



Panthera leo

STATUS

- Vulnerable.
- Estimates range from 16,000 to 30,000 lions alive today.
- In India it is Critically Endangered with perhaps 300 animals remaining in a sanctuary in the Gir forest.

ORIGIN

- In historic times lions were found in the southern parts of Eurasia, from Portugal to India, and most of Africa except the central rainforest-zone and the Sahara desert.
- The last place in Europe that they were found, until the 10th century, was the Caucasus, which is the region north of Iran.
- Between the late 19th and early 20th century they also became extinct from North Africa and the Middle East.

DISTRIBUTION

- Lions are now found only south of the Sahara Desert in Africa and in the Gir Forest in northwestern India.

HABITAT

- This varies from the rich grasslands and light woodland of eastern Africa to the more arid areas of the Kalahari Desert.

SOCIAL BEHAVIOUR

- Lions are the only big cats to live in organized social groups or prides, made up of 3 – 30 related females, their offspring and a few males (sometimes only one).
- Pride size is related to the availability of food. Young males are chased out of the pride as they approach sexual maturity and can form small bachelor groups.

- Females share the hunting and baby-sitting duties, whilst the main duty of the males is to protect territory, females and cubs from other male lions. This is because new pride males kill any young lions sired by the previous male, before fathering offspring of their own.

DESCRIPTION

- Powerfully built, the males can reach over 3m in length and can be 1.2m in height at the shoulder. Average male weight is from 150-240kg. Males develop a distinctive mane which darkens as they mature.
- Females are smaller (110-150kg) and do not have a mane. The fur is short and mostly tawny brown in colour.
- Lion tails are up to a metre in length and tipped with a dark tuft of fur.
- White lions are seen in the wild, but seldom survive to adulthood.

POINTS OF INTEREST

- Gestation (pregnancy) in females lasts about 90 days. Usually 1—4 cubs about 500g in weight are born.
- Lions have a very varied diet. It includes small animals such as rabbits, occasionally even very large animals such as young elephants. Common prey animals include wildebeest, Zebra, Buffalo, Giraffe (mainly calves), Warthogs, Impala and other antelope and gazelles.
- Lions need 5-7 kg of meat per day. They are able to eat much more than this, in which case they will not eat again for a few days.

