

Lion

Scientific Name: *Panthera leo*

Class: Mammalia

Order: Carnivora

Family: Felidae



Adults have a plain, unspotted coat that is light brown to ochre in color. Cubs are born with spots that sometimes persist on the legs and belly until maturity. Males have a mane which tends to grow fuller and darker with age. The tail has a black tuft at the end. Males stand 48.5 in. at the shoulder; head and body their length is 67 to 98.5 in.; the tail is 35.5 to 41.25 in., and the weight for males is 330 to 550 lbs. Females stand 42.25 in. at the shoulder; their head and body length is 55 to 69 in., and the tail is 27.5 to 39.25 in. and their weight is 265 to 400 lb. The best known of the cats, lions are also the most social, living in prides that range in size from 3 to 30 individuals. This variance is dependent on the availability of prey. Related females and their cubs form the core. Lions have no fixed breeding season and usually all

females in a pride will come into estrus and give birth at the same time. Cubs are raised communally and can suckle from any lactating female. Because of its strength and predatory habits, the lion has long been known as the King of Beasts. Yet, in the wild lions sleep 16 to 20 hours a day. Sexual dimorphism among lions is unique among the cats.

Range

Africa south of the Sahara to Botswana; remnant population of Asian lions in Gir Forest of western India

Habitat

Grassy plains, savannas, arid woodlands, semi-desert

Gestation

98 to 105 days

Litter

1 - 6

Behavior

The best known of the cats, lions are also the most social, living in prides that range in size from 3-30 individuals. This variance is dependent on the availability of prey. Related females and their cubs form the core. Daughters usually become members of the pride, though some leave as soon as they reach maturity in their search for a mate. They may return to their natal pride later in life. While the female population of a pride remains stable, males are transient, staying as little as a couple of months or as long as six years, until they're driven off by other males. A pride may have anywhere from 1-7 males. Lions have a top speed of 40 mph over short distances. Both males and females have been known to climb trees.

Reproduction

Lions have no fixed breeding season and usually all females in a pride will come into estrus and give birth at the same time. Cubs are raised communally and can suckle from any lactating female. Young stay with their mothers for 2 years. Eyes may be open at birth or take 2 weeks to open. Cubs follow the mother by 3 months and are weaned after 6-7 months. While cubs participate in kills at 11 months, they are fully dependent on adults for food until 16 months. They are probably incapable of survival on their own before 30 months. Sexual maturity comes at 3-4 years, though growth continues to 6 years.

Wild Diet

Buffalo, zebra, antelope, wildebeest, warthog, carrion