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8/11/17

It doesn't seem that long ago that we were adoring our five lion cubs that were born to Razi and Amali. But the cubs couldn't stay babies forever, and the boys had to find a home of their own. In this case, we found a home for them, and it wasn't that far away. Just a short drive and you can visit them at the Denver Zoo. Eventually, we did add two more boys, Asani and Bantu, from Zoo Miami. Our two lion prides are a favorite destination for the guests of Lee Richardson Zoo. It is amazing to see such a great predator up close.

On Thursday, we celebrated World Lion Day at Lee Richardson Zoo. This is a day of awareness and learning. While we make it fun with crafts and activities, our purpose is to let you know lions need our help. In the past fifty years, the lion population in the wild dropped by half. There are many issues facing these amazing creatures: poaching, loss of habitat, and conflicts with humans. These concerns don't just affect lions, but many species. Each issue comes with its own way to fix the problem.

Poaching is the most common issue people think of when they think of animals like lions going extinct. It is the most obvious: shoot, bang, dead. A simple one, two, three progression. While this issue does have an effect on many species, it generally isn't the leading cause of extinction. Note that hunting isn't the issue, poaching is the issue. When done right and under controls put forth by biologists and population managers, humans can hunt and are a balanced part of nature. Hunting is a legal method of population management. In fact, there are many hunting programs out there that fund conservation efforts. The licenses to hunt rare animals on safari can go for hundreds of thousand if not millions of dollars. Poaching is illegal, uncontrolled, and fueled by greed. This distinction between hunting and poaching fueled the issue of Cecil the lion two years ago. Those involved did not hunt, they poached. By supporting legislation making the sale and purchase of poached items illegal, we can stop the economy that fuels the poaching. In addition, we can support organizations that train and fund soldiers and park rangers to protect vanishing species.

While people generally think of poaching as the number one problem, it is habitat loss that has the largest effect on many species. If we didn't have farms to efficiently produce our food we would need to wander many miles every day to hunt and gather what we needed. This is the life of most wild animals. They don't have the luxuries of

agriculture to efficiently produce enough food to survive. So when we chop that habitat up to build housing editions, roads, mine for resources, or farms there is a drastic impact on the wildlife populations in the area. This is why we all need to reduce our impact on the world around us by reducing how much we use, reuse what we can, and recycling as much as possible. Simple switches to more energy efficient products and recycling can go a long way to minimize the need take over more sections of habitat.

While the last issue that lions and other endangered species face isn't the most common, it can be the most difficult to fix. Human conflict with wildlife occurs when animals are hurting the livelihood of one or many individuals. Lions aren't known for attacking humans, contrary to what movies and t.v. would like you to think. Lions are known for going after unprotected cattle. These cattle could mean life or death to many African villages. I personally cannot blame a hungry farmer or rancher for being angry when one of the cattle they depend on is killed, which is why we must respect their cultures and problems while at the same time working with them to find alternate solutions to the problem. Organizations such as Lion Guardians ([lionguardians.org](http://lionguardians.org)) teach tribal members better ways to protect their flocks and also teach them how to be guides for researchers. By doing so, they turn what was a financial burden into a financial gain. Not only do these tribes start to not hate the lions, they become the lions' protectors and advocates.

Did you miss out on World Lion Day? Don't worry, there are many more opportunities to learn and help help endangered species at Lee Richardson Zoo. On September 9<sup>th</sup>, Lee Richardson Zoo will be hosting A Wild Affair, an annual fund raiser held by Friends of Lee Richardson Zoo. The money raised at this event will go towards zoo improvements. Then on September 17<sup>th</sup>, we will be hosting an event for International Red Panda Day. On September 22<sup>nd</sup>, we will bring awareness to the black rhino crisis for World Rhino Day.