



If there were to be a 'King of the Jungle', apart from the kingly beast itself, it'll be Gareth Patterson. The "strong feeling (that) stirred within me" at the sighting of lions when just about seven years old led Patterson to become a wildlife crusader who walks the wilds with Africa's wild denizens, championing their cause. Author of *Last of the Free* and *To Walk with Lions*, and the un-anointed successor to the legacy of the legendary Adamsons (*George and Joy of Born Free fame*) talks to *TSI* about ecology, mankind & their common challenges.



# THE LIONMAN AND HIS PRIDE

## How was the Adamson experience?

It was as a child that I was drawn to the Adamson's work with the big cats of Africa. I was captivated particularly by George's relationship with lions. Reading *Joy* and George's books nurtured within me the feeling that lions were going to be an integral part of my life.

As opposed to viewing myself as a successor to George's life work, I see myself as someone who had the privilege of being passed 'the baton of responsibility'. And many of us were passed this baton from the Adamson's. That's the Adamson's legacy, a legion of people worldwide whose actions today are inspired and influenced by George and Joy.

## Who else has really influenced you?

Many, many people, and other beings, have influenced aspects of my life. My friend and former tracker in the Botswanan bush, Fish Mailia, for example, instilled within me (*the sensitivity*) to listen to the 'messages' while in the wilds, to 'tune in' to the subtle signals that carry in the sights and sounds around one, alerting one to what lies ahead, sometimes alerting one to potential danger for example, and if heeded how danger can be avoided. This 'tuning in' I have realised is not exclusive to our time in

the wild, but to life in general. The key is to listen, even though it's not always easy to 'tune in'.

I have been influenced by writers, musicians, orators, people in the street, and being influenced, inspired, is a part of our personal evolutionary process, part of one's life 'work in process.' Lastly, my lions influenced me and were more like teachers who taught me how to look through the window into their world, into what I call Lionlife.

## To the world, your bonding with Batian, Furaha, and Rafiki sounds other-worldly. How do you recall it?

The bond went very deep indeed, and I was very blessed that a portion of my life was spent with them. It was an experience that became a part of me, which is alongside me to this day. Living as a lion pride member was very humbling.

## Across Asia & Africa, wildlife is in conflict with growing human populations. What is their ecological future?

Humankind is morally evolving, despite also, like all of us here, having witnessed our negative impacts on the planet. I like to believe that with a perceivable shift in consciousness, we can find the road for the future. Nature is never static and we are a part of that nature and we cannot exist without natural processes, thus it's imperative that we act on long-term initiatives. Otherwise our own survival surely will be in peril...

## Environmentalists are often at loggerheads over the role of forest communi-

## ties in conservation processes. What in your opinion is the way ahead?

It would be terribly damaging if the very people who were a part of the forest environment in the past, are not an integral part of its future. Without these communities participating in preservation planning, conservation could dangerously be viewed as exclusive and almost neo-colonialistic. Conservation has to be inclusive, based in principals of consultation, respect and communication with communities.

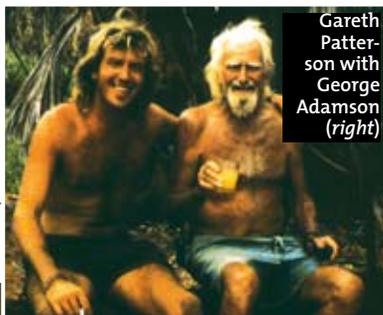
## What's currently keeping you busy?

Currently, I am continuing with aspects of the (*once thought extinct*) Knysna elephants, I'm involved in lion issues. I have been helping Karin Saks, with her primate preservation work, namely Vervet monkeys and Baboons. To borrow your phrase Indira, her relationship with these animals is almost 'other-worldly.' I am also busy with writing as well as our film project dealing with the Knysna elephants. I am working with filmmaker Mark van Wijk who has recently returned to South Africa from a two month project in India.

## Who is Gareth Patterson beyond wild-life and conservation?

Someone who is an eternal optimist, a realist, a lover of life and all things living, a spiritual person, and a pragmatist – all rolled into one. Which probably makes me a contradiction of sorts! 

Indira Parthasarathy



Gareth Patterson with George Adamson (right)