

# WITHOUT PRIDE

**IF WE DO NOT ACT NOW, THE LION MAY VERY WELL BE ANOTHER CREATURE LEFT TO THE IMAGINATIONS OF FUTURE GENERATIONS.**

**BY:** Kelly Calagna  
**PHOTOGRAPHY:** Kelly Calagna

From the Coliseum in ancient Rome, to canned hunting in southern Africa, lions have been slain for sport throughout all of history. The beast’s combined power and beauty has made it an icon since the beginning of human record, which countlessly portrays man versus lion as the most noble of battles, and their hide the grandest of trophies. However, this vendetta for glory cannot sustain. If we do not act now, the lion may very well be another creature left to the imaginations of future generations; gracing the walls of galleries instead of the grasses of the savanna.

Research done by National Geographic’s Big Cats Initiative suggests that since the 1940s, Africa’s wild lion population has dropped from an estimated 450,000 to as few as 20,000 left roaming the wild. Additionally, historic records have depicted lions as residents in Africa, Asia, and Europe, yet the predator has disappeared from roughly 80 percent of its previous range. Now, only parts of Africa and one small region in India still maintain the wild lion, though the creature’s reach recedes with each generation.





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Despite the population’s continued rapid decline, *Panthera leo* remains under the label of “vulnerable” by the International Union for the Conservation of Nature’s *The IUCN Red List of Threatened Species*. However, recently there has been a push to move the lion to the “threatened” classification, as it would provide greater protection for the species in regards to trophy hunting. A higher threat status for the lion would effectively make it illegal for hunters to bring lion trophies of any kind back into the United States. It is hoped that hunters would be discouraged from participating in “the big hunt” without the allure of bringing their prizes home. In support of this method of discouragement, Australia ruled to ban the import of lion trophies early this year. Additionally, Emirates airline has increased their ban on endangered species parts and products to include animal trophies, regardless of their level of endangerment. In a statement Emirates announced: “As part of our efforts to prevent the illegal trade in trophies of elephant, rhinoceros, lion and tiger, we will not accept any kind of hunting trophies of these animals for carriage on Emirates services irrespective of [a species’ threat level].” This sort of legislative support, as well as individual corporations taking

action, could save countless lions from ending up as a decorative piece in someone’s office.

Hunters typically target male lions as trophies because of their iconic manes, and as with other species, females are generally spared due to the possibility of leaving young behind without a caregiver. However, the killing of a male lion does not just remove the one creature, but causes a ripple effect throughout the local population. A pride is made up of multiple females and cubs, and is generally headed by a single male, or sometimes a pair. When the pride’s dominant male is expunged, the rest of the pride is left at the mercy of whatever male comes along to take his place. This commonly results with the death of all of the pride’s cubs. The new male wants to ensure his genetic success through producing his own offspring, and therefore eliminates their competition. Additionally, biologists have expressed concern about limiting gene pools with the elimination of male lions—their removal could create a lack of natural biodiversity within a community.

While cutting off the demand chains for sport hunting is



crucial to aid in the preservation of the species, the lion has additional adversaries in its fight for survival. Poachers, snares, farmers protecting their livestock, and a shrinking sustainable environment are all obstacles facing the species. Efforts to educate locals and aid communities in living in harmony with their fearsome neighbors is some of the most important work to be done for the big cat’s continuance.

Examples include Panthera’s Project Leonardo and the Build a Boma campaign, from the Big Cats Initiative, which were both developed to reduce conflict between man and beast. The Build a Boma campaign aids farmers in building basic structures in which they can secure their livestock at night, safe from the primarily nocturnal predators. This effectively protects the lion population by preventing retaliatory actions from the locals, who persecute cats that feed from their livelihood.

The fate of the African lion is a complex problem with no single solution. To keep this magnificent creature around for future generations to admire, there needs to be legislative and social change made with due haste. We must start taking action before it gets to the point of no return, a state that is currently facing the northern white rhino—as of this year there are only

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four left, of which none are capable of natural reproduction. However, as the world wept last July upon the killing of Zimbabwe’s beloved lion, Cecil, the species’ plight has reached the public spotlight. While Cecil’s death was undoubtedly tragic, it has brought awareness to a brutality that was by no means an isolated incident. Many lions meet his same fate each year—some under far crueler circumstances—and one can only hope that with the world now watching, the eons of injustices against the king of the beasts will be brought to an imperative end. ●

[panthera.org](http://panthera.org)  
[buildaboma.org](http://buildaboma.org)