

# The economics of a lion



LION IN THE PRIME OF LIFE  
*high value*

In *Unasylva* Vol. 33, No. 134, 1981, FAO economist Philip Thresher used a computerized model to estimate the importance of lions as a tourist resource at Amboseli National Park, Kenya.

Based on number of visitors to the park, the demographics of the lions there, the visitors' foreign exchange expenditures, their time spent seeking and viewing wildlife and the lions' share of that (2.5 percent), he calculated that the tourist value of a lion over a 15-year period (1977–1992) was US\$1 195 000.

Because a lion should be on view for at least six to seven years, one individual lion would thus draw about \$515 000 in foreign exchange receipts. This value as a tourist resource compared favourably with the value of a lion as a hunting or sport resource

(\$8 500) or as a commercial resource (based on the retail value of a lion's well-cured skin, i.e. between \$960 and \$1 325). One maned lion's present value to each rancher family in the park was thus close to \$90, compared with \$10 from a lion shot legally.

Thresher further showed that the present national value of one maned lion was comparable to that of 30 000 zebu-type cattle, because a herd of that size would produce about \$665 000 over 15 years, and the value to the national economy would be about 180 percent of that sum, or \$1 197 000. To put these figures in perspective, the 6 000 Masai living in the Amboseli ecosystem were at the time supported by 50 000 cattle and 20 000 sheep and goats.

"The immediate implications for managing

wild animals in general and lions in particular in an area such as the Amboseli ecosystem are staggering. Over 2 000 jobs could be tied to wildlife viewing in Amboseli alone," Thresher concluded.