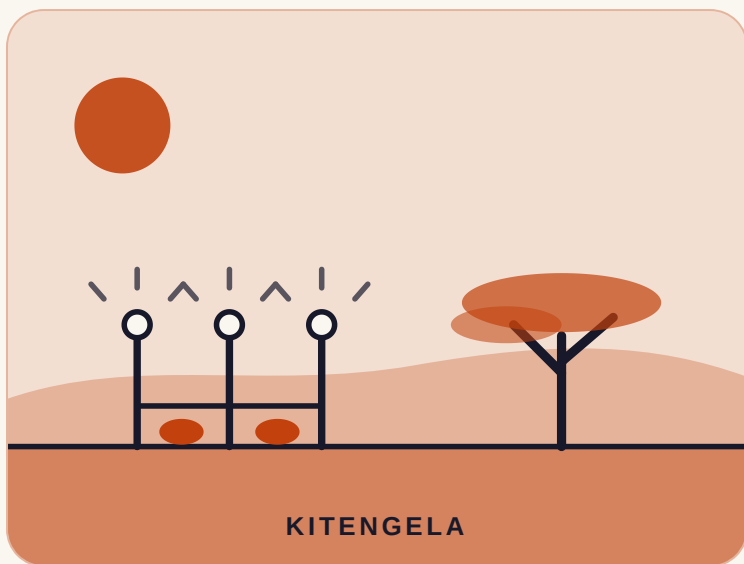




KENYA

The boy who scared off lions with light

A Maasai boy near Nairobi was tired of losing cattle to lions. At 11, he built lights that kept them away.

WHERE Kitengela

WHO Richard Turere, a Maasai boy from Kitengela

WHEN 2011 to 2013

4 min read

The story

Richard Turere grew up in Kitengela, Kenya. His family's home is on the edge of Nairobi National Park. Lions, giraffes and other wild animals roam the park.

He is Maasai, and his family kept cattle. At nine, he began herding them. At night, lions often came and killed the family's cows, goats and sheep. He grew up hating lions.

The moving light

Many herders in the area fought back. Some killed lions with poison. One report says Kenya loses more than 100 lions a year, often to angry locals.

Richard tried something else. One day, he was walking around the cattle pen with a flashlight. The lions kept away. They were afraid of the moving light.

One day, when I was walking around, I discovered that the lions were scared of the moving light.

RICHARD TURERE, TO CNN, 2013

Richard was 11. He liked to take electric gadgets apart and fix them. A few weeks later, he had a plan.

He put flashing LED bulbs, which are small bright lights, on poles around the pen. They faced outward. He wired them to a box with switches and to an old car battery. A solar panel kept the battery charged.

The bulbs flicker on and off in turn. To a lion, it looks like a person walking about with a flashlight.

11

years old when he
built it

\$10

or less for the whole
system, a UN report
says

75

sets in use around
Kenya by 2013

Did it work?

Reports say it did. CNN reported in 2013 that his family had lost no livestock to lions since. Neighbors asked for lights of their own.

A scientist at the Kenya Wildlife Service explained it to the BBC. Lions are not afraid of a steady light. But flickering lights from several places confuse them.

Richard says no one taught him. “I did it myself,” he told CNN.

In 2013, at 13, he spoke at the TED conference in California. Wildlife experts had helped him win a scholarship to one of Kenya’s top schools.

How it unfolded

- **9 y** Richard starts herding his family's cattle.
- **11 y** He builds the first Lion Lights.
- **2012** He starts at a top school on a scholarship.
- **2013** At 13, he speaks at the TED conference.

CHAPTER TWO

What makes it special

Most ideas to protect wildlife come from experts. This one came from a boy who hated lions. It protected cattle and lions at the same time.

It was also cheap and simple, so neighbors could copy it.

OUR TAKE

He solved the problem by watching what the lions feared.

CHAPTER THREE

What we can learn

1 Watch before you build

Richard first noticed that lions feared a moving flashlight. Then he built his lights.

Try this: Spend ten minutes just watching one problem you face, before you try to fix it.

2 Copy what already works

A person with a flashlight kept lions away. His flashing lights copied that.

Try this: Find one thing that already works in your life and ask how to repeat it.

3 Use what you have

He used LED bulbs, an old car battery and a solar panel.

Try this: List three things you own that could solve a small problem.

4 Share the fix

Neighbors asked for lights, and about 75 sets were in use by 2013.

Try this: Show one person a fix that worked for you.

ONE THOUGHT TO TAKE AWAY

Look closely at the problem, and it may show you the answer.

Sources

CNN

[Boy scares off lions with flashy invention \(2013\)](#)

Africa Renewal (United Nations)

[Simple invention brokers peace between humans and wildlife \(2013\)](#)

TED

Richard Turere, speaker profile

Fact-check note: The sources agree on the main story. Dates are worked out from his ages: CNN says he was 13 in early 2013 and built the lights at 11, so about 2011. CNN says his family lost no livestock to lions after the lights; the UN report says attacks were “dwindling”. The UN report says the system uses five flashlight bulbs and costs less than \$10; CNN says only “low-cost”. The 75 sets in Kenya is CNN’s 2013 count. The Kenya Wildlife Service scientist is quoted by the BBC, as reported by the UN; I did not open the BBC piece. The figure of more than 100 lions lost a year is from the UN report, which cites The Economist; I did not check it. A 2023 page from the Elephant Society says the lights now protect over 2,000 homes and that he lost about nine cows a week; this comes from one source, so the story leaves it out. The Nation (Kenya) article is a copy of the CNN piece, so it is not counted as a second source. Lines marked “Our take” are interpretation. Everything else comes from the sources above.