

## **Fiona Miles: The lioness protecting her pride**

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**May 2019:** In Fiona Miles's role as operations director at FOUR PAWS, success is often measured through little achievements. Sometimes success looks like a dog getting a kennel before winter; sometimes it wears the face of someone who has been educated on animal welfare. And on some days, success is when a lion walks on grass for the first time, set free from cruel restraints imposed on it by man.

"That's when you really soak up everything and it outweighs challenges in this job," she says.

And challenges abound in Miles's day to day work at FOUR PAWS, an international animal welfare organisation committed to encouraging people to treat animals with respect, compassion and understanding. FOUR PAWS focuses on animals that are directly under human influence, helping wild animals kept in captivity, farm animals and pets, as well as strays, to the right to live a dignified life in an environment suited to their species.

Since she was a child, Miles has shown a strong affinity for animals and nature. She studied toward a degree in Marine Biology at the then University of Port Elizabeth and has been involved in environmental issues throughout her career. After becoming director of a wildlife estate, in 2006 Miles was approached to establish the South African office of FOUR PAWS and its big cat sanctuary, LIONSROCK.

"At a certain point in my life I realised that more needed to be done to ensure that animals get to live their lives the way they were intended to, and that there were injustices to be stopped," Miles explains,

"A key moment in my life was viewing the Cook Report for this first time. This report was the first to expose the atrocities of canned lion hunting to the world and was a catalyst to me embarking on a journey to bring an end to this barbaric practice and protecting the African Lion."

Over more than a decade, FOUR PAWS has rescued around 100 big cats from around the world. This includes 80 rescued lions, 16 tigers, 3 leopards, a cheetah and a caracal. All rescued big cats are provided with a lifelong home and species-appropriate habitat at a FOUR PAWS' sanctuary, such as LIONSROCK.

Today, LIONSROCK is the biggest big cat sanctuary in South Africa. But this is just one of Miles' achievements. In 2009, she was part of negotiations to rescue Zimbabwean elephants, which were successfully relocated to Hwange National Park. A year later, Miles was the project manager of the Robbin Island rescue of 81 animals that would have otherwise been culled. In 2017, Miles handed over a petition with 500 000 signatures to the minister of environmental affairs, calling for a ban of canned lion hunting.

But her greatest achievement has perhaps been touching the hearts of millions through cooperation with the media, to bring about change for animals. Creating awareness is vital to teaching right from wrong, ensuring that people are aware of the atrocious practices causing animal cruelty, and encouraging them to help by changing their behaviour.

"When I wake up in the mornings, I know there's still a lot that needs to be done to protect animals from the worst side of humanity. In South Africa we have a philosophy of Ubuntu, meaning more humanity towards others. This corresponds to the philosophy of FOUR PAWS, in more humanity towards animals," says Miles.

"Through FOUR PAWS I believe that I can make a difference in the lives of animals that would otherwise have been forgotten. That is what motivates me every single day."

Ends.