

Working with farmers to reduce livestock losses by lions

Namibia's extreme drought over the last five years has led to a reduction in vast herds of antelopes that are the staple food of lions in the arid Kunene Region. The lions have turned to the remaining sources of prey – cattle, sheep and goats belonging to communal farmers who struggle to eke out a living on extremely marginal lands. These local farmers, many of whom have already lost livestock due to drought, have been heavily hit by lions targeting their decimated livestock herds. Ironically, many of the farmers are from communities that pioneered community conservation in Namibia – it was largely due to their willingness to tolerate wildlife that the lion population and range in the Kunene expanded to areas that had not seen lions for several decades.



In response to the immense pressures faced by the farmers who have been double-hit by drought and losses of livestock to predators, IRDNC has set up a Human-Wildlife Support Unit that focuses on preventing and mitigating human lion conflict (HLC) in northwest Namibia.

Lion ranger training facilitated by our Rapid Response Team

The first phase of work has prioritized reducing livestock losses and creating awareness and fostering positive relationships with farmers and other stakeholders such as the Ministry of Environment and Tourism (MET), traditional leaders, and tourism industry operators. Effective HLC response and overall lion conservation thrive when there is strong community involvement, support, and ownership.



Etosha fence monitoring – lions move through gaps in the fence in the park into community areas



RRT erecting EW tower at Okaturua, Anabeb

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Rapid Response Team assisting with collaring



Lion collaring in Torra

The team implement an Early Warning System, through which lion prides are tracked by satellite and setting of alarms on Early Warning (EW) towers in the hotspot areas to alert farmers of lion movements in their areas. They are on call to respond to incidents at any time, assisting farmers move their livestock away from high risk areas and constructing lion-proof kraals. Lion Rangers, who are absorbed into conservancy management structures, keep an eye on lion movements and train farmers to put in place preventative measures to reduce livestock losses to predators.

Community attitudes are shifting in favor of sustainable human-wildlife conflict solutions, and farmers who were previously unwelcoming are beginning to value the team's presence and are willing to work with them. In one example, local farmers who were extremely difficult and opposed to lions in their area were invited to join a darting and lion translocation activity, where they saw an alternative to killing lions.

As IRDNC's efforts to lower human-wildlife conflict expand and become more apparent to the communities, the team's credibility, community trust, and ears on the ground will continue to improve.