

INTRODUCTORY SPEECH TO THE MONACO FOUNDATION FOR 'FELINS'

**Presented by Simon King OBE and Marguerite Smits van
Oyen**

Your (Serene) Highnesses, my lords ladies and gentlemen.

It is with gratitude and admiration that we stand before you here this evening. I'd like to thank His Serene Highness Prince Albert and the directors of the Monaco Foundation for including the film "Felins" as a fitting part of their campaign to fight for a sustainable future to our planet.

I'd also like to thank everyone here this evening for showing, in the most practical way possible, that you care about our planet's future, and that we have a responsibility for ensuring we exist harmoniously with all living things, from the tiniest insect to the mighty lion.

My name is Simon King, and together with my wife, Marguerite Smits van Oyen we formed part of the camera and production team that created the film you are about to see.

Before we get underway I'd like to take you all on a journey. Close eyes / (turn down the lights.)

You are in the bush in Kenya.

The air is cooling after a day of temps in excess of 30 C

The light is fading and the sounds of the night are creeping into the air.

In the distance, at first just a whisper of an idea, and then the solid, rhythmic pulse of a distant lion roar.

Audio CD Track 1 - SOUND FX DISTANT ROAR

And then, from no further than 100 metres away, the answer.

Audio CD Track 2 - SOUND FX ROAR

These are sounds that have, for thousands of years touched the human soul, tingled the very fibre of our mortality.

The roar of a lion echoes in our ancestral past as a sound that might well have been the harbinger of our doom.

But it is also a sound that for time immemorial has been respected, revered perhaps, as that coming from a creature that is naturally far more powerful than ourselves.

Almost every human culture, historic or contemporary, that has had contact with the great cats, has put them on a pedestal, sometimes literally (Trafalgar square).

And yet, in 2011, we are potentially looking at the extinction of many of these majestic creatures within a human lifetime.

How can that be? How can an animal with a public profile like a lion, a leopard, a cheetah or a tiger possibly be on the brink of extinction? Or perhaps more significantly, how could we allow this to happen?

The film you are about to see, to which Marguerite and I contributed as cameraman and field producer, is a true story, one in which the stars wrote the script as their lives played out on the plains of Kenya's Masai Mara Game reserve.

The Lions and Cheetahs in the film are among the lucky ones, living as they do in a protected area, but how sobering it is to think that a little less than 2000 years ago the very same creatures wandered widely over most of Europe.

Human beings, we, eradicated the great cats from our shores and have done a good job of doing all but the same for wolves and other predators we consider competitors.

And the destruction of the big cats continues today in Africa.

If things continue the way they are going, there will be no WILD LION or CHEETAH outside national reserves in Africa, and very few LEOPARDS in 50 years time.

THE POPULATION OF CATS OUTSIDE THESE RESERVES IS AN ESSENTIAL ELEMENT IN THE HEALTH OF THE POPULATION AS A WHOLE.

It is projects like those supported by the Monaco Foundation that can help to swing the balance and to ensure that we learn as a global community from our mistakes of the past. I hope that films like *Felins*, can help in a small way too, to engender a sense of awe, and so a sense of admiration and care for the wild spirits of our planet, that they may have a place on this earth alongside us, well into the future. With your help and support, the roar of the lion will continue to echo across the savannah, and our world will be the richer for it.

You will have noticed a distinct lack of French speaking in my introduction for which I apologise, but here to redress the balance may I introduce Marguerite.....

(C. 8 minutes to this point)

(Marguerite will speak for a couple of minutes, in French, about our personal relationship with the cats that feature in the movie. We have worked with them as individuals, for many years, and have watched some born, grow, and become mothers themselves. She will remind the audience that many of the big cats they are about to see are still living, playing out their daily dramas, in the Masai Mara reserve in Kenya. Only if people care about their future, will they have a future. And we hope that the film will, in some small way, help to foster such care. She will then introduce the film.)