

# These Lions are Found in Two Places in the World

By Marion Verweij

***Ishasha sector of Queen Elizabeth National Park in Southwest Uganda is home to 24 tree-climbing lions, one of the two places they can be found in the world.***

After three weeks of searching, Kris Debref, was getting desperate. Normally she would locate the lions within days. Lockdown had kept everyone confined to walking; no one enters a safari park on foot. Three months into lockdown, Kris was allowed to jump in her Landcruiser and set off to try and locate the lions.

## ***Why was she so alarmed?***

In 2018, just after a *National Geographic WILD* special had been filming the lions, 11 of them were poisoned by a local villager who had recently lost a cow to a lion. One cow can be a villager's whole livelihood.

Before COVID, Uganda, also called The Pearl of Africa, received an increasing number of visitors each year. The tourism industry was becoming an important contributor to the economy. COVID brought a whole new

dimension. In many parts of Africa, the halt to tourism has been an enormous blow. Be it tour guide, cleaner or simply providing eggs to the lodges, the income of villagers around the lodges has decreased dramatically. Add into the scenario the fact that family members from the cities have also lost their jobs or business and are returning to the villages and you have a major food shortage on your hands. As the local people of Ishasha are traditionally hunters, poaching has increased.

Therefore, Kris was worried when she couldn't locate the lions. After the episode with the 11 lions, Kris worked with colleagues to collar some lions so they could monitor their whereabouts and relocate them away from human habitation, if needed. She, therefore, called on friends to see if they could use the collar tracking device to find them now.

## ***They found Jacob.***

A lion expert and a vet joined the search and found Jacob, a young, collared, male lion, with his leg in a snare. Records show that Jacob was caught in a trap once already in his young

life. Now, his leg was badly crushed and had to be amputated. Kris joined the rangers when they fed him the next day.

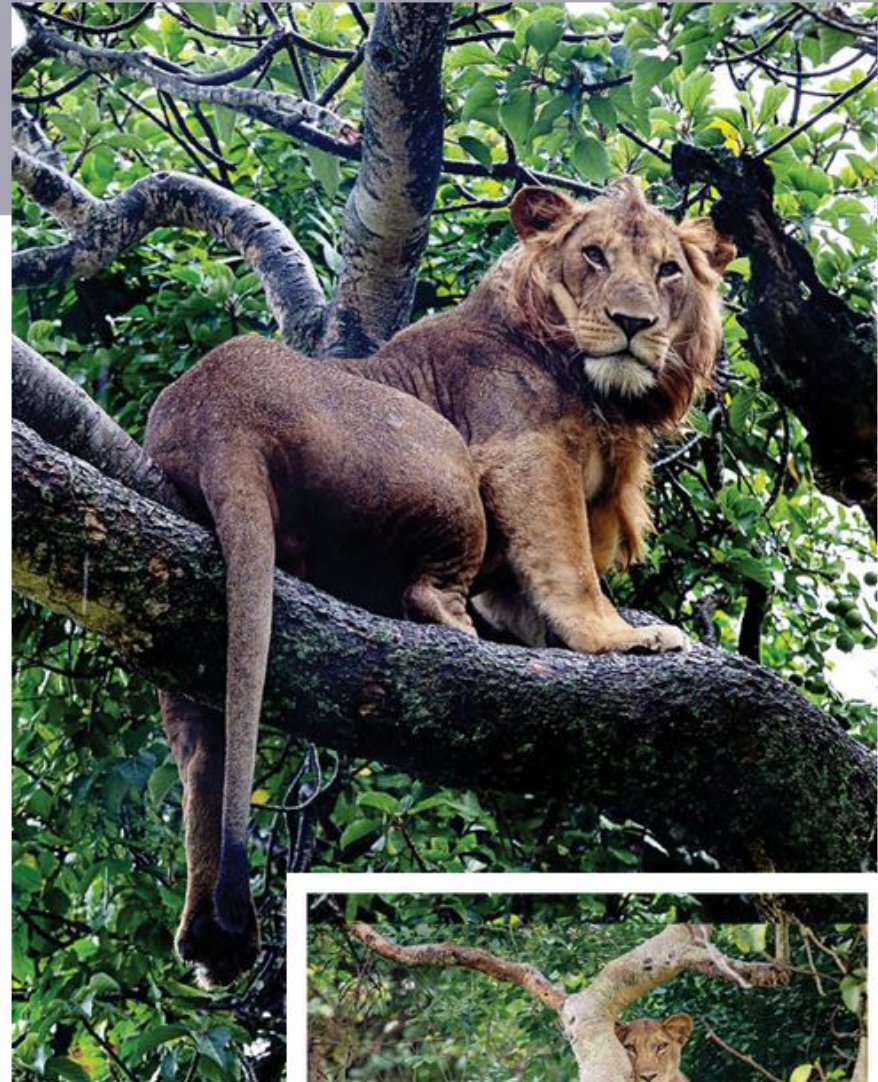
Kris said, "I felt so frustrated, at the situation and seeing the poor lion in such pain. There is so much needed and so little you can do."

Only one other lion with an amputated leg has survived in another park.

"There is a need for a sanctuary where animals that have suffered from wildlife crime can be cared for and rehabilitated before they are released back into the wild. Where a baby elephant that has lost its mother can be nurtured until it's strong enough ... Where a poached chimpanzee can recover from the trauma of being trafficked inside a suitcase."

The team do their best, but the big question with Jacob is whether he will survive.

Read [bUneke's Extra blog](#) to learn Jacob's fate and discover Kris' vision for Uganda's wildlife and the people who live in the communities of Ishasha.



Marion Verweij left her home in England and traveled Europe before settling in the Netherlands. She has 20+ years of voluntary and employment experience in Africa and works as a part-time consultant interim CEO for the nonprofit African-European Parliamentarians Initiative, promoting good governance and human rights in Africa.

