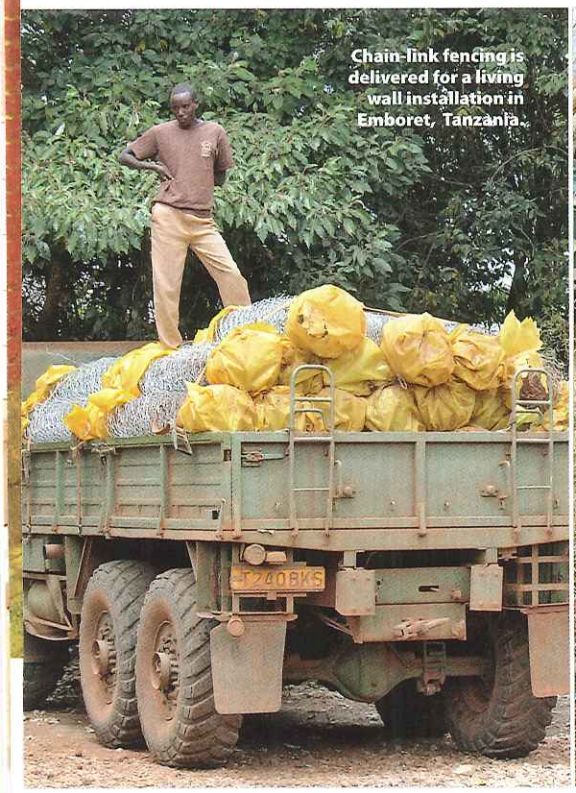
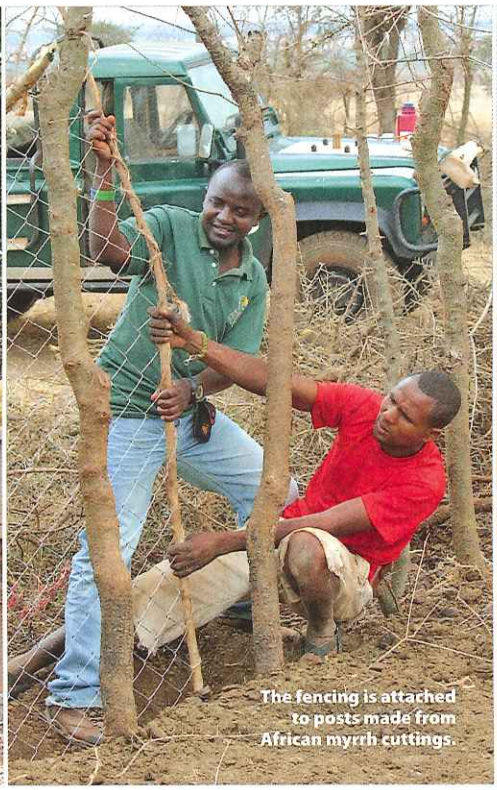
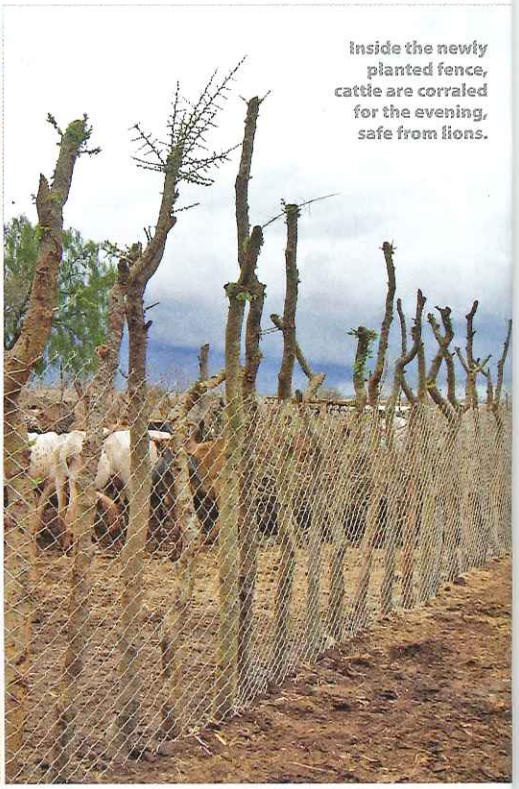


Chain-link fencing is delivered for a living wall installation in Emboret, Tanzania.



The fencing is attached to posts made from African myrrh cuttings.



Inside the newly planted fence, cattle are corraled for the evening, safe from lions.

Good Fences

"Living walls" help herders protect cattle from lions

It's a rude awakening. Startled out of sleep by noise from their cattle corral, herdsmen on East Africa's Maasai Steppe must search for a flashlight—if they have one—then venture into the darkness to possibly confront a lion, a predator four to five times heavier than a wolf and a good deal more deadly. Often, as they rush to protect their livestock, they stumble across the carcass of a freshly killed cow or bull, representing a big chunk of their family's wealth. Panicked by the attack, their other cattle have usually broken out and rushed off into the night.

Retaliation is swift and broad. In the past, herders might have set out with a spear in search of a single lion. But these days, it's more common for Maasai to lace the cattle carcass with poison, then wait for the lion to return to eat. Entire prides are wiped out.

"A lion that eats cattle is a dead lion," says Humane Society International program manager Mike Skuja.

Now, a project funded by HSI and other partners is helping to protect lions near northern Tanzania's Tarangire National Park by safeguarding cattle with stronger corrals.

Traditional corrals, or bomas, made of thorny acacia branches, used to be enough to keep lions away. But with nomadic families more and more settled and herders moving to cities for jobs, it's a heavy burden for those who remain on the range to walk farther and farther to gather acacia that has been over-cut or lost to drought. Elders sometimes hire people to fix bomas. Otherwise they fall into disrepair.

Working with Maasai communities, the nonprofit African People & Wildlife Fund is planting cuttings of a quick-growing spiny tree called *Commiphora africana* (African myrrh) as living rot- and termite-resistant posts for bomas. Galvanized steel chain link is then stretched to create a fence lions can't penetrate or jump. Each household contributes labor and 25 percent of the cost of the chain link, with donors like HSI covering the rest. So far HSI has paid for four "living walls" in the village of Emboret.

Families with the fences can now sleep soundly at night: The new bomas have reduced livestock attacks by more than 60 percent in one area and lion killings by 75 percent—from as many as eight a year to just two, says Laly Lichtenfeld, executive director of the African People & Wildlife Fund. The group can't put them in fast enough to meet Maasai demand.

"Living walls made the society to be free and to let lions roam around," says Elvis Kismir, a Maasai who works for the fund. "This means that the number of lions will increase again." — *Karen E. Lange*