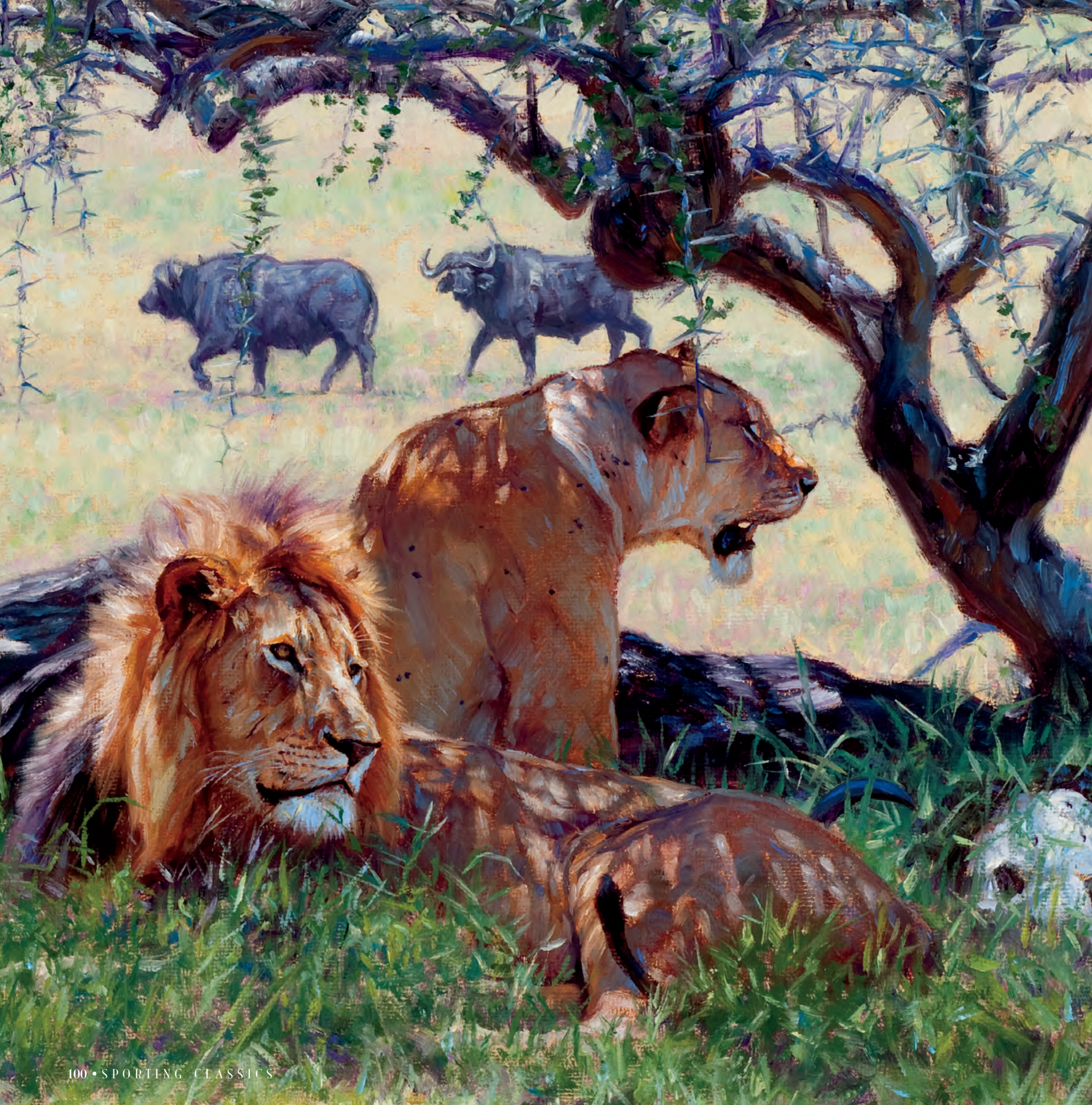


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KING OF BEASTS

A STUDY OF THE AFRICAN LION
BY JOHN BANOVICH

John Banovich believes he was born to tell the lion's story, from its ancient past to its troubling future. And in *King of Beasts*, a beautiful new book from *Sporting Classics*, he tells that story in a stunning portfolio of 134 paintings, many of which feature John's remarkable insights and adventures with Africa's most storied predator.

On the pages that follow are some of his favorite paintings and what he wrote about them.

