

***Counting Lions:  
Portraits from the Wild***

By Katie Cotton

Illustrated by Stephen Walton

A counting book that uses poetry to explore endangered and threatened species,  
their habits, habitats, and quest for survival.

**Audience**

- K-5

**Synopsis**

- Between 200 and 2,000 animal extinctions occur each year. What part do we play in an animal's devastating demise or stunning comeback? With oversized and exquisitely rendered charcoal drawings and lyrical poems about threatened and endangered species, the reader is invited to count from one to ten. Explore each of the ten majestic creatures through detailed realistic portraits and nuanced text that invites glimpses of their trials and tribulations, behaviors, physical attributes, what circumstances have occurred to place them in jeopardy, and what can be done to save them.
- Bookended by a lyrical and poignant introduction by Virginia McKenna, founder of the Born Free Foundation, a section entitled "About the Animals" that provides the species protection status, their habits and habitats, and information about organizations who work to save the animals, this book is a treasure. Take a moment to count the lions and ponder what we have to gain and lose if we take them for granted.

**Author Website**

- “Katie Cotton studied English at Oxford University and worked in education before becoming a writer and editor with the publisher, Frances Lincoln Children's Books. She lives in London.” (*Excerpted from Counting Lions*)

**Illustrator Website**

- “Stephen Walton is a self-taught, award-winning artist who works as a Supervisor at Bury Art Museum in Manchester, England.” (*Excerpted from Counting Lions*)
- <http://www.stephenwalton-wildlife-art.com/section608239.html>

**Introductory Contributor's Website**

- “Virginia McKenna started the international wildlife protection charity, Zoo Check, in 1984 with her husband and eldest son. Zoo Check later became the Born Free Foundation. Before becoming involved in conservation, she was an actress who played the leading role in the movie, Born Free. The Born Free Foundation is a global force for protecting and saving endangered species in the wild. (*Excerpted from Counting Lions*)
- <http://www.fatheroflions.org/>
- <http://www.bornfree.org.uk/>

## Curricular Connections

- Science - habitats, conservation, climate change
- Math - counting, statistics
- Art - photo realism
- Social Studies - geography
- Language Arts - poetry, anthropomorphism
- Guidance - social responsibility and activism

## Lesson Ideas

- Art
  - Compile a book in which each child chooses an endangered animal and creates a realistic charcoal drawing from photographs as Stephen Walton does. Learn about his methods of creating art. Focus special attention on the point of view of the illustration and whether to draw the animal up close or in familial groups to create the most powerful impact.
- Writing
  - Conduct scientific research on the chosen animal and write a brief factual biography. Then extrapolate information to write an emotional poem to accompany the drawing. Compile all student entries into a book and bind.
- Social Activism
  - A portion of the proceeds of the sales of Counting Lions goes to the Born Free Foundation. Using Virginia McKenna as a model, explore the idea of social responsibility and activism in which you learn about a problem you were previously unaware and work to change the situation.
  - Brainstorm strategies for bringing attention to the situation.
    - Use as a resource [www.youtube.com/watch?v=0vhpcUxvZXQ](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0vhpcUxvZXQ) uploaded on Mar 11, 2009 in which Virginia McKenna talks to Will Travers, Born Free Foundation CEO, about Born Free, her memoirs "The Life in My Years" and Christian the Lion.
- Endangered Species
  - Counting Lions profiles large animals but there are many smaller animals right in our own backyards that are endangered. Take a field trip to a wild life refuge or zoo and learn about these creatures. Chose an organization that works to help endangered animals and discover how children can help. Recognize that raising and donating money, signing a petition, planting native shrubs and flowers in your garden, reducing fertilizers and herbicides in your neighborhood are all ways that children can help.
    - For more ideas consult websites such as [www.endangered.org/10-easy-things-you-can-do-to-save-endangered-species](http://www.endangered.org/10-easy-things-you-can-do-to-save-endangered-species).
  - Conduct scientific inquiry into a particular animal, it's threatened status, what factors have contributed to the animal's current situation and what is being done to save it from extinction.
    - Consult a conservation website such as the National Wildlife Fund [www.nwf.org/What-We-Do/Protect-Wildlife/Endangered-Species](http://www.nwf.org/What-We-Do/Protect-Wildlife/Endangered-Species).

- Scientists estimate that up to one-third of U.S. species are at increased risk of extinction, and more than 1,300 U.S. plants and animals already have been federally listed as threatened or endangered and protected under the Endangered Species Act enacted by Congress in 1973. Under the ESA, the federal government has the responsibility to protect endangered species, threatened species and critical habitat. Research the Endangered Species Act and learn how people can create laws to affect change and how laws in turn, affect people's attitudes and behavior.
- Chose a culture in which there are animals on the edge of extinction and learn about the economic, social, and cultural reasons people make individual and group decisions to do things that harm animals such as poaching, hunting for animal body parts like ivory, burning rainforests, and polluting the environment. Learn about the process of debating an issue. Invite half of the students to debate for the conservationist point of view in which saving animals and preserving land for future generations is the priority and ask the other half of the class to debate the point of view of the indigenous peoples and their challenging need for economic sustenance and survival.
- Global Warming
  - Investigate global warming and climate change and how this affects animals. Watch the national weather forecast for several days. Use Google Earth, Ranger Rick magazine and [www.weather.com](http://www.weather.com) to discover weather issues such as droughts, rising sea levels and floods that are facing communities around the world. Use a world map to track areas that are facing environmental issues and see which animals are listed on the endangered list from that area. The Arctic and the challenges that polar bears are facing due to diminishing sea ice, milder temperatures, and shorter winters are an example. A helpful resource is [www.polarbearsinternational.org/about-polar-bears/climate-change](http://www.polarbearsinternational.org/about-polar-bears/climate-change).
- Compare and contrast your daily quest for survival with that of a chosen animal. Explore how you obtain food, battle the elements of nature, raise youngsters, sleep, and find shelter. Create a diagram investigating the similarities and differences.
- Giving human characteristics to animals, inanimate objects or natural phenomena is a human trait called “to anthropomorphize.” Find examples in other books or create your own. Think about why humans do this and how it helps or hurts our views on animals and their importance in our world.

### **Common Core Anchor Standards**

- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.W.7  
Conduct short as well as more sustained research projects based on focused questions, demonstrating understanding of the subject under investigation.

### **Suggested Companion Titles**

- [Animal Kingdom Information Graphics, Understanding the Facts in the Blink of an Eye](#) by Nicholas Blechman
- [Born in the Wild, Baby Mammals and Their Parents](#) by Lita Judge
- [Citizen Scientists, Be a Part of Scientific Discovery from Your Own Backyard](#) by Loree Griffen Burns

- Migration Nation: Animals of the Go from Coast to Coast by Joanne O'Sullivan
- The Animal Book: A Collection of the Fastest, Fiercest, Toughest, Cleverest, Shyest - and Most Surprising - Animals on Earth by Steve Jenkins