



The world's most social felines, lions roam the savannas and grasslands of the African continent, hunting cooperatively and raising cubs in prides.

Physical Description

- Lions have strong, compact bodies and powerful forelegs, teeth and jaws for pulling down and killing prey.
- Their coats are yellow-gold, and adult males have shaggy manes that range in color from blond to reddish-brown to black.
- The length and color of a lion's mane is likely determined by age, genetics and hormones.
- Young lions have light spotting on their coats that disappears as they grow.
- Without their coats, lion and tiger bodies are so similar that only experts can tell them apart.

Size

- Lions stand between 3.5 and 4 feet tall at the shoulder.
- Males grow to lengths of 10 feet and have a 2 to 3 foot tail. Slightly smaller, females grow to lengths of 9 feet
- Males weigh from 330 to 550 pounds whereas females weigh between 265 and 395 pounds.

Fun Fact

Lions are the world's most social felines. They live in groups of related females, called prides, which may comprise several to as many as 40 individuals, including adults, sub-adults (between the ages of 2 and 4) and cubs, plus one or more resident males.

Native Habitat

- Lions inhabit a wide range of habitats, from open plains to thick brush and dry thorn forest from the Sahara's southern fringe to northern South Africa.
- They are absent from equatorial areas dominated by moist tropical forest.

Food/Eating Habits

- Lions primarily eat large animals that weigh from 100 to 1,000 pounds, such as zebra and wildebeest.
- they also catch and eat a variety of smaller animals, from rodents to reptiles.
- Lions also steal kills from hyenas, leopards and other predators.
- At times, they may lose their own catches to hyena groups.
- Lions may also feed on domestic livestock, especially in areas near villages.

Lifespan

Lions in zoos may live into their late teens or early 20s. In the wild, a lioness may live up to 16 years, but males rarely live past the age of 12.

Threat to Species

- During the past decade, lion populations have declined by about 30 percent. Currently, an estimated 20,000 lions remain in the wild.
- Within these areas, lions still face dangers, including habitat loss, poisoning and hunting.
- Many have died from diseases such as distemper, which is spread by domestic dogs from villages near natural habitat.
- To prevent lions from becoming as rare as tigers, large expanses of habitat must be carefully protected.
- In disease-ridden areas, ranging dogs must be kept away from lions or immunized.

