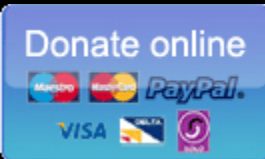


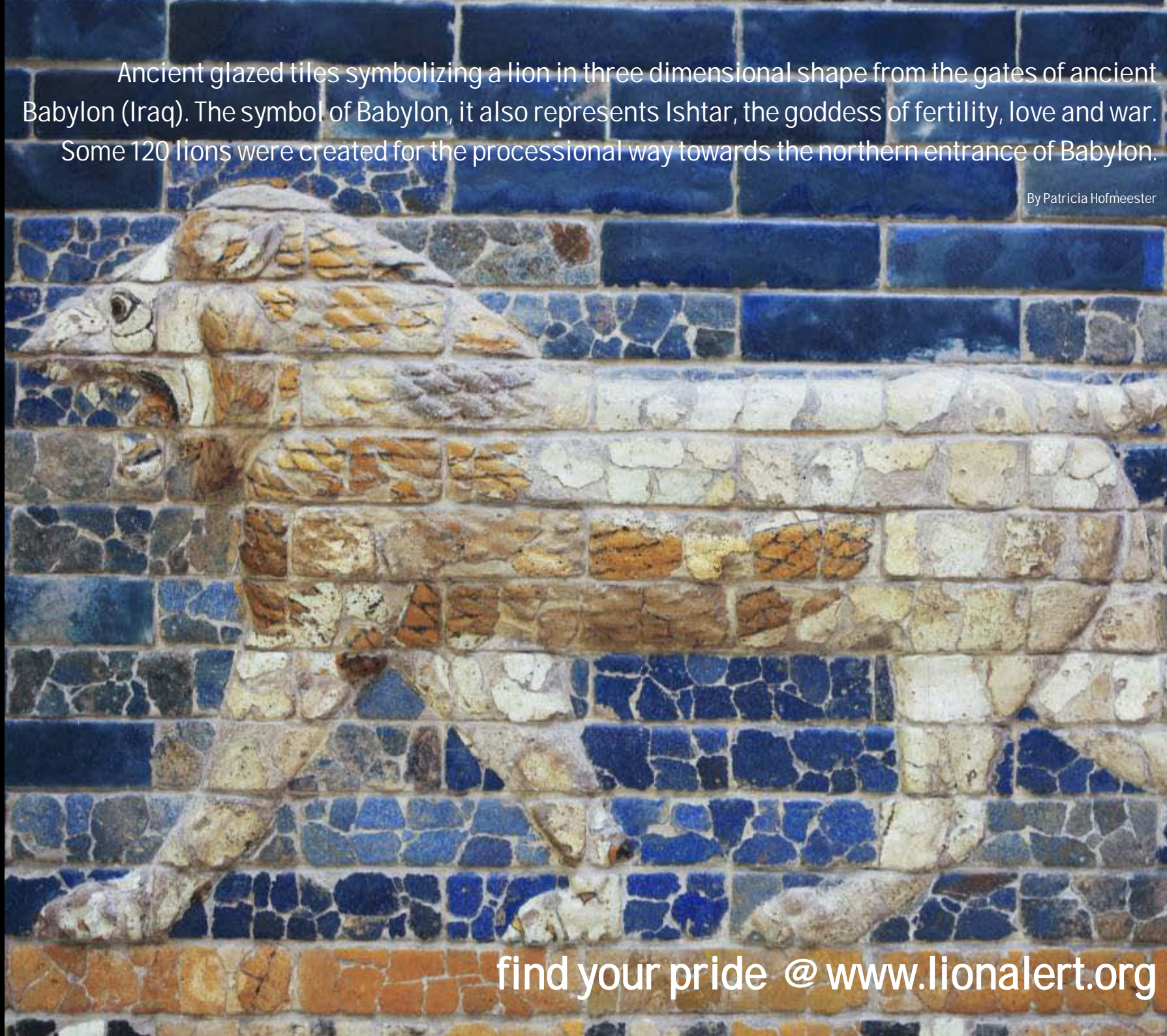


May 2011



Ancient glazed tiles symbolizing a lion in three dimensional shape from the gates of ancient Babylon (Iraq). The symbol of Babylon, it also represents Ishtar, the goddess of fertility, love and war. Some 120 lions were created for the processional way towards the northern entrance of Babylon.