Dreaming of Buffalo, 2011
Oil on Belgian linen, 12 x 16



Partners, 2007
Oil on Belgian linen, 32 x 50

There is no greater bond in the big cat world than between pride males. Male lions often start out their lives as litter mates, and these two brothers will grow up together and leave the family pride together. If they successfully conquer all of the threats facing them, they will finally arrive at the day when they rule over a territory and have a pride of their own. Like all brothers, they will fight over the small stuff, but reconcile their differences fairly quickly. One day, as new heirs defending their own pride, they will face an enormous amount of challenges, but because of their deep connection, they will go to war for each other, defining what the word “partners” truly means.



Testing the Night Wind, 2015
Oil on Belgian linen, 12 x 16

It is under the veil of darkness that most of Africa’s wildlife comes alive. Night is the time for both predator and prey to carry out their delicate balance between life and death. Under the intoxicating lure of the full moon, the elephants are driven to find water. Their trunks have a sense of smell that is up to four times as sensitive as that of the bloodhound, and it is believed they can smell water from several miles away. Ever-cautious as they approach the water’s edge, they pause and together begin testing the night wind, searching for the scent of any unseen danger.



Portrait of a King, 2003
Oil on Belgian linen, 30 x 30

**A Mother's Wish—
Long May He Reign,** 2013
Oil on Belgian linen, 30 x 50

This quiet narrative demonstrates the everlasting bond between a child and its mother, who shares what we all wish for our own children—a long and vibrant life. For this lioness' newly born cubs to survive in the kingdom of beasts, they will have to overcome many challenges along the way. Their mother will need to pass along all the lessons she learned from her mother and, with the right amount of luck, these little cubs will one day join their mother, siblings and cousins to become the next generation and the heart of the pride.



Man Eaters of Tsavo, 2002
Oil on Belgian linen, 50 x 80

"Banovich, you've taken it to a whole new low." That was the first reaction to *Man Eaters of Tsavo*. The other comments I heard before the exhibition opened weren't much better. I was in trouble. After exhausting so much time, money and effort on this painting, I wondered if I made a mistake.

The predator and prey relationship fascinates me more than anything else in nature. It's a relationship stained with blood—a relationship I never tire of painting. When commissioned to paint a dramatic lion scene, I centered in on the lions of Tsavo. How often does a chance to paint a unique natural-history story come along? It's rare. They often turn out contrived.



Committing myself, I re-read Colonel J.H. Patterson's first-hand account; I read Phillip Caputo's *Ghosts of Tsavo*; I watched the hit movie, *The Ghost and the Darkness*; and I saw the mounted lions at the Field Museum in Chicago. After all that, the difficulty of painting lions dead for more than 100 years felt as if I stood at the base of Mount Everest with a 75-pound backpack. Scant pieces of visual evidence existed. I found a few photos of the dead lions and the specimens at the museum. Patterson had cut their hides into rugs years before and though the taxidermists did a great job with what they had, the lions were little more than vermin-infested swatches of leather when Fields purchased them for \$10,000.

In 1898, these two beasts murdered and devoured 135 people. It took Colonel Patterson nine months of intense pursuit before he killed them. I needed to bring them back from the dead.

But how?

During my research, two traits kept emerging. One was the aggressive, bold manner in which they attacked. These lions charged into a crowded hospital and ripped patients from their beds in the middle of the day. The other trait was the indifferent arrogance with which they ate their victims—often within sight of horrified laborers. If I could capture those traits, I would accomplish something that, to my knowledge, no artist had ever done—paint the most infamous man-eaters in history.





Offensive Line, 1997
Oil on Belgian linen, 30 x 90

The concept behind *The Defensive Line* and *The Offensive Line* originated in the titles, which goes back to my days of playing football. I remember the feeling of facing a lineman that outweighed me by 75 pounds. African buffalo seemed to be the best candidate for that role, given their bad attitude and helmet-shaped horns. On safari in 1994, I came across a pride of lions and a herd of buffalo engaged in such a test of wills. Positioned 30 yards apart, they began to size up each other for what would be a deadly confrontation.

These nomadic lions in *The Offensive Line* are not yet mature enough to be pride males. Most are probably brothers or closely related. They possess a cocky attitude, feeling indestructible in their group of seven. As immature cats, they do not yet possess the wisdom to clearly understand that there is easier prey elsewhere.

The lions were waiting for a moment when the buffalo would make themselves vulnerable, exposing one of their young or showing signs of injury. Watching with intense interest, it was as if the lions were actually plotting a strategy.

