

current conservation

kids



A DAY IN THE LIFE OF A LION CONSERVATIONIST

My name is Enoch and I study lions on the savannahs of Africa. Being a lion conservationist is not always easy. It often involves working to minimize conflict between humans and lions. However, it is very interesting and very rewarding.

In the area I work, the Maasai Mara National Reserve in Kenya, both humans and lions rely on the same land. It provides them both with food and shelter. It is home to both. Sometimes this can lead to conflict, either because they need to use the same resources, for example water or land, or because the cattle which the humans keep for food, are also a tempting meal for the lions. And when threatened, both humans and lions can be dangerous. Both will defend themselves with violence. So my job isn't easy.

What is my most important skill? Doing without sleep. Each day brings different challenges, but every day is busy. With other rangers, I live much of the time in a camping site next to the park gate. Many days we visit local households affected by lions killing their livestock, to install lion-proof bomas (livestock enclosures). Before first light, we all load up in the Landrover and head off to the field. This morning, we climb up the Ololoolo escarpment,

and before we reach the village of Kawai, we spot a wounded giraffe. We stop to check on it and realize that he has been shot by a poisoned arrow. We cannot deal with him alone, so call the Kenya Wildlife Services for help. Sadly, they cannot save him this time.

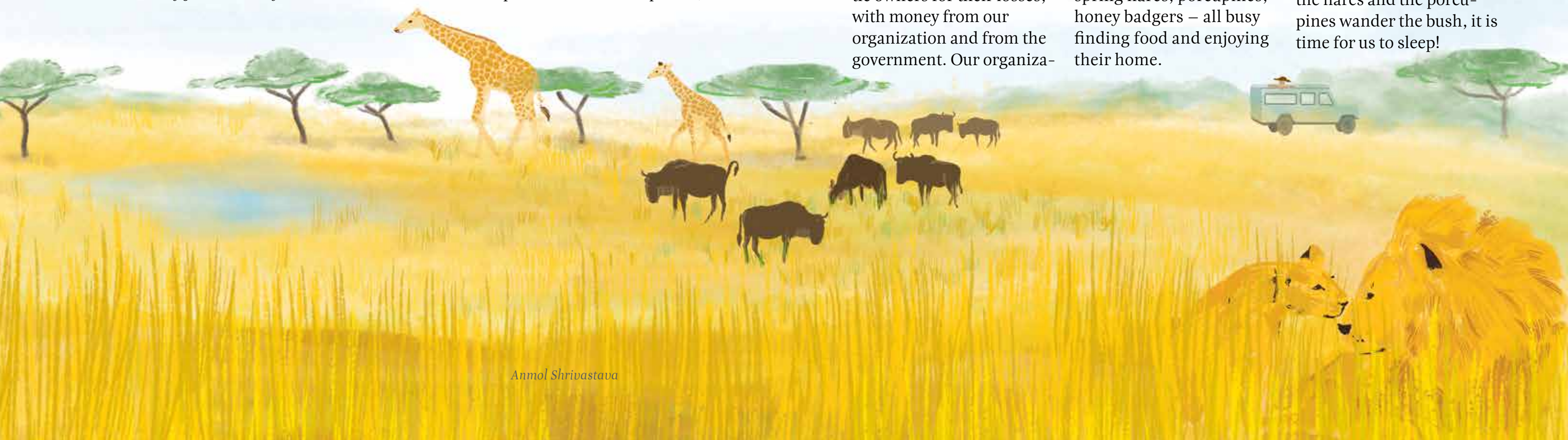
At Kawai, we hear that a pride of 11 lions went up the escarpment from the National Reserve, killing one cow and injuring several others. Visiting the homes of the cattle owners, we take photographs of the cow's injuries and strengthen the fences to protect them from further attacks. We will pay compensation to the cattle owners for their losses, with money from our organization and from the government. Our organiza-

tion must also pay for half the cost of the new fences. Protecting people, their cattle and the lions can be expensive. We then head into the bush to find the lions and drive them back to the Reserve. If they are allowed to stay close to the community's homes, they may attack more livestock, which may result in them being attacked in turn by the local people.

In the afternoon, more villages to visit, more conflicts to resolve. Eventually, at 9 p.m., we turn for home. Tired as we are, as we drive back, we feel so fulfilled and close to the maker, Mother Nature. We see all the night wildlife – spring hares, porcupines, honey badgers – all busy finding food and enjoying their home.



As tired as African wild dogs, we eventually lie down to sleep at 11.30 p.m. Hopefully, we won't be called on to respond to attacks by poachers tonight, as we are sometimes! Tomorrow we must begin removing some wire traps we have found which were put in the bush by poachers, to catch wildlife for meat, before any animals are hurt. But for now, while the lions the hares and the porcupines wander the bush, it is time for us to sleep!



AFRICAN LIONS

The scientific name of the African lion is *Panthera leo*. They are endangered and less than 30,000 wild lions remain in the African savannahs.

African lions mostly like living in open savannahs and sometimes in sparse scrub lands.

The lions mate throughout the year, depending on the availability of food. When there is enough food, more young ones are likely to be born.

Gestation lasts for 110 days and females have an average of 3 cubs per litter.

Multiple females in the pride often synchronize their litters so that other females have cubs at the same time, encouraging cooperative rearing by sisters.

They live in family groups called prides, with a number of related females, and unrelated males which are father to all the cubs born while they are with the pride.

Young males must leave the pride when they are about two years old.

Young females may also leave but mostly they stay with their pride.