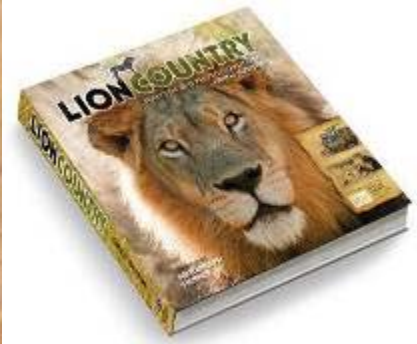
By Patricia Hofmeister



find your pride @ www.lionalert.org



Seven of the eight: Temi got momentarily lost in the tall grass



Congratulations to Elaine Grimes - winner of our *Lion Country* competition. A copy of the book by wildlife photographer Chris Weston is on its way to Elaine, courtesy of Evans Mitchell Books www.embooks.co.uk



Antelope Park's Tsavo will feature in May's edition of Getaway Magazine. Former volunteer Sylvie van den Bossche took this photo on her placement at the Park in July 2010.

Picture the scene... you're a wildebeest, minding your OWN business when this mob come thundering towards you! Good luck. The Dambwa eight of Kela, Kwandi, Loma, Leya, Rundi, Rusha, Temi and Tswana went out en-masse for a morning encounter in their future release site on the 28th April.

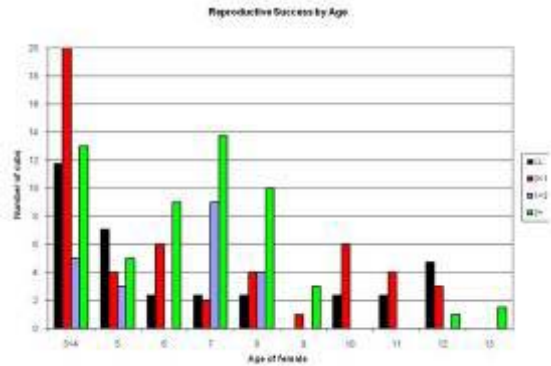
At times all eight would disappear in the tall grass, only to re-emerge in an explosion of gold seconds later as they chased one another through the site with no small amount of enthusiasm.

But the games soon stopped when first Leya then Tswana noticed a herd of wildebeest about 150 metres away. As one by one the lions slipped off in different directions it was only minutes later that a cloud of dust went up signalling that the wildebeest had become aware of the lions' presence. But the pride worked to divide the herd and the end result was an inevitable and well earned breakfast.

Two days later and the 4RTs caught another wildebeest and it only seemed fair and right that the KLs were let out to join them for a meal once again.

Over the past month we have reported on the loss of four of the five cubs born to the Ngamo pride this year. Cub mortality rates in a wild situation are high with studies suggesting between 50 – 67% + of cubs fail to thrive although the highest level of mortality is with first time mothers.

The following graph shows reproductive success from a study in Botswana which revealed that survival rates for cubs of first time mothers is as low as 26%, most dying before their first birthday. A first time mother's "shotgun" approach to motherhood does produce a number of surviving cubs, but it is the careful, older females that reduce initial mortality threats. Whilst the females of the Ngamo pride may be older than many first time mothers they were still expected to make the same errors of younger mothers.



Above: LL = lost litter (i.e. never emerged from den); 0<1 = cubs that died before 1 year; 1<2 = cubs that died before 2 years; 2+ = cubs that essentially survived.

Causes of cub mortality are often not known. A study of lions in the Serengeti suggested 25% of cubs were taken by predators, 28% starved and 47% died of unknown reason, simply disappearing. According to Schaller, the response of a lioness to cubs is a balance between care and neglect. As a social creature a lioness prefers to be with her pride rather than separated with her small cubs. As such, they will seek out pride members and spend the day with them; up to 24 or more hours may elapse between visits to the cubs. Females can be careless with their cubs, sometimes even leaving them when a predator is present, or simply failing to return to a den site to suckle them for no apparent reason.

