



AFRICAN LION

CARNIVORA
Family: Felidae
Genus: *Panthera*
Species: *leo*



Range: found in most countries south of the Sahara Desert, majority in East and southern Africa

Habitat: grassy plains, savannahs, open woodland and scrub country

Niche: nocturnal/crepuscular, terrestrial, carnivorous

Wild diet: large ungulates including wildebeests, zebra, gazelles, warthogs and rodents,

Zoo diet: fortified horsemeat

Life Span: (Wild) 14 (average) (Captivity) 25 - 30 yrs

Sexual dimorphism: male has mane and is 20 to 35 % larger than female

Location in SF Zoo: Lion house

APPEARANCE & PHYSICAL ADAPTATIONS:

African Lions are uniformly tawny with a white abdomen and are the largest African carnivore.

Adult males have a mane that varies from light tawny to dark brown or black. A mane provides protection during fights and is an indicator of an individual's fitness. A lion's overall coloration provides excellent camouflage on the savannahs and scrub country.

Weight: M 300 - 500 lbs

Length: 5 - 8 ft

TL: 2.5-3.5 ft

SH: 3 ft

Lions are large predators, with strong powerful limbs and large paws with soft pads to distribute weight and to keep their stalking movements quiet. They have sharp claws for taking down prey, which are retractable to keep them sharp until needed. Lions have powerful jaws, large canines for killing prey, and well-developed carnassials for shearing meat from bones. In addition, a lion's tongue is covered with rough papillae (bumps) used to scrape meat from bones. Lions are obligatory carnivores; they must eat meat to get necessary nutrition to survive. Lions have simple stomachs with an undeveloped cecum as meat is easy to digest.

As lions are mainly nocturnal, they have large eyes with a developed tapetum lucidum, which enhances low light conditions. Lions are large cats and have a partially ossified hyoid bone, which creates anatomical structure for roaring. They are capable of sustaining 35 mph for short time spans.

STATUS & CONSERVATION

The IUCN lists African lions as Vulnerable and they are regionally listed as Endangered in west and central Africa. Trade in African lions is regulated by CITES under Appendix II regulations; lions are legally hunted in some range countries in East and southern Africa.

Lion depredation on livestock can be a serious problem and leads to persecution by farmers. Lions' scavenging behavior makes them particularly vulnerable to poisoned carcasses put out to eliminate predators. Lions are becoming very scarce outside parks and reserves and many scientists feel that, in the future, lions will only be found in protected areas, a scenario which could have genetic implications for future generations.

COMMUNICATION AND OTHER BEHAVIOR

Lions are only active 3-4 hours of any given day, the rest of the time is spent resting and sleeping. Lions have a roar can be heard at a distance of 5 miles and is usually heard at sundown, after a kill and after eating. The 'purring' type of noise produced by big cats can only be made as they exhale due to their flexible hyoid bone.

Lions are the only large cat that lives in a group, called prides. Prides consist of females and young accompanied by one or more (usually two) adult males; the average size of a pride is 15. Young males are driven from the pride after two to four years or sooner if the pride is taken over by a new male. Many females will remain with their natal pride for life. The primary role of the male is breeding and protection of the pride's territory by marking boundaries with urine and other scent markings.

Females being slightly smaller and more agile tend to do most of the hunting. Lions often work cooperatively as a team, to stalk prey, getting as close as they can before launching an attack. They are successful in only one of every four hunts. Lions also scavenge and even chase other predators off their kills. Males eat first, then females with cubs eating last. Lions are capable of obtaining their water from prey and melons and thus, can survive in very arid environments; they will drink regularly when water is available.

COURTSHIP AND YOUNG

The mother and cubs will stay secluded from the rest of the pride for six to eight weeks. She will move her cubs to a new den several times a month to avoid the attention of predators. Pride lionesses often synchronize their reproductive cycles in order to cooperate in the raising and suckling of the young. The synchronization of births also has an advantage in that the cubs end up being roughly the same size, and thus have an equal chance of survival.

Males often kill any existing young cubs in a pride (infanticide), when taking over the pride; females do not become fertile and receptive until their cubs mature or die. All in all, as many as 80% of the cubs will die before the age of two.

Estrous: polyestrous	Sexual Maturity: F~ 4 -M~5 yrs
Gestation: 100 - 119 days	Weaning Age: 6-7 months
# of Mammae: 2 pair	Weight at birth: 2.4 – 4.6 lbs
# of Young: 3-4	

MISCELLANEOUS

The African lion is part of the Felid TAG management and the Species Survival Plan (SSP). Asian lions are similar in appearance to the African lion. The minor differences include a fold of skin along its abdomen not present in African lions and males have a slightly sparser mane.

Sources:

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http://animaldiversity.ummz.umich.edu/site/accounts/information/Panthera_leo.html

<http://www.iucnredlist.org/search/details.php/15951/summ>

<http://felid-tag.org/lions/>