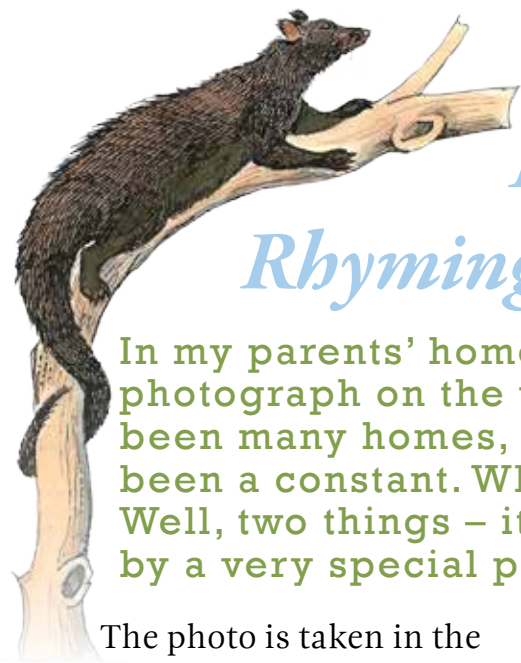
Lions have a strong attachment to particular areas, and human interference with this home range can cause problems.

Biologists identify members of a pride using the whisker patterns on the face or on both sides of the mouth.

If one mother dies from disease, an accident during hunting or is killed by poachers, her young cubs can be raised by her sisters in the pride.

Females share the care duties, and cubs in a pride suckle any mother that has enough milk to feed them.

Cubs depend on their mothers for survival up to two years of age.



Book of Beasts: An A to Z Rhyming Bestiary by M Krishnan

In my parents' home, there is a large black and white photograph on the wall. Over the last 20 years, there have been many homes, and many walls, but this photograph has been a constant. What is so special about this photo you ask? Well, two things – it has a very special story and it was taken by a very special person.

The photo is taken in the Nilgiri forests of South India and captures in its frame a herd of elephants. At first glance, it seems to be just a nice wildlife photograph of pachyderms in the forest. Now let me share with you the special part and tell you the story, one that my father has narrated to me more times than I can count.

There are a number of elephants – big ones, ones with long trunks, ones with floppy ears and most importantly, a little one. The elephants are walking through the forest, and have come across a giant log that is blocking their path. Some who are big enough, walk majestically

The little elephant who could



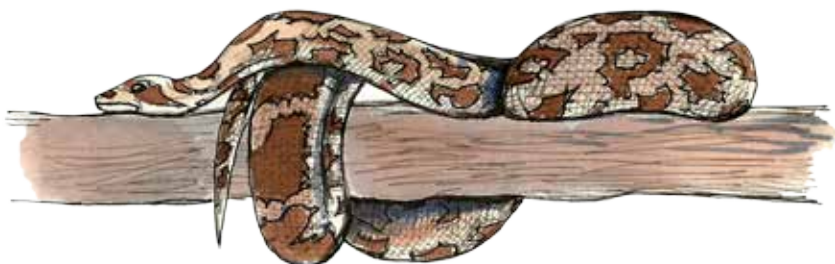
M Krishnan

over the log, while others who can't, take the longer path around. They all continue with their walk. Well, all of them except our little friend, whom I like to call 'the little elephant who could'. As captured in the photo, he tries and tries

to cross the log, with no success. All the elephants wonder why he is not taking the easy way out and plodding around. Finally, after many slips and slides and falls, the little elephant succeeds! He climbs over the log and marches triumphantly on.

Like I said before, this photograph was gifted

Illustrations: M Krishnan (reproduced with permission from Duckbill)



and this story was told to my father by a very special person. His name was M Krishnan, and he had thousands of stories just like the one of 'the little elephant who could', that he had seen with his own eyes. If you asked me who Krishnan was, it would be difficult to answer, because he was so very many things. Krishnan was a photographer, he was an artist, he was a writer, a poet, but most significantly he was a lover of nature. Krishnan was born more than a 100 years ago, and spent a large part of his life wandering India's forests, observing the birds and beasts who made their homes there, photographing them, and writing about his times in these forests. Being the lover of words and wildlife that he was, about 25 years ago, Krishnan wrote a collection of poems as birth-

day presents for his granddaughter Asha.

The years passed and Asha decided she had to share these poems with animal lovers everywhere, and so she published them in a book titled 'Book of Beasts: An A to Z Rhyming Bestiary'. If you want to learn about animals and birds, or you like to read poems, then the *Book of Beasts* is meant for you! Through this set of poems, Krishnan spells out the alphabet with an A to Z of wonderful and weird animals and birds.

As we turn through the pages, we see strange faces like the Eland, a kind of African antelope who resembles a cow, and familiar faces, like our favorite big cat - the tiger. Krishnan writes about animals from near and far, there are poems on Dingos from



Australia and pythons from India alike. These poems are filled with fun facts, jokes and Krishnan's memories. The *Book of Beasts* is a treasure trove of information, and is so important to those of us who care about the conservation of nature and wildlife. Of the 24 animals and birds that Krishnan has written about in this book, today 11 or almost half of them are threatened or endangered in the wild. If after going through pages with Binturongs and Okapis, if you want to read about still stranger critters, no fear, because the *Book of Beasts* ends with the mysterious creature XYZ!

I'll leave you with a little verse inspired by this book.

*If you want to meet an independent Kangaroo,
Or stumble upon a sullen Gnu,
If you wish to learn about the Hispid Hare,
Or the Sloth Bear-oh-so rare.
Then let your eyes and ears feast,
On the fantastic Book of Beasts.*



Do you have wildlife poems that you've written? We'd love to read them and publish some in our next issue. Do share them with us at editor.ccmagazine@gmail.com

