Cry Of The Kalahari: Mark And Delia Owens About Lions

Mark and Delia Owens are two individuals who shared the love of researching and understanding animals in their natural habitat. They were zoologists who strove to their dream of saving the precious life in Africa. They met in the early 70s as students at the University of Georgia, and soon were able to live their dream of studying nature in the wild lands of Africa. They got married “December 31, 1972”, (Owens, Delia 1949(?)-. (2020, April 3) and began their journey onwards to Africa. They even put themselves through some difficult times where they’d save up all the money they made and use it only for their soon to be long expedition into the wild. Shortly after they married, they auctioned everything they owned, and with $6,000, their plane tickets and back-packs, they headed to their ultimate destination. They arrive in Johannesburg, then to Botswana and from a small village named Maun they go out to the uncharted Kalahari Desert wildlife reserve. They use a Land rover that was given to them, even with its mechanical issues, they travel the rough terrain and arrive at Deception Valley where they will be spending the next seven years together surviving the wilderness alone with the few resources they were able to obtain. Mark and Delia wanted to explore a land that was previously unexplored by humans, and to be the firsts to do so and to make sure that they were able to learn as much as they could about the Kalahari. They were very earnest to try and get this land to be protected and unharmed from poachers and hunters. They were able to find a spot named Deception Valley, in the Kalahari Desert of Botswana. “The wildlife there had not been depleted by poaching, as it had been in other parts of Africa and were confident in hoping to observe this area of land for the sake of education.” (Goldberg, J. (2010, March 29). The Hunted)

The Republic of Botswana is located on the continent of Africa and is surrounded by Namibia, Zambia, Zimbabwe and South Africa. Botswana’s capital is Gaborone, “The city is located about 15 km from Botswana's border with South Africa in southeastern Botswana. The city is based near the confluence of two rivers and between the Oodi and Kgale Hills.” (“Botswana.” Cultural Capital and Prospects for Democracy in Botswana and Ethiopia, 2019, pp. 73–100., doi:10.4324/9780429277184-4.) The current population of Botswana is at around 2.292 million people. The people of Botswana, regardless of color, ancestry or tribal affiliation are known as Batswana (plural) or Motswana. “The majority of the area of Botswana in the Limpopo River basin is considered to be rural. There are six administrative districts found within the basin. The main urban centres within the basin are Serowe, Selebi-Phikwe, Palapye, Mahalapye, Francistown, Mochudi and Gaborone, in addition to a small number of small and medium settlements.” (Botswana.”Cultural Capital and Prospects for Democracy in Botswana and Ethiopia, 2019, pp. 73–100.) Diamond mining is what makes up a third of Botswana’s Gross Domestic Product (GDP) (35 %) and 70-80 % of its export earnings, while they also have tourism, livestock, subsistence farming and financial services. Back in the late 19th century, Botswana started out as just territory to natives but eventually was taken over by government on March 31st 1885. After some time, Botswana had evolved and grew, and even started their own democratic self-government around 1966. In the end, Botswana went from being a fairly poor country, to one of the few richest and grew exponentially throughout its upbringing.

Mark and Delia Owens were able to observe and extensively study many creatures while staying in Africa, one of the magnificent and alluring creatures they were able to learn more about, were lions. More specifically, they learned and observed lion prides. A lion pride is a

group of lions that contains a few adult males, related females and cubs. Within these prides, groups of female lions usually hunt together, preying mostly on large ungulates. Lion prides seem to have a structure or pyramid of who's strongest to the weakest. Within these lion pries, "Young males eventually leave and establish their own prides by taking over a group headed by another male. Males defend the pride's territory, marking the area with urine, roaring menacingly to warn intruders, and chasing off animals that encroach on their turf." (African lion. (2020, April 1). Retrieved from National Geographic) Lions tend to hunt at dawn and or dusk, but they're able to adapt their hunting schedules when needed to. Lions are able to communicate via chemical scent markings, vocalizations, licking, facial expressions, head rubbing and also visual markings. Lions also happen to sleep for up to16 to 20 hours a day. What makes up a lion pride is that a pride consists of mainly only female lions and just 1 male lion to very few young male lions. Up to around 5 or six females along with their cubs and the male lion leader make up the basic size of a lion pride. "Usually all of the adults in the pride will work as a team to protect each other and the young from other predators." (Lion Social Structure. (n.d.) Retrieved from Feline Worlds, Lion Social Structure) Lion prides are very nomadic, which means that's they don't have an exact set habitat, and wander around and live their lives as it comes.

Whilst staying in the Kalahari, Mark and Delia Owens also stumbled upon a pack of brown hyenas and were lucky enough to observe, study, and take notes of how brown hyena packs worked, due to there being not much information of them at the time of their 7-year expedition in Africa. The hyena packs the Owens were able to observe, were specifically the ones of Brown Hyena. Hyenas are carnivores and have a social hierarchy within themselves. Hyenas are mainly nocturnal and can choose to be either a nomad or live in a clan. The brown hyenas live in clans that are composed of extended families of four to six hyenas. These clans have their own territories and defend and protect their territories and each other when needed to. When raising cubs, all members of the clan contribute to raising the young and also tend to work together often in these clans. Solo hyenas who choose the be nomadic," are solitary scavengers and travel distances as far as 35 kilometers every night, hunting for food. With an excellent sense of smell, these animals can find carcasses several kilometers away." (Brown Hyena. (n.d.). Retrieved from Animalia) Hyenas are most known for their hectic laughs, but they can do more than just utter out their laughs. They use many vocalizations to communicate with other hyenas and also use scent markings to mark their/ their clans' territory/ boundaries. In the brown hyena clans, "There is a hierarchy in each clan which is maintained by ritualized forms of aggression, such as neck biting." (Dell Cheetah Centre. (n.d.). Hyena Facts - Brown Hyena Research.) The brown hyena is also deemed the rarest species of hyena mostly because of the intervening of humans. Currently the generalized population size of the brown hyena is at about 5,000-8,000, and have a lifespan of 12- 13 years.

In the Kalahari, there is a variety of creatures and animals from all sorts of species. One kind in particular, are called ungulates. "Ungulates are a group of large mammals that are distinguished from other animals by the presence of hooves. ... Almost all ungulates are herbivores and they have evolved ways to break down difficult compounds in plants that would be toxic to other mammals such as humans." (Ungulates. (n.d.). Retrieved from Basic biology) The kinds of ungulates that live within the Kalahari are: giraffes, zebras, wildebeest, hartebeest, and buffalo. Creatures like these ungulates have an abundant source of food in the Kalahari. The plants found in the Kalahari, are grasses, shrubs, acacia trees, and cacti. A familiar animal of the Kalahari is the giraffe. Giraffes are one of the tallest mammals to roam the earth. The life span of the giraffe is about 25 years and their height spans from15 to 20 feet tall. Giraffes are

seen as social animals. The female giraffes are known to get into herds, while occasionally including some younger males. Mature males live in 'bachelor' herds and fight for dominance using their necks. The older males are usually solitary. Giraffes are also well known to be able to adapt with mostly any situation they're in. "They drink water when it is available but can go weeks without it, they rely on morning dew and the water content of their food. Their very long necks are an adaption to feeding at high levels in the treetops." (Animal Adaptation. (n.d.) Received from Veeriku. Tartu)