

AFRICAN LION

updated March 2017



Range	Southern Sahara to southern Africa, excluding the Congo rain forest belt
Habitat	Grassy plains, savannas, and semi-deserts
Diet (wild)	Hoof stock and virtually anything they can subdue. Opportunistic feeders; will steal kills and carrion from other predators: 40 percent of their food comes from scavenging prey from other predators
Diet (captivity)	Carnivore diet, fasted one day a week
Description	Length: 7–9 feet; weight: 250–430 pounds. Males are larger than the females. Lions are the only sexually dimorphic members of the cat family; males have characteristic manes that cover their head, neck, and chest, ranging in color from blonde to red to brown to black. Both genders have a tawny coat; shades may vary from light to dark. At the end of the tail is a black tuft, which hides a hard “spur” and is unique to lions.
Lifespan	Wild: 15 years. Captivity: 25–30 years
Reproduction	After 100–120 days gestation, the female gives birth to 1–5 blind and helpless (altricial) cubs. They are weaned at three months and are able to hunt at one year. Young to start eating morsels of meat when they are about four weeks old. They usually remain with the mother for about two years. Males within a pride do not compete for mating rights; the first male to encounter a female in heat wins.
Behavior	The only wild cat that is truly social, lions live in groups of 15 or more animals called prides. Prides can be as small as three or as large as 40. In a pride, lions hunt prey, raise cubs, and defend their territory together, although females do most of the hunting and cub rearing. Lionesses in the pride are usually related (mothers, daughters, grandmothers, and sisters). Males and females fiercely defend against any outside lions that attempt to join their pride. Many of the females in the pride give birth at about the same time and cubs may nurse from other females. Each pride generally will have no more than two adult males. Lions are both nocturnal and crepuscular. The lion stalks its prey and charges when within about 100 feet (30 meters), reaching top speeds of 35 mph in short bursts. Drinking regularly when water is available, lions survive water shortages by acquiring moisture from the stomach contents of their prey or from tsama melons.
Our animals	2 females, 1 male. Born: 03/26/2004 (females [sisters]); 10/23/2006 (male). Birth place: Cheyenne Mountain Zoo, Colo. (females); North Carolina Zoological Park (male)
Cool stuff	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lions are the largest carnivore in Africa. • The Swahili word for lion, “simba,” also means king, strong, and aggressive. • A male’s loud roar, usually heard after sunset, can carry as far as 5 miles. The roar warns off intruders and helps round up stray members of the pride. • Hunting generally is done in the dark by the lionesses. They hunt in groups of two or three using teamwork to stalk, surround, and kill their prey. Lionesses aren’t the most successful of hunters, scoring only one kill out of several tries. After the kill, the males usually eat first, lionesses next—and the cubs last. • When a new male deposes another male, it is not unusual for him to kill all the cubs in the pride, prompting females to go into heat sooner and ensuring that all future cubs will have his genes. • The Asiatic lion (<i>Panthera leo persica</i>) is a sub-species that exists as a single population in India’s Gujarat state. It is listed as Endangered by IUCN due its small population size. Asiatic lions are slightly smaller, have a larger tail tuft, and a less developed mane than African lions. • Breeding pairs may mate 30–40 times a day. • The male lion’s mane, while it makes him appear larger and protects the vulnerable area around the neck and head from injury, also makes the male a less able hunter, as the mane is cumbersome and makes the lion overheat during a chase.

Phylum
ChordataClass
MammaliaOrder
CarnivoraFamily
FelidaeGenus
*Panthera*species
P. leo