

*Maasai pastoralists kill lions in retaliation for depredation of livestock by lions*

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In the drylands of southern Kenya, Maasai pastoralists are in direct conflict with carnivores that kill their livestock. Lion-killing today is a criminal act in Kenya, but is also part of traditional Maasai culture. Lion-killing is less prevalent today than in the past, but the modern causes of lion-killing remain controversial. Here, we surveyed 213 Maasai communities from three geographic regions to determine whether lion-killing is an indiscriminate act of retribution for the loss of livestock to any cause, or a specific act of retaliation for the loss of livestock to lions. We found that the probability of lion killing increases with increasing numbers of livestock lost to carnivores, but not with increasing numbers of livestock lost to drought, disease or theft. We also found that lion-killing discriminates among culprit species of carnivore. The probability of lion-killing increases when lions are identified as culprits of livestock death, but not when leopard, cheetah, hyena, dog or jackal are identified. These results should change the perceived wisdom that lion-killing is provoked by general loss of livestock. It is instead a direct action against the loss of livestock to lions. This evidence should help shape the governance and mitigation of human-wildlife conflict in Kenya and beyond.

