

## Lions 'close to extinction'

**Lion populations have fallen by almost 90% in the past 20 years, leaving the animal close to extinction in Africa, a wildlife expert has warned.**



Live with them or lose them

There are now only 23,000 left, compared to an estimated 200,000 two decades ago, according to Laurence Frank, a wildlife biologist from the University of California.

Drawing on a study in Kenya, he says that the only hope for lions and other predators is for humans and wildlife to live together.

Clare Wallerstein of the International Fund for Wildlife Welfare told the BBC that the problem would get worse as Kenya's human population doubled in the next 12 years.

### **Populations plummeting**

Interviewed in New Scientist magazine, Dr Frank says "It's not just lions. Populations of all African predators are plummeting."

The wild dog population has fallen to between 3,500 and 5,000 and there are now fewer than 15,000 cheetahs.

"People know about elephants, gorillas and rhinos, but they seem blissfully unaware that these large carnivores are nearing the brink," he says.

Dr Frank blamed the decline in predator numbers on people killing them to protect livestock.

"People have always killed predators," he says. "But there's only so much damage you can do with spears and shields."

"Now everyone has got rifles and poisons."

His study of the Laikipia region of Kenya convinced him that predators and farmers could co-exist peacefully.

Improved fencing and dogs to raise the alarm when predators approach

could cut attacks drastically.

But with each lion killing livestock worth on average £200 a year, equivalent to one cow or three sheep, "bullets and poison are always cheaper than good husbandry".

Controversially, Dr Frank says the only solution is for local people to earn money from the predators, either through tourism or through sport hunting.

"In Laikipia you could make half a million dollars a year by shooting the problem animals that are going to be killed anyhow," he says.