Lale’enok: Conservation Through Coexistence in Kenya’s South Rift Valley

By Shasta Bray and David Jenike

In the South Rift Valley of Kenya, the lion population has grown to more than 65 from a low of 10, while elsewhere across the continent, lions are in severe decline. The difference is testament to a human-wildlife coexistence approach taken by the Maasai South Rift Association of Landowners (SORALO) at the Lale’enok Resource Centre.

At the heart of the program is a Resource Assessor (RA) team of Maasai youth that collects and disseminates ecological information to the community to inform land use planning and mitigate human-wildlife conflict. For example, the Rebuilding the Pride team of RAs monitors lion activity daily. Sharing the information with herders enables them to make informed decisions on where to graze livestock with minimal chance of conflict with lions.

Over the past eight years, the Cincinnati Zoo & Botanical Garden (CZBG) in Cincinnati, Ohio, has supported the growth of SORALO’s innovative programs, resulting in an enthusiastic and credible team of RAs skilled at gathering ecological data. However, conveying complex science in meaningful and engaging ways to the community remained a challenge. In 2016, funding from the Association of Zoos and Aquarums (AZA) Conservation Grants Fund and Disney Conservation Fund enabled us to address the need for more effective communication skills, in addition to allowing the program to expand on what it already does well.

In June 2016, Shasta Bray and David Jenike, veterans in education at CZBG, shared their expertise in communication—the quintessential zoo skill—with 14 RAs through a three-day Community Educators Workshop. Following training on effectively delivering messages to various audiences, the RAs then applied their new skills to developing and practicing their own educational presentations.

We are proud of the support that we, as a Zoo, are able to provide to enhance SORALO’s efforts to promote coexistence between people and lions.

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