

Natural World Press and Publicity
Return of the Giant Killers:
Africa's Lion Kings



TX: Wednesday 19th August, 9pm, BBC Two

BILLING

In southern Africa a pride of lions has rewritten the rules - they have learnt to take down elephants. In this follow up to "*Africa's Giant Killers*" we join the pride at the start of the rainy season. As the elephants depart, a catalogue of dramatic events unfolds. The pride males turn against each other; an inexperienced mum puts her new born cubs in mortal danger; a rival group of lions challenge the pride for its territory and when lightning strikes, fires burn day and night. When the dust eventually settles the pride is left with only one choice, to face their old foe the elephants or risk starvation. The final showdown awaits.

Narrated by Imogen Stubbs
Filmed and Directed by Brad Bestelink and Written by Steve Gooder
(for Icon Films & NHFU Botswana)
Series Editor - Roger Webb
www.bbc.co.uk/naturalworld

Medium <179 Characters

In this sequel to *Africa's Giant Killer's* a lion pride is in chaos. As the rainy season unfolds, they are left with only one choice: to take on elephants in a final showdown.

Short <90 characters

A lion pride is left with only one choice: to take on elephants in a final showdown.

THE STORY TOLD IN THE FILM

Every year in northern Botswana, as the dry season tightens its grip, thousands of hungry animals make their way to the last remaining patches of grassland. The Savute marsh, with its precious water supply, is normally packed with game and the lions are easily sated. However, this year, the Savute has been through its worst drought in three decades. The grass has run out and the herds have vanished. Desperate to remain in their territory, but with only elephants left to hunt, the resident lions have no choice but to take on Africa's giants. Their remarkable success as giant killers has enabled them to stay in the marsh so far. However, as the pride faces tragedy after tragedy, will they retain their giant-killing title and with it, their precious marsh lands?

A coalition of five brothers watches over this pride and its precious lands, bringing much needed security to its members. However, even before the rains return, the coalition is starting to unravel. When a young lioness comes into heat, the brothers fiercely compete to claim her. As the dust begins to settle, it becomes clear that three of the brothers have been banished. With just two males left to defend the pride, the future of the giant killers is suddenly looking shaky.

However, respite is on its way. Luckily for the hungry pride, the welcome rain signals the return of the grasslands and the grazing herds. During the barren drought, only the elephants remained, slaves to their need for water. Now they are liberated from the lions' grasp and able to move on. When they return they are bound to be stronger and less vulnerable to the lions. However, for now, there are other herds to satisfy the prides appetite.

Unable to join the hunt, the young lioness is now caring for two tiny cubs. She stays away from the boisterous group, keeping the vulnerable cubs hidden. With this new mother preoccupied and the pride's ageing leader barely able to keep up, there are just two lionesses left to lead the hunt. An injured buffalo provides an ideal opportunity for them to lay on a hunting tutorial for the younger members of the pride, who are keen to get involved.

Just a few days after the hunt, the fearless leader lets out her final roar. Unsettled by the death of the lioness, the young mother collects her tiny infants from hiding and re-joins the pride. The younger members of the pride are fascinated by the new arrivals. When the new mother leaves to go hunting, her cubs find themselves as play things. The older lions' misplaced enthusiasm has tragic consequences.

The pride's fortunes appear to have hit rock bottom. It has lost three adult males; its most experienced giant-killing lioness has died; and now the older cubs have killed two infants. The prides heightened vulnerability is soon tested as a dozen intruding lions appear in the

north. A brief skirmish and the intruders move on but one of the pride's male leaders is luckily to escape with his life.

Months pass and following a rare period of stability, the pride begins to regain its strength. A new litter of cubs are successfully integrated and as well-fed herds of buffalo roam the marsh, the pride seems well placed to take advantage. Yet their attempts to hunt are unsuccessful with only one lioness refusing to give up. Endowed with the same courage and determination as her giant-killing mother, she emerges as the pride's new leader. Despite her efforts though, the pride is starting to go hungry, hampered by the lions' inability to work together.

Soon after, the trespassers from the north return. Despite their hunger, the giant-killing pride attacks the invaders and successfully defends its territory, with devastating consequences for an intruding male. It's a pivotal moment for the pride. Then, when the rallying lions make their first big kill, their future finally must be assured.