Lionesses make little attempt to keep newborns isolated from the rest of the pride and will readily other pride members to enter the den. Full integration of cubs is a gradual process, often based on whether they are able to keep up with the moving adults, but integration may start before they can walk at 5 or 6 weeks of age. This is also the age when cubs are often brought to kill sites with some feeding on meat even at this young age, dependent on the varying development of their teeth. Mother's will allow their cubs to interact with other members of the pride without concern, although they may call if they observe a cub approaching a feeding adult. Schaller noted that he observed a cub approach a feeding male; the cub ignoring its mother's call. As it approached the male slapped the cub; which could cause fatal injury.

The choice to follow a lioness or remain at a den is the cubs'; if they follow they are not always able to keep pace and may be left behind, and will likely die or be killed by predators. At a kill cubs may be crushed or bitten by competing adults. The greatest reason for cub mortality is probably abandonment, sometimes for no apparent reason with even seemingly healthy cubs being left behind and subsequently dying.

These events are difficult to understand and even more difficult to accept, but they are part of the natural life of a lion and therefore part of life in the Ngamo pride. We anticipate that the pride will achieve higher reproductive success with successive litters.



Livingstone volunteer, Jackie Abell, had been in training for the Brighton Marathon since her placement in April 2010; having completed the 26.2 mile course on the 15th of April this year, just one week later she was on a plane to visit the lions that had set her off and running in the first place:

“Well, I did it! I’m not entirely sure how, but on Sunday 10th April on a hot day in Brighton I completed the marathon in 4 hours 20 minutes and 35 seconds!

I won’t pretend it wasn’t painful, because it was! But, it was also hugely enjoyable. The crowd were fantastic, with people rigging up hoses and showers from their kitchen sinks to spray the runners with cold water as we went past, as well as keeping our spirits up on the 26.2 mile slog. To the small child whose tin of Quality Street I raided at mile 12; apologies! I don’t usually run off with children’s sweeties!

The only point at which I seriously wanted to stop and go to the pub was mile 16. You’ve already gone a long way and there’s still 10+ miles to go! However, I’d taken photos of some of the lions with me. A quick look at them, and I remembered why I was doing what I was doing. The pub could wait - I had a marathon to finish.

To date this has raised £1,500 for ALERT but I’ve left the justgiving page open, as more people have donated since the marathon. So if you can help to boost this total, please do at www.justgiving.com/Jackie-Abell

I went back to the project in Livingstone a week after the run and saw for myself yet again how urgently money is needed to conserve this charismatic species we’ve all fallen in love with, to fund release sites in Zimbabwe and Zambia for the lions in stages 2 & 3, and to help the communities that ALERT work with and support. In a nutshell, the project and those lions need our help. Please let’s get these lions to stage 4.

Finally, a huge thank you to everyone at ALERT and all of you who have sponsored me, supported me, suggested songs I could train to (although thrash metal took some getting used to!) and suggested lion names to go on the shirt. As Bisa’s name was at the top of my running shirt, the crowd seemed to assume this was my name and cheered her on for 26.2 miles. I informed Bisa on my recent placement that she’s now famous in Brighton. Apparently she’s available for autographs!

And will I keep running? Oh yes! I’ve got 4 hours 20 mins and 35 seconds to beat...”