The buffalo in *The Defensive Line* make for a very formidable opponent. The biggest bulls face the cats with an overwhelming sense of power. African buffalo weigh in at roughly 2,000 pounds. The lions weigh from 400 to 450 pounds, but they compensate for their smaller size with their ferociousness and determined attitude. Thirteen yellow-billed oxpeckers can be found among the branches. They remind me of the fans in the stands, hustling about, readying themselves for the incredible showdown.

Defensive Line, 1997
Oil on Belgian linen, 30 x 90





Bahati Ya Kawinda, 2005
Oil on Belgian linen, 48 x 74

Bahati Ya Kawinda is Swahili for “lucky hunting.” This piece features a family of lions on a warthog kill. Even though this is small prey for the two adults, it probably was an important hunting lesson for the cubs that, before long, will be capable of capturing their own prey.

I have seen lions and warthogs interact many times. One day, we found two adults and four yearling lions perched over some sort of den. The opportunity to witness a kill presents itself about as often as a total eclipse, so we waited for the action. A lion’s greatest offensive asset is its patience. After several hours, the sun forced them to move 50 feet into a patch of long, cool grass. That’s when we lost our patience and drove off to find an old *dagga boy* buffalo. When we returned, we found the lions still lazing in the tall grass. We decided to drive up and peer into the den’s entrance. Two crouching warthogs appeared to be staring back at us. They were easily within reach of a hungry lion.

Apparently, lions are as smart as they are patient. They had no interest in confronting two pairs of long, sharp tusks waiting like loaded crossbows. As we started to drive away, the warthogs exploded from the den with a loud grunt. The lions leaped to their feet, but the warthogs’ speedy scamper put 100 feet of space between them before the big cats could mount a charge. The lead lioness watched them sputter away and then sauntered to the hole and crawled in. After a moment, her hindquarters tightened and she backed out with a two-week-old piglet in her mouth. Two more piglets ran out screaming. One ran right into the waiting jaws of a cub—the other never looked back as it raced to freedom.

Cheering erupted from our vehicle—nobody likes to watch the death of a cute baby—especially if your curiosity may have provoked the situation. But the circle must turn and life has no possibility without death. This is how it has always been—and how it will always be.



OPPOSITE:

Game of Lions, 2014
Oil on Belgian linen, 50 x 75

Deep in the heart of every lion lives an ancient hatred for hyenas, never missing an opportunity to beguile their nemesis. For millennia, this turmoil has reached far beyond the competition for food. It is a war between eternal enemies. The composition is what makes this painting work. The concept was to create a bull’s-eye effect, centered on the male lions running into the pack and sparking a centrifuge of energy erupting all around them, while the vultures, marabou storks, hyenas and jackal escape the lions’ wrath. This has always been one of my favorite lion paintings.



**KING OF BEASTS:
A STUDY OF THE AFRICAN LION**

Written by David Cabela

Over his illustrious 26-year career as one of the world’s foremost wildlife artists, John Banovich has continued to draw and paint the African lion more than any other subject.

Now, in his new *King of Beasts*, a strikingly beautiful 12- by 11-inch book published by *Sporting Classics*, he presents 134 stunning color plates and 20 drawings of the lion and the many fascinating creatures that share the big cat’s wild domain.

Written by David Cabela, an expert on conservation, wildlife and things Africa, *King of Beasts* pays homage not only to lions but also to Banovich and his remarkable achievements in art and conservation. Two editions are available, each signed by John Banovich.

COLLECTOR’S EDITION:

Linen hardcover foil-stamped with a colorful dust jacket, signed by John Banovich. \$60

DELUXE EDITION:

400 mahogany-colored, leather-bound books with gold foil stamping, signed and numbered by John Banovich. \$90

**TO ORDER *King of Beasts*,
CALL (800) 849-1004 OR VISIT
SPORTINGCLASSICS.COM/STORE.**

SPECIAL NOTE:

JOHN BANOVICH WILL BE SIGNING AND PERSONALIZING COPIES OF HIS NEW *KING OF BEASTS* BOOK AT THE NEVADA MUSEUM OF ART IN RENO ON FEBRUARY 9 AND AT THE SOUTHEASTERN WILDLIFE EXPOSITION IN CHARLESTON, SOUTH CAROLINA ON FEBRUARY 14-16.

ABOVE:

Outnumbered, 2008
Oil on Belgian linen, 16 x 24

In any lion/Cape buffalo confrontation, the victor is always the one that outnumbered its opponent. When a single lion comes across a massive herd, it is he who might have to make a hasty retreat. If the buffalo are in a relaxed mood, they just might let him pass unharmed. I’ve studied the lion/Cape buffalo relationship for nearly 20 years, and each time I see them interact I invariably learn something new.