However disaster is around the corner. A freak fire rips through their kingdom, turning huge swathes of grass into ashes. With little left to eat, the bountiful herds depart, leaving only the elephants behind. Once again, the desperate pride is forced to make a bold and risky move in order to survive. The elephants are strong; there are no easy targets. The leader of the pride forges on regardless, but with each failed attempt the pride's grip on its kingdom slips further. Hardships and bad luck have threatened to destroy this pride altogether, but in the face of adversity these remarkable giant killers eventually rise to the challenge. By hunting elephants, for a second time, they finally secure their kingdom.

CONTACT DETAILS AND PUBLICITY MATERIALS:

• ***Natural World*** : The Series Editor is Roger Webb.

For more information contact Sophie.Meyjes01@bbc.co.uk 0117 974 6816

• ***BBC Publicity : Front Desk - 020 8576 9900***

Email: publicity.frontdesk@bbc.co.uk

Website: www.bbc.co.uk/pressoffice

Previews: www.bbcpreviews.co.uk

Images: www.bbcpictures.co.uk

THE CONTRIBUTORS

The Return of the Giant Killers is the sequel to the award-winning Africa's Giant Killers, filmed by Brad Bestelink and Richard Uren in the Savute Game Reserve in Botswana.

Brad is fourth generation, born-and-bred in Botswana. His grandfather was a crocodile hunter, while his father set up the first photographic camp in the Okavango Delta. He has spent most of his life in the bush, following and filming the predators of the Savute and Moremi. Understanding the dynamics of the Savute, Brad knew that it would be the focal point for unusual animal behaviour. Therefore, together with friend and fellow cameraman Richard Uren he moved to the area for over 2 years to capture the events

unfolding. Brad and Richard camped every night in their vehicles so they would never be too far from the action and were able to document the astonishing story seen in this film.

“The lions killing elephant behaviour was driven by the old female. After her death we weren’t sure that it was going to continue. Her death, combined with the fire, were serious setbacks to this pride and we were never sure whether they would be able to overcome these obstacles.”

The film was written by Steve Gooder, a BAFTA-nominated, multi-award winning filmmaker who has previously made six Natural Worlds.

LOCATION

Savute is an area covering the western end of Botswana’s Chobe National Park. Situated on the northern edge of the Kalahari, it is a large amphitheatre formed by an unusual collection of natural geological features: a sand ridge, dolomite hills, and an ephemeral marsh caught and suspended on the edge of a great sand mass. Water pushing down from the confluence of the Lynanti and Kwando waterways along the old fractured architecture of the Savute channel literally transforms Savute overnight into one of the most dynamic wildlife spectacles in Africa.

SPECIES NOTES

African Elephant (*Loxodonta africana*)

The African Elephant is the largest living terrestrial mammal. The height of a bull at his shoulder is between three and four metres whilst a female’s height is about three metres. Their trunk acts as a fifth limb, a sound amplifier, and an important method of touch. Their large ears allow them to radiate excess heat.

African elephants mainly eat leaves and branches of bushes and trees, but also eat grasses, fruit, and bark. Each day they can consume anywhere from 220 to 660 pounds. This species lives up to around 70 years.

The complex social structure of elephants is organized around a system of herds composed of related females and their calves. Each family unit usually contains about ten individuals led by a matriarch female.

When threatened, elephants will group around young calves and the matriarch, the leader of the group, may attack the foe. Young elephants stay with their mother for many years and are also cared for by other females in the group. Male elephants leave their natal group at puberty and tend to form much more fluid alliances with other males.

Elephants are extremely intelligent animals and have memories that span many years. It is this memory that serves matriarchs well during dry seasons when they need to guide their herds, sometimes for tens of miles, to watering holes that they remember from the past. They also display signs of grief, joy, anger and play.

Recent discoveries have shown that elephants can communicate over long distances by producing a sub-sonic rumble that can travel over the ground faster than sound through air. Other elephants receive the messages through the sensitive skin on their feet and trunks. It is believed that this is how potential mates and social groups communicate.

Lion (*Panthera leo*)

Lions live for 10-15 years in the wild. Males seldom live longer than 10 years, as injuries sustained from continual fighting with rival males greatly reduce their longevity. They typically inhabit savannah and grassland, although they may take to bush and forest. Lions are unusually social compared to other cats. A pride of lions is made up of related females and offspring, defended by a small number of adult males. Groups of female lions typically hunt together, preying mostly on large ungulates. Although they are apex, keystone predators, lions are also expert scavengers - obtaining over half their food by scavenging as opportunity allows. Sleeping mainly during the day, lions are primarily nocturnal, although bordering on crepuscular in nature.

Other species featured

Buffalo, warthog, giraffe, zebra, and numerous birds.