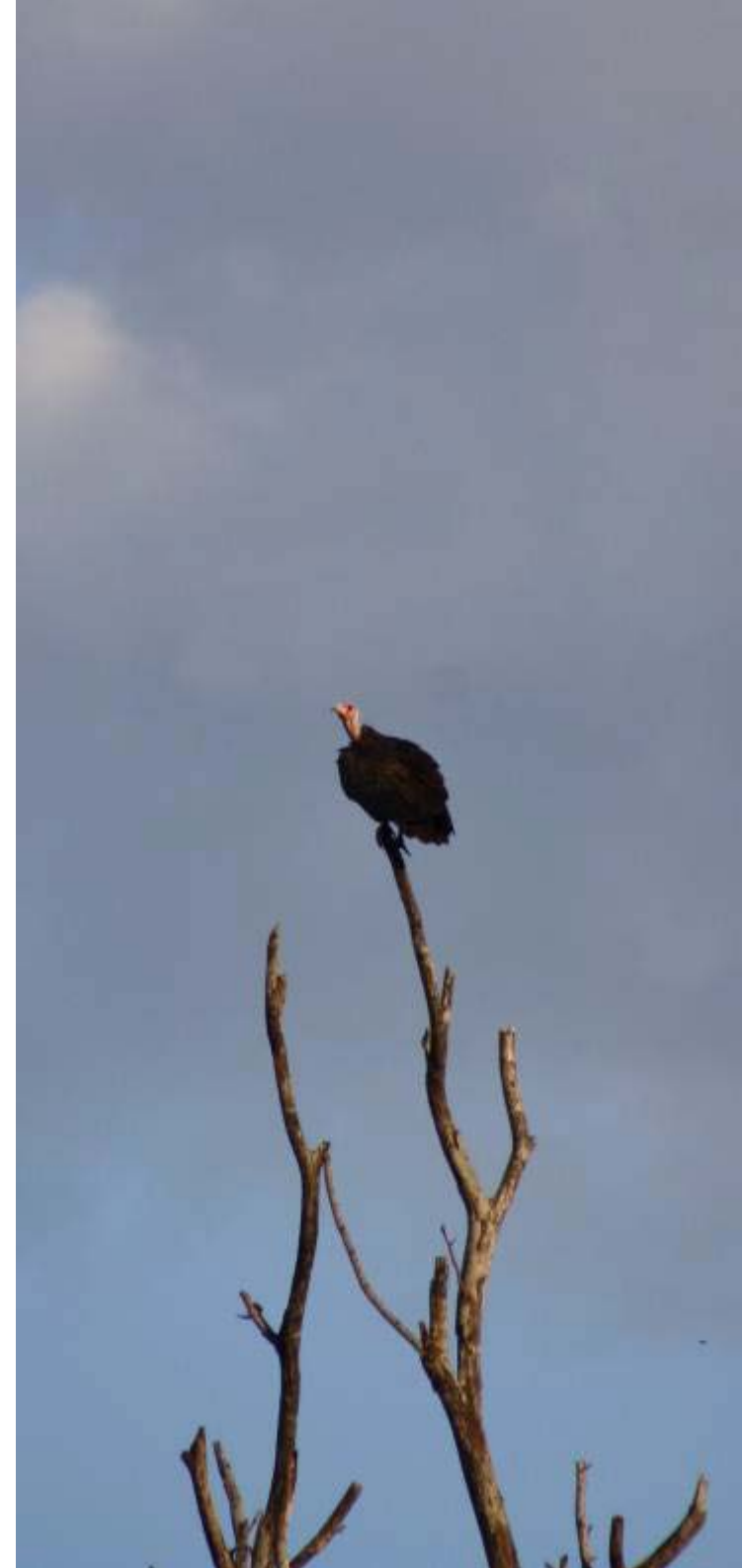


This year's elephant season in the Mosi-oa-Tunya National Park has begun in earnest with the first sighting of the year being made on the 13th April. A bachelor herd browsing just off main road through the National Park broke the four-month long drought. April started off well even before the sighting with 69% of all indirect information for 2011 (up until the end of April) being collected over the month alone. Over the remainder of April a breeding herd, two more bachelor groups and a lone male were also sighted and recorded – but identification work is still difficult due to thick vegetation at the end of the rains. Nevertheless, patience paid off on several of occasions with two repeat sightings being made of animals identified last season.

But currently efforts are concentrating on a breeding herd of seven who have been sighted on four occasions over the month. Breeding herds proved difficult to identify conclusively last season as there was a tendency for them to meet up in larger family units making it difficult to discern discreet groups. Added to this, the breeding herds in the area are especially shy and will often move to thick cover on hearing vehicles or people's voices. But with so few herds around at the moment, we've been able to accurately identify each member of this herd.

Just from the few weeks of data collected so far there's a noticeable difference in the herds' browsing choices. Data collection did not begin last year until August and the subsequent four months showed that Mopane was the favoured diet of most elephants. Over April they've been recorded feeding on Zebrawood, Jackal-berry, Leadwood, Kudu-berry and Velvet bushwillow; to name a few. We'll have to see later on in the year if several months without rain causes the diet choice to move back to Mopane.

There's also been a noticeable increase in the number of vultures we've been seeing in and around the National Park; which is helping contribute towards monthly vulture counts being conducted throughout Zambia.



