

NEWS FROM LAIKIPIA: LM38: ROMULUS



Five years ago, the few lions there were on Sosian were wary of people and almost impossible to see. Today Sosian, a 24,000-acre working cattle ranch at the centre of the vast Laikipia plateau, is a much friendlier place for lion, and visitors are often rewarded by excellent lion sightings. Sosian's biggest pride numbers

at least 15; and more with the recent birth of cubs. During the last two years, Sosian has assisted the Laikipia Predator Project (LPP) in collaring four lion - two females and two males - the most notable being Romulus, a lion well-known for his size and grandeur. Officially known as LM38, Romulus is more than just a splendid ambassador for his species, he's a survivor.

It's a rough world for a male lion and there is fierce competition in Laikipia for the best and safest territories on private ranches. Romulus has lost three territories, and his life is testimony to the hard existence that males lead.

Born on Mugie Ranch in 1998, Romulus and his brother Remus, moved to Loisaba Wilderness where they took over a pride. After a year or so Remus was poisoned, and Romulus was ousted making his way south to Sosian. We got to know Romulus in 2004 when he roamed over the northern part of the ranch, hunting the abundant zebra and eland with his female harem. Thanks to Sosian's innovative predator-resistant *bomas* - built of thick stone walls with a fast-growing species of cactus planted on top - the ranch has had little trouble with Romulus and his pride killing cattle. Human-wildlife conflict is a key issue in non-protected areas such as Laikipia,

where pastoralist communities and small-scale agricultural farmers live alongside wildlife. The Laikipia Wildlife Forum, in partnership with the LPP and Mpala Research Centre continues to derive strategies to alleviate this conflict.

Late in 2005, the Sosian lion world was turned upside-down when Romulus was deposed by four males.

Wisely he fled to Kisima with his favorite female, a collared lioness named Bella, and their two-year-old sons. Understanding pride dynamics and identifying livestock killers has been made possible by radio collars and when Romulus was accused of killing livestock on a neighboring ranch, our monitoring equipment proved otherwise.

Radio signals recently indicated that Romulus and his family were back on Sosian. With a young male - possibly an older son from a previous litter, and his two eighteen-month-old sons with Bella, Romulus may have been testing the water for a return to his old territory.

(Deborah Wettlaufer; shareholder & resident of Sosian)

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