

# REVIEW

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**Organization Name:** Lion Encounter

**Location:** Zambia & Zimbabwe

**Website:** <http://www.lionencounter.com/volunteer/lion-project>

**VERDICT:** NOT RECOMMENDED

**Project Overview:** Lion Encounter or Walking with Lions strives to take captive bred lions and reintroduce them into the wild. A volunteer will be walking with lions, helping feed cubs and have very close encounters with the lions within the project. Volunteers are responsible for the overall care for the lions.

**Is it Conservation?:** Absolutely NOT. This is not true conservation. There is no place or need for breeding captive lions for 'return' to the wild. There is enough of a population of wild lions in the world that these captive programs aren't necessary. It's rarely proven that a human can successfully teach a lion how to hunt and exist in the wild.

Secondly, if you truly want a lion to be successful in the wild, then you would limit and ultimately eliminate all human contact, not encourage it like this organization does. The lion must see humans as a threat and run away. A wild lion that isn't afraid of humans is a dead lion. These captive bred lions would be acclimated to humans and when 'released' back into the wild, wouldn't mind the being in close proximity to human population. This is a lose-lose situation for the lions.

These lion exploitation schemes are just a money maker. They rip cubs away from the mother, so that the mother can breed again soon and draw animal lovers in with the hopes of touching and handling young lions. This is heart wrenching both for the mother and the cub, they call for each other but can never have contact again. It is stressful on the cubs that are being constantly handled by multiple people.

Here is a great link from Panthera, a leader in big cat conservation, on why projects like these are NOT good for the conservation of these animals.

<https://www.panthera.org/blog/2016/06/09/walking-lions>

This is a hot topic discussion in the conservation world. However, when you question whether you think a project has a positive impact or not, it's best to check with leading organizations and experts, like Panthera.

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These reviews are based solely on my opinion and research done by leading conservation organizations



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**Verdict Explanation:** There is no true value for projects like these, if you want to truly have an impact in conservation. There is something to be said that several countries don't allow for programs like these because they don't allow breeding of these animals in captivity (Namibia & Kenya). It's hard to know where these lions go after they have grown up fully, even though the website discusses several parks. Lions are good breeders and I doubt a couple of parks have the space for so many lions. Unfortunately, lion cubs in these scenarios typically end up in a canned/caged hunt as an adult. You have to ask yourself, what happens to the animals after I have left the project?

It is to be noted that several people have been injured while volunteering in these projects because ultimately, you're working with wild animals and in particular, large predators.

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