

By Gareth Patterson

On Batian's Death

A day later, I returned with a slab of sandstone upon which Julie and I had engraved the following:

Batian
July 1988-July 1991

He was only three years old when he died.

It was a year and a half later, after his killers had been found guilty of illegally shooting Batian and had received paltry fines, and after much cajoling of insensitive South African nature conservation officials for his remains, that I finally brought Batian to rest in the Tuli bushlands. One afternoon, Julie and I went to the stone cairn and I buried my Batian's skin and skull. I am inflicting upon myself great grief in writing these words, but write I must to make known the cruel and senseless killing of lions that persists throughout Africa, lions shot for "sport," for man's pleasure. It is happening as you read these words.

After Batian's death, I would sit each afternoon beside the cairn of stones. I would question the value of my work. Despite this work, Tuli lions were again being killed. I could not prevent the killing of one lion, my lion, by man. It was, however, beside Batian's grave that one day I received an answer to my questions.

One evening, before returning to her cubs, Furaha walked with me down to Batian's grave. As the western horizon glowed at sunset, I sat to one side of the cairn and Furaha the other. It seemed unusually quiet and I think we both sensed Batian's presence. A herd of impala crossed to the west but did not see Furaha and me. Furaha's head rose and together we watched them pass. Then, with their passing, we stood and slowly headed away in the golden light.

The following evening, I went down to Batian's grave alone. Upon reaching the grave, I saw to my surprise lion spoor, and that of cubs, beside the cairn of stones.

The night before, Rafiki and the little ones had walked past the grave. I sat at the base of the cairn with the footprints of little lions around me. I touched the small pugmarks on the soft soil and my mood lightened. There, around me, was the answer to my questions. I was looking at the future; the future being living lions, little cubs and those of their kind yet unborn. I needed renewed courage to continue in my efforts for the lion and, as I sat there, I drew my courage from a remarkable lion called Batian.