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SOUTH AFRICAN LIONESS GIVES BIRTH TO FIRST LION CUBS IN RWANDA June 2016

The first lion cubs in Rwanda in almost 20 years have been born to one of the five lionesses donated by &Beyond Phinda Private Game Reserve to reverse a local extinction of the species in Akagera National Park as part of an African Parks project.



Estimated to be approximately fourteen weeks old, the three cubs were first spotted with their mother in early May and have since been seen climbing trees and eating meat provided by their mother. Their arrival brings the total number of lions in Akagera, the only park where they are present in Rwanda, to ten.

“There is great excitement in Rwanda about these new additions,” says Jes Gruner, Park Manager of Akagera. “We are thrilled that the lion population is growing in the park. It shows that they have settled in well and are thriving in their new home.



Lions became extinct in Akagera 15 years ago, as Rwanda experienced a period of intense upheaval following the 1994 genocide, resulting in the lack of management of its national parks and the subsequent poisoning of lions by cattle herders. In June 2015, the five lionesses from &Beyond Phinda, as well as two male lions from Tembe Elephant Park, were introduced to the park in a ground-breaking effort to bring the species back to Rwanda.

The mother of the cubs is the eldest of the five females translocated from &Beyond Phinda. Eleven years old and an experienced mother, she is known to have successfully raised at least three litters prior to her translocation. This is good news for her latest cubs, as they will rely entirely on their mother for food and protection during the first few months of their lives.



“The five lionesses that we donated for translocation to Rwanda were carefully selected and are very tourist-friendly, disease-free and genetically diverse,” says Simon Naylor, Conservation Manager at &Beyond Phinda Private Game Reserve. “Studies have shown that Phinda’s lions are the second most genetically diverse population in South Africa and we are proud to have played a role in spreading these genes to Rwanda.”

The cubs’ father is the elder and more dominant of the two males reintroduced to the park. Additional good news is that the same male has also been witnessed mating with one of the younger lionesses, suggesting that more cubs may be expected in the near future.

For the purposes of the translocation, African Parks partnered with &Beyond. &Beyond Phinda Private Game Reserve has a long history of lion



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conservation in South Africa. It was one of the first private game reserves in South Africa and the first in the province of KwaZulu-Natal to introduce lions, thereby extending their historical range. Since the first 13 lions were introduced in 1992 and 1993, almost 220 lions have been born on the reserve. &Beyond Phinda has helped establish other lion populations in private game reserves in the Eastern Cape, Zululand, Mpumalanga, North West and the Limpopo Province, as well as neighbouring Mozambique.

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ABOUT &BEYOND

&Beyond is one of the world's leading luxury experiential travel companies, designing personalised luxury tours in 15 African countries, India, Bhutan, Sri Lanka, Nepal, Chile and Argentina. The company also owns and operates 35 extraordinary safari lodges and camps in Africa and India, as well as privately guided expeditions, which include private jet tours in Africa and mobile camping in Botswana. All of these activities allow the company to positively impact more than 9 million acres of wildlife land. Established in 1991, &Beyond takes exceptional care of its guests in order to make a difference; its commitment to sustainable responsible travel, conservation and community empowerment has been globally recognised with multiple awards over the years.

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ABOUT AFRICAN PARKS

African Parks is a non-profit conservation organisation that takes on the complete responsibility for the rehabilitation and long-term management of national parks in partnership with governments and local communities, African Parks manages 10 national parks and protected areas in seven African countries. Visit www.african-parks.org to learn more.

ABOUT AKAGERA NATIONAL PARK

Located in the east of Rwanda, on the border with Tanzania, Akagera is 112 000 hectares in size. A river of the same name on its eastern boundary feeds into a labyrinth of lakes that makes up the eastern boundary of the park. Rolling grassland and wooded hills make up the western boundary. The park is home to a huge diversity of animal and birdlife and boasts spectacular scenery. Akagera is managed through a public private partnership between the Rwanda Development Board and African Parks.

Images of lion cubs courtesy of African Parks / Sean Carter.