring capacities in northwest Namibia. Sustainable conservation of desert-adapted lions must be founded upon the support and direction of local communities. The Lion Ranger program supports communal conservancies through collaboration and capacity-building projects based on community needs. This is being achieved through an integrated Early Warning System to better inform communities about lion movements and limit human-lion conflict. This system brings together cutting-edge collaring technology, conflict response team deployment, and renewed emphasis on kraal construction to provide multiple means for limiting human-lion conflict. Since the program's reactivation in 2018, our efforts have been focused-upon Lion Ranger training, developing standardized and quantitatively robust methods for minimizing human-lion conflict, improved information-sharing among stakeholders, and securing sustainable support for the program.



## Geographic Focus

The Kunene Region of northwest Namibia is large (115,260 km<sup>2</sup>), sparsely populated (~1.3 people/km<sup>2</sup>), and semi-arid (100-200 mm/yr.) with highly variable rainfall. In 2017, MET identified three focal lion-range conservancies, Anabeb, Puros, and Sesfontein, where human-lion conflict is most in-need of intervention. An additional five conservancies (Ehi-rovipuka, ≠Khoadi-//Khoas, Omatendeka, Sorris Sorris, and Tsiseb) are activating Lion Ranger teams at the communities' request in early 2019.



Because lion movement and human settlement is highly spatially-differentiated over this large area (~20,900 km<sup>2</sup>), human-lion conflict is unevenly distributed. Spatial analysis of lion movements and of existing farms highlights areas of greatest human-lion conflict risk. This analysis was reinforced by community surveys interrogating areas of greatest lion problems. This multi-method approach identified three-to-four human-lion conflict 'hotspots' within each conservancy. Lion Rangers focus monitoring efforts on these 'hotspots', while maintaining contact across their conservancy. At this early stage, the program aims at a proof of concept: that mitigation, and prevention will have immediate and long-term, measurable effects on human-lion conflict.

## SITE SELECTION CRITERIA

- ❧ **High frequency of lion movements** – is a site frequently visited by multiple groups of lions?
- ❧ **Critical density of farming activity** – are farmers and livestock also present in high numbers?
- ❧ **High need identified by multiple methods** – do scientific monitoring and social surveys both indicate certain areas?
- ❧ **Community demand** – is there legitimate demand and willingness from a conservancy to work in partnership?

## 2018 Achievements

- ✿ In January and February, problem-causing lions around the Ugab River were collared and translocated by IRDNC Rapid Response Team Leader Cliff Tjikundi and Desert Lion Conservation's Dr. Philip Stander.
- ✿ In February Anabeb Lion Rangers, under guidance from MET, led the removal of a problem-causing lion from the Mbokondja farming area. The Anabeb Conservancy received over N\$ 20 000 from the hunt.
- ✿ Lion Ranger training took place from 4-11 March. Classroom and field sessions focused on lion identification near conflict sites and human-lion conflict mitigation. IRDNC and Desert Lion Conservation supported this training.
- ✿ From 8-13 April, MET staff led region-wide community feedback sessions focused on human-lion conflict challenges. Communities strongly requested further Lion Ranger activities across northwest Namibia.
- ✿ At the end of April, the first in a series of Early Warning System towers was erected. These towers are being developed by Desert Lion Conservation and supporting technical crew to provide direct information to farmers in conflict hotspots.
- ✿ In Mid-May the Lion Rangers and Desert Lion Conservation, under direction from MET, successfully collared and translocated a three-year-old male lion out of the Puros Conservancy.
- ✿ In May and June, the Rapid Response Team and Lion Rangers assisted farmers in northern Kunene conservancies to prevent a destructive human-lion conflict incident. These conservancies are requesting their own Lion Rangers!
- ✿ In June IRDNC hired two additional Rapid Response Team Leaders. Linus Mbomboro and German Muzuma are now working with Lion Rangers to mitigate and prevent conflict.
- ✿ From July to October the Rapid Response Team Leaders covered more than 18,083 kilometers (!) across northwest Namibia, responding to human-lion conflict and assisting MET and Desert Lion Conservation in lion monitoring.
- ✿ In September the Lion Ranger program began partnering with the National Geographic Society who is supporting Lion Ranger activities in 2019.
- ✿ In mid-October the Lion Rangers assisted Desert Lion Conservation in collaring five lions in and around the Hoanib river and Anabeb Conservancy. These collars are part of the Early Warning System. An additional Early Warning Tower was also erected at Mbakondja in Anabeb.
- ✿ In November an agreement was signed between the University of Minnesota Lion Center and MET to support the creation of the Northwest Lion Information Manager (NWLIM) position. The NWLIM is responsible for managing all aspects of data-collection, information-sharing, and public dissemination of the northwest lion population.
- ✿ In November AfriCat North joined the Lion Ranger program. AfriCat will lead human-lion conflict work in the Hobatere Concession and within communal land bordering western Etosha National Park.

## Key Priorities for 2019-2020

- ❧ > 90% reduction in lions lost in human-lion conflict incidents
- ❧ > 90% reduction in livestock losses to lions at human-lion conflict 'hotspots'
- ❧ > 50% reduction in livestock losses to lions across focal conservancies
- ❧ 100% communication of relevant lion activities to farmers at human-lion conflict 'hotspots'



## Upcoming

In 2019 the Lion Ranger program will continue to emphasize training, deepening relationships with communities, and broadcasting accurate information concerning lion conservation across northwest Namibia, with a renewed emphasis on the entire northwest lion population. Human-lion conflict continues to be a pressing issue and some lions were lost to retaliatory killings this past year. These challenges deepen our commitment. Our next training takes place in mid-February at our remote field base, World's End Environmental Centre; another training is slated for mid-year. Partnering with the Ministry of Environment and Tourism we are continuing to develop lion monitoring and information-sharing capacities across northwest Namibia. From March to July we are executing a northwest Namibia lion and predator population survey. We anticipate having survey results by the end of the year. Over 2019 we will emphasize extending our supporter network to ensure that the program is sustainable heading forward. Program updates can be found online at [kuneneconservation.dash.umn.edu](http://kuneneconservation.dash.umn.edu) or at the Lion Ranger Instagram: @lionrangers.

## Partners

The success of the Lion Ranger program is only possible because of the support it receives. We gratefully acknowledge the support of:



**Oliver Adolph  
& Family**





We believe that wild creatures will only thrive with humanity's care and aid. A world in which humans and lions coexist is desirably, possible, and necessary. The Lion Ranger program works to secure a brighter future for humans and desert lions. Thank you for being such an important part of our team!

