Expert to discuss decline of African lions

Who: Laly Lichtenfeld, executive director of African People and Wildlife Fund, research affiliate for Yale University, member of the African Lion Working Group
What: Talk on the decline of the African lion and how to help
When: 7 p.m. Friday
Where: Wilson Community Center
How much: Free to attend; beadwork for sale
Web: www.afrpw.org

By Sarah Lison

PHOTO COURTESY LALY LICHTENFELD

Africa's most famous species is on the decline. Dr. Laly Lichtenfeld, a member of the African Lion Working Group, will talk at 7 p.m. Friday at the Wilson Community Center about efforts to save the great cats.

The organization Laly Lichtenfeld co-founded with her husband works with ranchers to prevent attacks on livestock by native predators. In the valley she's called home for 10 years, these attacks have become more frequent as the people use more land outside the villages for grazing and farming.

Though the challenges may sound familiar, the landscape is halfway around the world.

Lichtenfeld, executive director of the African People and Wildlife Fund, lives among the Maasai people in the Great Rift Valley in Tanzania, and it is the African lion whose very existence she works to protect.

"Lions are disappearing," said the Yale University research affiliate, "and it's amazing to me that people don't know that considering they're one of the world's most famous species."

On Friday evening, Lichtenfeld will speak at the Wilson Community Center to raise awareness of the decline of lion populations across Africa and seek support from a community that shares an understanding of wildlife management.

Lichtenfeld also will sell Maasai beadwork after the presentation, which starts at 7 p.m., said event organizer Ann Smith.

Smith, a Jackson resident with a love for Africa, met Lichtenfeld through a Maasai friend years ago during a conference in town. The two developed a friendship, and Smith has twice traveled to Africa to observe Lichtenfeld's work.

"She's very well loved by the native people," Smith said.

The feeling is mutual, Lichtenfeld said, and it's essential to her work.

For example, one of her organization's many projects involves "living walls."

Working in concert, villagers and Lichtenfeld's staff developed corral walls made with thorny trees and chain-link fencing. The trees act as posts, cover the fencing with dense, thorny brush and grow high enough to prevent large carnivores from jumping into corrals at night.

"This keeps the lions out, the animals in and allows people to sleep at night," Lichtenfeld said.

Lions often prefer to hunt under the cover of night, so about 60 percent of attacks at traditional corrals happen at that time, she said.

Yet, despite an increasing number of attacks, even on humans, "there isn't a sentiment that all lions must go," Lichtenfeld said.

"I feel really lucky in Tanzania," she said. "There is a strong local ethic that the wildlife is part of their natural heritage."

The Maasai tend to be quite tolerant, though they will kill predators after repeated conflicts with livestock or an attack on humans. Poison, in the form of a cheap American pesticide called Furadan, often is used, Lichtenfeld said.

Still, "it takes several attacks before they will retaliate," she said.

"It is positive in that sense, and our job is just to help them maintain that tolerance."

For the lions, humans' willingness to coexist could be crucial.

Only about 30,000 roam Africa today, down from more than 200,000 in the early 1900s, Lichtenfeld said.

"And a huge amount of that loss has happened in the last 20 years," she said.

Acclaimed author to give free reading at arts center

Who: Don DeLillo
What: Reading
When: 7:30 p.m. Tuesday
Where: Dancers' Workshop Studio 1, Center for the Arts
How much: Free

