

28 June 2007

By: Stefan Anitei, Science Editor



Kevin rolls around with two adult brother lions
DailyMail

[The Lion Whisperer](#)

An amazing empathy with the big carnivores

Perhaps amongst the beasts that haunt our imagination, triggering the deepest fears, there is nothing more powerful than the big cats. Up until a few millennia ago, we were their breakfast, lunch and dinner. And even today, lions, leopards and tigers are causing quite a number of victims in Africa and Asia. Still, some people have the ability to connect with these beasts perhaps better than they do with humans. Behaviorist Kevin Richardson has such a close bond with big felines that he can spend the night curled up with them while not experiencing the smallest fear of attack. [img=2]Richardson, 32, works at a wildlife conservation area off Johannesburg in South Africa, and he uses his amazing abilities on other species too, from cheetahs and leopards to the more unpredictable hyenas. He has an instinctive ability to perceive the mood of these beasts - whose molars are so tough and their jaws so strong that they can pierce through thick steel (hyenas can feed on the largest bones, including elephant bones) - and connect with them; mother hyenas even allow him to handle their newborn cubs without any startle. [img=3]Still, Richardson prefers the lions, a combination of power, intelligence and social behavior, to whom he treats with unconditional affection, approaching each individual differently, speaking to them, caressing them and showing them respect. Richardson has a degree in human physiology and worked with pre and post-operative human patients, but he started with the animals ten years ago when he realized that he could trust a lion more than he could trust a human. Well, almost every time, because a close encounter with an aggressive four-year-old male in the early days of his work with the animals gave him a lesson to never forget. [img=4]The beast put him to the ground and began biting him until something in his passive attitude stopped the lion. "I'm most confident with animals I've known since birth, but I can become close friends with any lion less than a year old, when it is still flexible enough to accept me as part of its own pride. I have to rely on my own instincts to gauge an animal or a situation, and I will not approach a creature if something doesn't feel right. I don't use sticks, whips or chains, just patience. It may be dangerous, but this is a passion for me, not a job.", said Kevin.