

by Gerhard Damm

Two “Famous” Lions Killed In Non-hunting

Two more lions - both of them “named and famed” - have been killed in Kenya in the waning days of March, although hunting is prohibited since 1977.

“Mohawk the most famous lion of Kenya”, the other one called “Lemek”, which Maasai leaders said that residents speared the two- and-a-half-year-old near Old Kitengela township road, 12 miles south of Nairobi, and roughly two miles south of the Nairobi National Park southern tip. “Lemek” was apparently seen roaming about in the plains outside the Park, not having raided any cattle yet.

Consequently these two killings cannot be blamed on hunters, nor can the human-lion conflict be laid at the hunters’ doorstep. The killings simply confirm the fact that humans do not tolerate large predators in their neighborhood - and that proper wildlife management and adequate responses to a real or perceived threat are not in the repertoire of the Kenya Wildlife Service. “This was the third time in two months that lions had escaped from Nairobi National Park. One found its way to a military barracks, another to a strip of land near the international airport” said The Washington Post and added “Where the lions once would have wandered peacefully, they now encounter suburbs, farms and commercial buildings”.

Kenya Wildlife Service spokesman Paul Udoto said “the lion escaped from Nairobi National Park and ended up in Isinya town, 12 miles away [sic]. Veterinary teams headed to Isinya after they got word on Mohawk’s whereabouts. But noise and commotion from bystanders agitated the animal, prompting it to attack the man [sic]. In order to save lives, rangers shot it to death before veterinarians arrived with tranquilizers.”

Congratulations to the Kenya Wildlife Service for a “decisive and consequent action” one might try to say. This is competence squared!

“Mohawk”, reportedly 13 years of age (Editor’s note: it usually takes qualified scientists and a laboratory to determine a lion’s true age by analyzing some teeth), came to an admittedly gruesome end. If you have the stomach, watch the video clip of the killing on CNN at this link

<http://edition.cnn.com/2016/03/31/africa/kenya-mohawk-lion-killed/> .

The story of the lion from the fairly small town of Isinya reverberated all around the world. It was broadcast originally by KTN Kenya but quickly found its way on to the net and across the front pages of national and international newspapers. “In a country that has invested millions in protecting its wildlife, Kenyans are trying to figure out what went wrong” asked The Washington Post. “The uproar over the death of Mohawk mirrored a similar outcry in South Africa, where South African National Parks officials said that they had decided to kill a lion known as Sylvester who had escaped from Karoo National Park” chimed the New York Times. The Dodo Website titled “Beloved Lion Killed Because People Wouldn’t Leave Him Alone” adding “the news of Mohawk’s death prompted swift internet outrage, echoing concerns about another beloved lion you may remember named Cecil”. We shouldn’t forget the anti-use activists who came board in their thousands with comments and online petitions like “Fire the rangers

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who killed Mohawk the lion!" - conveniently forgetting that the rangers are not to blame, but the wildlife management system of Kenya and the Kenya Wildlife Service.

Kenya has a poaching problem for many years; ever since regulated sustainable use was banned in 1977 most of the wildlife species there have declined in unimaginable percentages. The decline was demonstrably not caused by hunting, since there was no legal hunting!

A golden opportunity was available in the 1970s for Kenya Wildlife Service to establish community conservancies in the same area where the deadly conflicts between man and wildlife are occurring. The area's open plains were only utilized by the Maasai for grazing their livestock. Had KWS had the foresight and courage to make its own decisions without animal rights NGO pressure and made beneficial arrangements with the landowners and those who utilized their land for their stock, the area would be teeming with wildlife and there would have been real benefits to the local people. The lack of firm vision resulted in what is now a concrete jungle right at the doorstep of Nairobi National Park to the south and the sad loss of wildlife thru conflict and a clear lack of any appreciation of the wildlife from the Park.

Already in 2003, the late Imre Loeffler former Chairman of the East African Wildlife Society said in an article "... over the years, public attitudes towards the parks have become increasingly hostile, particularly because of the consequences of the growth in human population: as the numbers of people have trebled, land, water and wood have become scarcer and human-animal conflicts have increased manifold... With Nairobi being the seat of numerous conservation NGOs confessing various shades of imported animal welfare philosophies, the government and the agency responsible for wildlife were always under pressure to eschew any form of wildlife management and utilization other than tourism. Tourism, even under the best of circumstances, is not capable of generating enough revenue to vouchsafe the survival of wildlife. Moreover, tourism is concentrated in a few areas and, particularly in its mass variety, is detrimental to the environment. All in all, Kenya's conservation efforts have failed and wildlife numbers have plummeted."

And in another article published in 2004, Loeffler said with some foresight "without providing economic benefits, conservation cannot succeed. For now, Kenya is the last remaining bastion on the entire eastern half of the African continent for conservation concepts of the old fashioned kind. And it is the NGOs concerned mainly with animal welfare and animal rights - and not with people - that are mobilizing their resources to stop Kenya from embracing husbandry as the way forward for wildlife and forest management."

Imre Loeffler was right!