



Maasai tribesmen have found a solution that protects their livestock without harming predatory animals.
Photo: ©CI/Gina Buchanan

OL DONYO WUAS TRUST: COMMUNITY PROTECTION FOR PREDATORS

Kenya

Summary

In 2003, indigenous Maasai landowners entered into an agreement with the Ol Donyo Wuas Trust (ODWT) to keep lions and other predators safe on the community-owned Mbirikani Group Ranch in southeastern Kenya. In a region where lions once thrived but are now on the brink of local extinction, the agreement has virtually stopped the killing of predators across more than 300,000 acres. Building on this success, ODWT now seeks to broaden wildlife protection across the six Maasai group ranches and three national parks that make up the 2.2 million-acre Amboseli-Tsavo ecosystem.

Benefits to People

Throughout the Amboseli-Tsavo ecosystem, loss of livestock to predators is a daily occurrence, as the Maasai share their land with lions, cheetahs, leopards, and hyenas. As a result, retaliatory hunting with spears – and in more recent years, the killing of entire prides of lions through poisoning – is common.

Today however, on Mbirikani, the Maasai are becoming conservationists: livestock owners and young warriors are protecting lions and other predators instead of killing them. In a historical statement, in March of 2007, the former Chairman of Mbirikani stated: “From this day forward, on Mbirikani, the warrior and the lion are brothers.”

This impressive change began in 2003 when ODWT and the group ranch leadership launched a Predator Compensation Fund that pays herders market value for livestock killed

by predators. The program pays claims on approximately 750 head of livestock annually. But livestock owners are paid *only if* no predators are killed by members of their local community. As a result, protecting predators is linked to economic wellbeing, and a major historical source of conflict has been greatly diminished.

Predator compensation is central to a more comprehensive model aimed at making conservation and development mutually beneficial. The model includes support for schools, educational programs, and scholarships for the local community, as well as several types of conservation-based employment. A program called Living With Lions monitors lion numbers and population trends, helps to increase tolerance for predators by directly employing young warriors, and seeks to reduce livestock losses through improved animal husbandry.

Results

During the first four years of the Predator Compensation Fund, the Maasai and ODWT have saved an impressive number of threatened animals. Only four lions were killed on the Mbirikani Group Ranch since 2003, compared to 65 on neighboring ranches. In the eighteen months prior to the launch of the compensation program, 22 lions had been killed on Mbirikani by the same community that now protects them.

Today, predator compensation and the jobs it creates are an integral component of the local economy, with the community



Fewer than 30,000 lions (*Panthera leo*) survive today.
Photo: ©ODWT

paying 30% of claims from its tourism-based income. The local community administers the program across the ranch and resolves disputes through an elected advisory committee.

In 2006, ODWT's conservation model contributed in excess of \$150,000 in wages, predator compensation payments, and scholarships to the Mbirikani community. Also in 2006, the Maasai living on neighboring Kuku Group Ranch adopted the predator compensation program with the support of the Maasai Wilderness Conservation Trust, a local group similar in size and purpose to the ODWT. This expansion doubles the area of protection for lions and other predators to nearly 600,000 acres.

Biodiversity Importance

Prior to European settlement, 1 million lions lived in Africa. By the 1980s, the population had dropped to 200,000 due to over-hunting, habitat loss, and other human encroachment. Fewer than 30,000 lions remain in the wild today, mostly in parks and protected areas too small to maintain viable populations. ODWT's success protects lions entirely outside of parks, providing a model for conservation of critical, unprotected areas, complete with roaming prides of lions, wild herbivores, and people.

To strengthen protection of lions and other predators, including the highly threatened African Wild Dog (*Lycaon pictus*), ODWT is now focused on creating a trust fund to support conservation on Mbirikani in perpetuity and on rolling-out its conservation model to the entire Amboseli-Tsavo ecosystem. ODWT plans to expand, in stages, the scope of its work to include not only protection of lions and other predators, but also to address the resource management issues that are critical to sustaining the ecosystem itself, a step that is vital for the future of both its human and non-human inhabitants.

At a Glance

Conservation International began its partnership with ODWT in 2007 to support the work on Mbirikani Group Ranch and to promote the replication of its conservation model across the Amboseli-Tsavo ecosystem and beyond. ODWT was founded in 1992 by Richard and Tara Bonham, owners of Richard Bonham Safaris, Ltd.

What is a Conservation Agreement?

A conservation agreement provides communities with benefits and capacity-building in exchange for their participation in effective conservation of high priority areas and species. Key strengths of this approach are an explicit agreement linking benefits to agreed-upon conservation actions (such as not killing lions), with the ability to tailor development support to each specific circumstance.

Where the Money Goes

Contributions of any size make a huge difference.

The following are examples of how contributions to ODWT may be used:

\$30	Compensation for 1 goat
\$200	Compensation for 1 cow
\$500	Radio collar to monitor 1 lion
\$600	One year's salary for a Lion Guardian (warrior)
\$700	Secondary school scholarship for 1 student for 1 year
\$1,000	One year's salary for a community game scout
\$1,500	Telemetry set (GPS, radio tracking equipment) for a Lion Guardian or game scout
\$3,000	One GPS collar that yields detailed data on lion movements.
\$50,000	Annual operating costs of the entire Predator Compensation Fund on Mbirikani



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