

# There is Always a Good Market for *LIONS*

By H. S. MOSHER



If raising lions for the market down in South-Florida isn't putting the climate to work for you, then what is? A look at a map of the world will show that the lower part of the Alligator State is "on a line" with northern Africa where some of the world's largest and fiercest lions roam about in the wild desert country of the Sahara. And so down in southern Florida two enterprising farmers have taken up lion farming!

The lion raisers (fanciers) are J. H. McKillop, farm manager, and P. M. Hutton, a partner in the venture. Mr. McKillop spends most of his time on the farm—sleeps within thirty feet of some of the largest and fiercest beasts, in fact. The McKillop-Hutton lion farm is located two miles north from Fort Lauderdale, in Broward County, right on the highway into Miami, so thousands of tourists stop each year to see the lion farm in operation. The huge cats don't seem to mind the attention. The lionesses go right on raising huge families of cubs, while the lions strut majestically up and down their enclosures, roaring their defiance to all man-kind.

"Yes, we raise lions for the market. There is always a good market for lions. Zoological gardens, circuses, owners of animal shows, and others, buy them for good prices. Right now we are unable to supply ten orders for youngsters. And if, in addition to our regular business of lion farming, the public insists upon being let in to look at our operations, isn't it a good idea to charge them a few dimes a head? Well, we do that and we find that both raising lions and letting tourists pay you to see lions raised are profitable!" is the way J. H. McKillop explained his novel venture.

#### In Natural Surroundings

The Fort Lauderdale, Florida lion farm is an imposing looking place. There is a high wall around the outside and as one enters, it becomes evident that the lions are quartered in several old rock quarry pits. The great gaping holes in the earth (rather in the rock) make the finest quarters imaginable for lions. Even the largest and strongest of the King of Beasts can't leap up over the side of these pits. And pools of beautiful, clear water in the lowest parts of the quarry-holes, add much to the beauty of the farm. Mr. McKillop has built a huge, artificial waterfall which comes tumbling down over a rocky bed between the largest of the old quarries. Huge lions strut about below—they are not caged—and onlookers are told that some of the scenery is typical of the African veldt.

"Yes, we keep our lionesses working. Lions are just big cats. They have lots of kittens, frequently, or rather one should say cubs!

"It takes only 120 days for lion cubs to come into the world. There are from one to three cubs, as a rule, but mostly we have twins. Because we take the youngsters away from their mothers at two months after they're born, you can see we average nearly two litters per year to the lioness. The lions do their part!" Mr. McKillop explained while conducting the STATE FARMER reporter about the premises.

Some distance from the imposing looking entrance and "African veldt" lion caves in the rock, the lion farmers have a "lion house" which is just a wooden building, full of steel cages, where they keep the "main supply" of lions while additional quarters are being prepared out in the quarry-pits.

#### Mussolini From Ethiopia

At present only a few lions are roaming around in the open, so to speak, down in the rock. The others are still quartered in cages in the lion house.



Natural surroundings are a factor of the Florida lion farm.

"Yes, that's Mussolini roaring," Mr. McKillop said, as we entered the place. "Mussolini is a lion from Ethiopia. He was captured alive there and has always resented it. He is the meanest, fiercest brute I've ever seen and a killer!"

Fortunately it was feeding time. Negroes entered with huge chunks of beef. All the lions in the house, nearly a dozen of them, began roaring at once. What a racket! The 10-pound slabs of raw beef were tossed to the front of the cages and the lions pulled their rations through the bars.

"We have 21 lions now on the place. We feed them 200 pounds of beef a day—six days a week. On the seventh they are given medicines, good for their inwards. The small range cattle of South-Florida are cheap and often a carcass won't weigh more than 200 pounds. But the beef makes fine lion food," Mr. McKillop explained.

There were dozens of people in the lion house watching the lions eat; hearing their roaring. When the "roasts" were handed out the huge cats became silent and fell to eating—all but Mussolini. This huge, dark-maned lion, Mussolini, held his portion of beef between his paws and roared fiercely at the humans just out of his reach. Every few moments with a roar he would charge toward the front of the cage. Mussolini acted much as a cross dog acts with a bone. After "showing off" for fifteen minutes this big lion finally ate his dinner.

#### Guard-rail Protects Spectators

There is a guard-rail between the place where onlookers stand and the cages. On this rail are signs, reading:



"Menelek," with Cole Bros. Circus, is valued at \$5,000 by Clyde Beatty.

his unusual livestock enterprise.

"Some days we've had as many as 1,500 people visiting our place. This would be on Sunday in the winter. But from 200 to 600 daily attendance is common." Adults are charged 35c each, children less. It looks like no matter how well Mr. McKillop's lionesses produce cubs—that he'll make money anyway!

#### Sleeps Under Waterfall

Mr. McKillop pointed to the "lucky" lions which roaming around in the lion pits, near at hand. Then he pointed to the artificial waterfall.

"I sleep under the waterfall—in a little apartment we've built there at the top of the stairs. The lions wake me up nearly every night when they get roaring. That's part of lion farming," he observed.

David Kirkbride, the keeper, is one of the most experienced lion men in the business. He was brought to Fort Lauderdale by Mr. McKillop to give the lions expert care.

The Fort Lauderdale lions are as neat and clean as an old maid's pet Persian cat. They are, actually, in the pink of condition. Cages are kept clean and sanitary. And of course those lions who are fortunate enough to have quarters in the "veldt" section of the farm are living almost as they would live in Africa. In time Mr. McKillop expects to have all of his beasts living naturally, that way.

"Not responsible for persons reaching over guard-rail." When Mussolini stuck his huge paws some distance out of his cage, through the bars, showing his claws, the reason for the sign was evident.

Other interesting lions in the house include Princess, a sleek lioness, quartered next to Mussolini. She pays no attention whatever to his growlings and fierce display. Nell, a huge fat lioness, has had 21 cubs already and soon will have more. Walter, a brother of the lion who appears in the movies to introduce films made by a motion picture producer, is just as big as Mussolini, but he is peaceful, gentle and quiet.

Henry Pringle, a colored lion attendant, says "all de lions are gentle, boss." But Manager McKillop says "Henry" is the only negro they ever had who didn't arouse the lions to a fury—the moment the darkey was spotted! Seems the big cats always have disliked negroes, Henry excepted.

Back in the "veldt" country, beside the waterfall, and seated under a coconut palm tree, Mr. McKillop disclosed that he had to pay as much as \$700 to \$800 a piece for some of his lions, at the start. He said most of his youngsters sell for \$200 to \$400 each, depending upon their appearance. He expects the lion farm to pay—both from the standpoint of producing lions and because thousands of people pay him to see



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