

THE VOICE OF CONSERVATION IN EAST AFRICA

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SWARA

CARNIVORE SPECIAL

WHAT'S THE FUTURE FOR EAST AFRICA'S LARGE CARNIVORES?

PLUS: THE NILE WRANGLE, JAPAN'S IVORY INDUSTRY AND MORE



THE EAST AFRICAN
WILD LIFE SOCIETY



WHAT IS THE FUTURE FOR EAST AFRICA'S LARGE CARNIVORES?

BY STEPHANIE DLONIAK



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Spotted hyenas, dogs, Cape Crows and people utilise the city garbage dump in Harar, Ethiopia.

ecology and conservation. The goals of this special section are to inform you about the current status and threats to the various species in eastern Africa, divulge what is currently known about the tools that may or may not be of use for carnivore conservation and suggest way forward – namely implementing the new regional and national strategies that have been endorsed by various countries.

Each of these articles also clearly shows how long-term, scientific research and monitoring form the foundation of conservation planning and management. This is a take-home message that applies not just to carnivore conservation, but to the wise stewardship of all natural resources. In fact, we think you will find that some other lessons learned from the studies showcased in this section could be applied to other conservation problems.

While there are still Spotted hyenas in Harar, such a degree of co-existence will most certainly not be the future for eastern Africa's large carnivores in general. Harar's incredibly unique, cultural history is not replicated elsewhere, and the vast majority of people inhabiting villages, towns and cities are not nearly as tolerant of free-ranging large carnivores living in such close quarters. As we now know from long-term research, Spotted hyenas are also the most adaptable and disease-resistant of the large carnivores; such co-existence is simply not possible for more specialised species.

Finally, do we as a society actually WANT to only have semi-tame, habituated carnivores living on the edges of cities, consuming only garbage and hand-outs? If the answer is no (and I personally hope it is), action must be taken now to implement the best conservation strategies to ensure a future for wisely managed, ecologically functional and wild large carnivore populations throughout eastern Africa. ●

As a carnivore biologist, my original interest was observing just how adaptable and urban these hyenas really were but after a single night I found myself staring at it all in disbelief and wondering aloud, "Is this the future for large carnivores?"

This is an important question for large carnivores are pretty important. Not only do large carnivores earn a lot of money for eastern African countries through wildlife-based tourism, but they are critical components of healthy ecosystems that provide fundamental services for all people living in the region. However, they can also be difficult to live with and are incredibly difficult to conserve: many historical populations are now extinct and many others are in decline.

In this issue of SWARA, we bring you a timely collection of articles, contributed by leaders in the fields of large carnivore

I recently journeyed to Harar, Ethiopia, to visit its famed Spotted hyenas, the "hyena man" who feeds some of them every night as a tourist attraction, and an Australian graduate student, Marcus Baynes-Rock, who is studying the unique human-hyena relationship there. For me, someone who has spent about five of the last 10 years studying hyenas and other carnivores in the relative wilds of the Maasai Mara, the Harar experience was surreal, to say the least. Not only are there hyenas in Harar – there are a lot of them. They lie in wait for scraps at the hyena man's house on the outskirts of town as darkness falls, and forage along the streets and drains of the old town at night, waiting patiently for hand-outs from a butcher's shop beside a dirt soccer field at 6 a.m. and also investigate the gustatory potential of each arriving load of garbage at the city dump every morning.

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