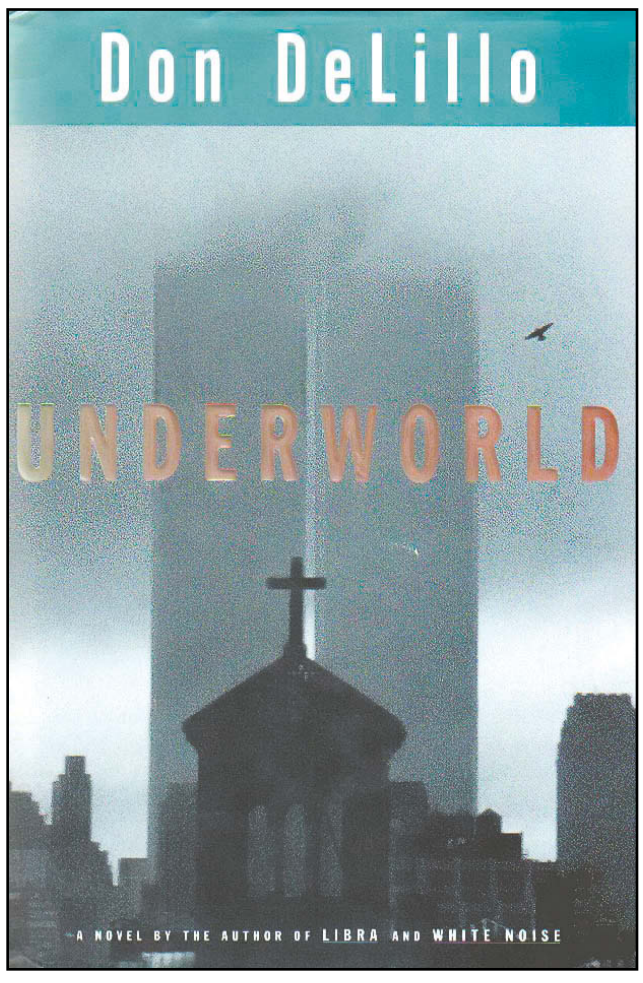
By Katy Niner

Time seems to pass. The world happens, unrolling into moments, and you stop to glance at a spider pressed to its web. There is a quickness of light and a sense of things outlined precisely and streaks of running luster on the bay. You know more surely who you are on a strong bright day after a storm when the smallest falling leaf is stabbed with self-awareness. The wind makes a sound in the pines and the world comes into being, irreversibly, and the spider rides the wind-swayed web.

For almost 40 years, Don DeLillo has ridden the wind-swayed web of our world and spun 15 novels that make readers stop and consider the filament.

Cued by falling aspen leaves, DeLillo arrives in Jackson to give a free reading Tuesday night. With 150 seats available in Dancers' Workshop Studio 1 in the Center for the Arts, entrance is first-come, first-served. Doors open at 7 p.m. A book signing will follow the reading. The evening is presented by the University of Wyoming's Master of Fine Arts Program in Creative Writing, Teton County Library Foundation and Jackson Hole Writers Conference. The day before his Jackson appearance, DeLillo will give a reading at the University of Wyoming.

Beth Loffreda, the university's MFA program director, put the coup of bringing DeLillo to Wyoming in context. "I think that many people outside Wyoming don't consider us on the literary 'map,' so to speak, so partnerships like this one between the UW creative writing program and the Teton County Library Foundation, to bring extraordinary writers like DeLillo to the state, are fantastic opportunities for us," she wrote in an e-mail.



More intimately, Loffreda expects his readings will inspire aspiring Wyoming writers. "The chance for them to meet a writer like DeLillo is unforgettable – the kind of thing that stays with you for a lifetime," Loffreda wrote. "Writers are always drawn to the kind of spectacular landscapes we have here in Wyoming – we can be sending great art out into the world, alongside all the other critical resources we produce. Having DeLillo here is a fine reminder of that."

Since his literary debut with *Americana* in 1971, "DeLillo has lived in the skin of our times," a description borrowed from the book jacket of *The Body Artist*, the 2001 novel that begins with the passage above. His books – panoramic and prophetic – examine the creases of contemporary culture: from President Kennedy's assassination (*Libra)* to toxic clouds and culture (*White Noise*) and the Cold War (*Underworld*).

Whether the setting is the 1951 World Series or a rambling rental house, DeLillo digests history through the day to day, and gnaws at global topics with a detached American sensibility. Humor speckles his sparse prose.

In 1985, *White Noise* won the National Book Award, and seven years later, *Mao II* scored him a Pen/Faulkner Award for Fiction. In 2006, *Underworld* was named one of the three best novels of the last 25 years by *The New York Times Book Review.*

On Tuesday, DeLillo will read from his most recent book, *Falling Man*, a novel set in the aftermath of Sept. 11, 2001.

His next novel, *Point Omega*, slated for release this winter, follows a young filmmaker and his documentary solicitation of a secret war advisor.

The son of Italian immigrants, DeLillo grew up in the Bronx, steeped in sports and street games, and attended Fordham University. One summer, he worked as a parking attendant and during downtime started reading literature – William Faulkner, Henry James. After graduation, he worked in advertising. The city and its cultural confluence – of jazz, foreign movies and modern art – influenced him more than any academic course, according to interviews (he did not grant any ahead of his Jackson appearance).