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The Man-Eater Lion

The abnormal behavior

People are an easy prey for any large predator. And between death by hunger and death by shooting, perhaps a lion won't starve till dying. In Mozambique, the rainy season is the moment when the lions turn into man-eaters, because the too tall grass impedes them to approach to their normal preys. This happened in Fort Mangoche: a man was standing in front of his hut, beating the drum, while the woman was cooking. The hut was located about 100 m (300 ft) off the village and often these isolated people attract the lions. Suddenly, the woman heard his shout "The lion! It grabbed me!". She took from the fire a burning stick and hit the lion in the face with it. The beast let its prey escape. The woman dragged her husband into the hut and blocked the door, but the man died few minutes later. The lion return, scratching the door insisently. The terrorized woman took a new ember and went out running towards the village. The lion took the man's corpse and disappeared with it into the bush. In the '80s, a lion terrorized a region in southern Mozambique, avoiding cleverly all the set traps. Two experimented hunters from Blantyre decided to chase the lion. A young bank functionary insisted to join them, finding this very exciting. In the first night, while the three men were resting in their bivouac, the lion suddenly appeared in their middle, grabbed the functionary and started to carry the speechless victim. A gun shot made the animal release its prey and disappear in the night. The functionary left the expedition sooner than expected, and the two hunters finished the career of the man eater. The traditional homeland of the man eating lions remains Eastern Africa. In 1908, Vaughan Kirby and south African zoologist Austin Roberts organized a hunting expedition in the area with the goal of killing some man eaters. They reached a region where lions killed 20 people, but none of the locals helped them in their search. A superstitious fear retained the locals from giving them the slightest sign and they had to carry by themselves the four killed lions. The animals had the habit of stalking in front of a hut and in the dawn they killed the first person going out (they do the same when stalking wart hogs at the entrance into their dens). In Mozambique, a lion killed this way 40 persons in a month, before being shot. At a moment, many villages in the Zambezi river valley were inhabited, as people fled from the lions that pierced the straw roofs and took the victims from the huts with extreme audacity. John Taylor hunted in Eastern Africa many man eaters. Sometimes, entire families were made of man eaters: males, females and youth. The parents initiated the young into the man hunt the way other lions do it for hoofed mammals. A chief of tribe had been attacked by a lioness and two young lions. One of the youngsters jumped onto his back, while the other stayed at a distance of 10 m (30 ft) watching the action. The man fell face down, but his desperate cry made the beginner hunter forget what to do, as even if it kept the man at the ground under its weight, it did not try to bite. Several villagers chased away the lions. Taylor killed in one occasion a lion who lost a fore limb in a trap, and the infirmity had turned him into a dangerous man eater. On the eastern shore of Lake Malawi, five askaris (local police) from a village were waken up by a slight grunt and a crackle of broken twigs. A groan was heard from a hut located 50 m (166 ft) away and a noise of broken bone. Askaris knew a man-eater was inside, so they surrounded the hut and started to shoot randomly through the walls, waiting for the lion to go out. After a period of silence, during which nothing happened, they decided to put on fire the hut. At dawn, amongst the fumigating remains, they found the burned bodies of a lion, a woman and a child. The lion had a bullet in the heart, the woman received three bullets, but was probably dead by then. The child had the skull smashed by one paw blow. If the lion bites its human victim by the head, the death is instant, as it touches the brain. But sometimes they grab their victim from the shoulder, dragging it alive, and death can come up to 15 minutes later, so that a quick intervention can save it. The hunter and naturalist Hans Besser, who killed 16 man eaters in 14 years, counted this occurrence. "A local was grabbed by the lion in the presence of his family, in the village of Oussangou, where I had installed myself. The man's cries were terrible in the night. My lantern spread a weak light, so that I hurried to take the burning mops and torches of the villagers. The high rained grasses clearly revealed the path of the lion, due to the victim dragged on the ground. The man was shouting ceaselessly. In was in front, followed by the men with torches, and when we saw the victim, the lion pounced on us. The torch carriers run and my lantern turned off, leaving me in a total darkness. I returned walking

backward. I spoke with the men, explaining that if we go altogether, the lion would run. Moreover, I could shoot if they lightened over my shoulder. The victim was moaning, emitting from time to time scaring sounds. When we approached again the scene, the lion pounced again. The third attempt failed too, and we renounced, as the man also could not be further heard. Next day, we encountered his intact body, except some portions from the thighs and back. There was no other wound, thus the lion had eaten him alive."When man-eaters are not interrupted, they do not leave of their victims nothing more than the head and often the soles. From a soldier kidnapped from the instruction field, the lion left only his footwear, with the still bleeding feet, whose meat had been chewed to the entrance of the boot. In Somalia, a lion attacked an English officer resting on the camp bed. The bed overturned, and in the confusion, the lion run away with ... the pillow. In 1930, in Rhodesia (today Zimbabwe), a lion entered into the tent occupied by a young engineer, his wife and their child, which was grabbed by the beast from the cradle. The mother alerted the whole camp, and the engineer with the locals, carrying lanterns and torches, found the child unharmed few hundreds of meters away. No sign of fangs could be seen on its skin. Once in Botswana, a local encountered a lion during the sunset, but had time to take refuge in a tree. The lion installed under the tree, waiting patiently the whole night. To the dawn, the man got asleep, lost balance, and fell right over the lion, which run away frightened. In the Achanti area, a man-eater killed a man. His brother swore revenge, and he was part of the group which several days later surrounded two lions that had killed several cattle and two people. Singing a war song and imploring the help of the spirit of his brother, he approached the lions and shot an arrow to the heart of the already arrow-wounded male. But in the next moment he was attacked by the lioness. He shot hastily an arrow into the lioness, but he could not stop her jump. The lioness killed the daring archer and bawled her defiance towards the villagers, before falling over her last victim, pierced by tens of arrows. The cases of man-eaters are a burden for the lions' protection in some African areas. The man-eating behavior could have reached all time highs in Africa in the last years and environmentalists might have to find another methods for protecting both villagers and animals. Shrinking habitat and food supply force lions on humans. Attacks on humans by lions are on the rise in Tanzania and Mozambique as people have been sleeping outdoors to defend their crops from raiding bush pigs. "Each year, more than 200 Tanzanians are killed by lions, elephants, crocodiles and hippos," said Robert R. Frump, a well-known conservationist. "Until conservationists and environmentalists understand the consequences of this terrible toll, wildlife will be seen more as a negative than a positive by African villagers and so will be endangered in the long run." added Frump, who has studied the issue of the man-eaters in the South-African Kruger National Park for many years. "Kruger is horrible, but Tanzania makes Kruger look like a shopping mall. In Kruger, refugees passing through the park are attacked and eaten and that is awful. In Tanzania, in some of the southern villages, the lions literally go door to door and seize peaceful farmers and their children from mud huts and front porches. That is a horror beyond imagination until you meet the villagers. Often, all they have to face 400 pound (180 kg) lions is a machete and fish nets." A 2006 study made in Tanzania revealed that the rate of lion attacks has tripled since 1990, and if the humans are not protected, lions will be the losers. Of course, many may wonder: why should we protect lions in this case? The man-eater cases may be spectacular, but less than 1 % of the lions do this. If hoofed prey is abundant, human prey is totally ignored. In the end, in many cases, people adopt a risky behavior that makes them vulnerable to lion attacks. Actually, more people die annually in car crashes than those killed by lions in a century...so, did anyone think about banning cars?