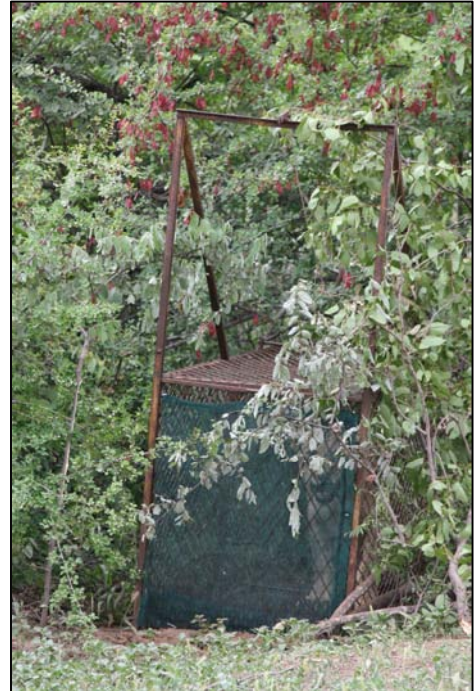


# Tuli Lion Relocation

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After months of hard work and perseverance, two young lions were finally caught and relocated to a safer place. It was during the last remaining months of 2009 that three lions, an adult lioness with her two sub-adult daughters, were causing considerable damages, in the form of livestock predation, to locals in and around the Motlabaneng Village. The village is situated just outside the western border of the Northern Tuli Game Reserve. The three lions were frequently killing goats, sheep and cattle in and around the village. Whenever a case of livestock loss was reported, the Department of Wildlife and National Parks (DWNP), and an anti-poaching unit from



Mashatu Private Nature Reserve (Mashatu hereafter), followed up and almost every time the same culprits were involved – three lions, a mother and two cubs. No matter how well livestock husbandry was implemented by the farmers (i.e. keeping herds inside kraals at night; having dogs and herdsman watch over the livestock during daytime grazing) these cunning lions still managed to kill. In one particular case the lions managed to kill 12 goats in one kraal! In relative terms, for some farmers such a loss is equivalent to losing millions on the JSE stock exchange. The term used when predators, especially lions & leopards, find themselves inside an enclosure with numerous prey, and kill numerous individuals is called *surplus-killing*. Even when one animal is killed, the fleeing movements of the other animals causes a predatory response to catch another one. During that night the adult lioness was shot out of retaliation, but the two young females managed to escape.

Although some believed that the problem was solved after the demise of the adult lioness, the two youngsters proved otherwise. The two females were approximately 15-17 months old, weighing in at over 80kg's each (which is similar to a big adult male leopard) and capable of easily bringing down their own prey. The only problem for them was that they still lacked the experience to catch fleet-footed animals such as impala etc. The one thing they were good at

though, and experienced enough at it, was to sneak in under the cloak of darkness and kill livestock. Although their mother was dead, these two lionesses continued to catch sheep and goats. One evening they even managed to catch, kill and feed on an adult sheep through the kraal fence! It was a mess to say the least.

There was an increase in urgency to catch these remaining females before they killed more livestock and before they themselves got killed. During the evenings of the 27<sup>th</sup> and 28<sup>th</sup> of February 2010, both the females were successfully captured inside two different cages, baited with impala meat.



After long hours in the sun the following day, during which time numerous logistical and operational procedures had to be taken care of the two lionesses were darted and safely transported to Mashatu. The following day a plane was dispatched from Maun, with a veterinarian on board to keep them sedated during the 3 hour flight to their new home in the Selinda Game Reserve in the Okavago Delta. In this instance the veterinarian was easily as important as the pilot. Nobody wants a lion to wake up on a plane!!

Although it would have been ideal to release the lions into the Northern Tuli Game Reserve, it would not have been practical. The main reasons for this being:

- 1) The location of the reserve is too close to where they were living, so within days the lions would have made their way back to the Motlabangeng village – rendering all the effort & time to catch them useless (lions are known to have a strong homing-instinct, especially if not placed inside a boma for some time to break that homing instinct).



- 2) The proximity to the reserve of other small cattle-posts and villages. So likely that the lions would have opted to return to their livestock-killing ways, rather than hunting more difficult to catch wild game.

3) A major risk of them being killed by the adult lions resident within the reserve.

It was for these reasons that we decided to relocate the lions to Selinda, an area many kilometers away from human settlements and livestock with a relatively low lion density where their chances of survival, although not guaranteed, would be a lot higher.



Sincere gratitude is extended to Derrick Joubert for covering the costs of airlifting the lions to their new home, to Pete le Roux for all the support and logistical organization and a special thanks to Rex Masupe and the DWNP officials for their hard work and persistence during the capture phase of the operation.