With AT1 now starting to integrate fully into the Ngamo pride the opportunity to collect social data from the cub has arisen. It goes without saying that the primary source of social contact for the three-month old is her mother, Athena, but what are the others' attitudes towards the youngest member of the group? We've been able to collect regular information from AT1 since the 17th April and between then and the 3rd May she initiated 130 social interactions on the adults (including greeting, play and grooming) and received 54. In theory, it should be Ashanti who comes in for the most attention after her mother. Ashanti receives 12.3% of all of AT1's interactions, but there are several other lionesses who seem to take an equal if not more active role in their niece's social development.

Table 1: Social interactions initiated by AT1 towards adult pride members between 17th April-3rd May 2011

Lion	Greeting	Play	Social licking	Total interactions
Ashanti	6 (12%)	6 (9.1%)	4 (28.6%)	16 (12.3%)
Athena	20 (40%)	12 (18.2%)	3 (21.4%)	35 (26.9%)
Kenge	3 (6%)	4 (6.1%)	1 (7.1%)	8 (6.2%)
Kwali	7 (14%)	7 (10.6%)	2 (14.2%)	16 (12.3%)
Nala	1 (2%)	3 (4.5%)	0 (0%)	4 (3.1%)
Narnia	2 (4%)	13 (19.7%)	4 (28.6%)	19 (14.6%)
Phyre	7 (14%)	10 (15.1%)	0 (0%)	17 (13.1%)
Milo	4 (8%)	11 (16.7%)	0 (0%)	15 (11.5%)
Total:	50	66	14	

Narnia and Phyre feature quite strongly with 14.6 and 13.1% respectively, with Nala and Kenge being towards the bottom of the pile. In terms of which lions initiate on AT1 of course mum features at the top with Narnia, Phyre and Ashanti taking on some aunty duties:

Table 2: Social interactions received by AT1 from adult pride members between 17th April-3rd May 2011

Lion	Greeting	Play	Social licking	Total interactions
Ashanti	2 (20%)	1 (4.5%)	3 (13.6%)	6 (11.1%)
Athena	5 (50%)	1 (4.5%)	12 (54.55%)	18 (33.3%)
Kenge	0 (0%)	4 (18.2%)	0 (0%)	4 (7.4%)
Kwali	2 (20%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	2 (3.7%)
Nala	0 (0%)	9 (41%)	0 (0%)	9 (16.7%)
Narnia	0 (0%)	6 (27.3%)	1 (4.55%)	7 (12.95%)
Phyre	0 (0%)	1 (4.5%)	6 (27.3%)	7 (12.95%)
Milo	1 (10%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	1 (1.9%)
Total:	10	22	22	



Table 3: social interactions received and initiated by AT1 and Athena between 17th April-3rd May 2011

Lion	AT1 Initiate	AT1 receive	AT Initiate	AT receive
Ashanti	16 (12.3%)	6 (11.1%)	10 (16.4%)	7 (11.9%)
Athena	35 (26.9%)	18 (33.3%)		
AT1			18 (29.5%)	35 (59.3%)
Kenge	8 (6.2%)	4 (7.4%)	4 (6.6%)	3 (5.1%)
Kwali	16 (12.3%)	2 (3.7%)	2 (3.3%)	3 (5.1%)
Nala	4 (3.1%)	9 (16.7%)	6 (9.8%)	3 (5.1%)
Narnia	19 (14.6%)	7 (12.95%)	5 (8.2%)	2 (3.4%)
Phyre	17 (13.1%)	7 (12.95%)	13 (21.3%)	5 (8.4%)
Milo	15 (11.5%)	1 (1.9%)	3 (4.9%)	1 (1.7%)

For AT1 we saw that after Athena it was Narnia, Phyre and Ashanti who she was most likely to initiate an interaction with, but are her choice of interactions influenced by her mother's social favourites?

After her daughter, Athena is most often seen socialising with Phyre, Ashanti and then Nala, while she's most likely to receive from her sister and Phyre. So it does seem to be Aunt Ashanti, Phyre and one or other of the Ns that are forming a close alliance with the newest pride member and Athena; but we'll need to keep watching to see if this is initial curiosity from Ashanti and co., and whether future cubs born to the pride once again change the dynamic.