

African Lion

Panthera leo



Class: *Mammalia*

Order: *Carnivora*

Family: *Felidae*

Characteristics: Females average 4.5 to 6 feet (1.4 to 1.7 meters) long; males are 5.5 to 8 feet (1.7 to 2.5 meters) long – not including the tail. Weights range from 270 pounds to 400 pounds for females and males from 325 to 570 pounds. Males are identified by longer hair around the head, neck and shoulder (mane) whereas females have shorter fur.

Behavior: Lions are unusually social compared to most cats and live together in groups called “prides.” The average pride is 13 cats but can range anywhere from 2 to 40 individuals. A pride consists of one to three males with several females and young. Females are the primary hunters and will often work together to take down prey ([National Geographic](#)). Lions (especially the males) spend upwards of 16-20 hours per day sleeping.

Reproduction: Lions actively breed year-round. Gestation is about 120 days. There are usually two cubs in a litter but as many as four is not uncommon ([National Geographic](#)). They breed within the pride, and if a new male challenges and overcomes an established male, the new male will often kill the pride’s cubs and immediately breed with the females, most likely to establish his own genetic lineage ([BBC](#)).

Diet: Wild: Lions hunt mostly zebra, antelope and wildebeests but will eat anything they can catch and kill. They are also known to scavenge, displacing such animals as hyenas from their kills.

Zoo: Feline diet, bones

Conservation: Current populations are decreasing due to indiscriminate killing (human and livestock protection), conflict with ranchers, prey depletion, loss of habitat, use of body parts in traditional medicine and trophy hunting. Disease, particularly diseases from domesticated animals such as dogs, has also had a population impact. Overall, IUCN lists the lion as Vulnerable as its status varies by region. In South Africa, their numbers are greater whereas in West Africa and India, the lion is considered critically endangered or endangered, respectively. Overall, the population is trending downward ([IUCN](#)). In fact, in December, 2015 U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service listed the subspecies of the western African lion as endangered ([African Wildlife Foundation](#)).

FYI: A lion’s roar is used to communicate with its pride and to warn of intruders in their territory and can be heard up to five miles away ([Lincoln Park](#)).



Range & Habitat:

Grassland, scrub and open woods of sub-Saharan Africa



Extant (resident)
Possibly Extinct

Lifespan: up to 30 years in captivity, 15 years in the wild.

Special Adaptations:

Males have the large mane to impress the females and to intimidate rival males.

IUCN Conservation Status:

Vulnerable

