

# LION, AFRICAN

## RANGE:

Once ranging throughout Africa, they are now found mainly in sub-Saharan regions. Largest surviving concentrations in southeastern Africa. Several northern subspecies are now extinct.

## HABITAT:

Generally prefer grassy plains, savannas and semi-deserts.

## SIZE:

**Length:** 8 – 10 ft. (not including tail)

**Weight:** Males: 330–550 lbs./Females: 260–400 lbs.

## LIFE EXPECTANCY:

**Wild:** Average between 8 – 14 years.

**Captivity:** Average between 14 – 20 years.

## REPRODUCTION:

- Females reach sexual maturity around age 3. Males reach maturity around age 5.
- Gestation period of 110-120 days.
- Generally 1 – 5 cubs per litter.
- Mortality rate of young is high.
- Cubs are generally about 5 lbs. at birth, eyes open at about 3 weeks of age.
- Cubs are following mother on hunts, etc, at about 3 months.

## DIET:

**Wild:** Large to medium-sized animals, such as giraffe, water buffalo, zebra, wildebeest (or gnu), wild hogs, and antelope. (In the wild, males need on average about 15 lbs of meat per day, while females need about 11 lbs. It is not usually on a daily basis that they acquire food, since only about 20 – 30 % of their hunts are successful. When a kill is made, the animals will gorge themselves to make up for lost efforts.)

**Zoo:** Feline diet, bones once a week. Captive animals do not expel as much energy hunting so they do not require as much as their wild relatives, otherwise they will gain too much weight. (The zoo monitors all animals for excessive weight problems and adjust diets as needed.)

## BEHAVIOR:

- Lions live in a family or social group known as a pride
- They may hunt singly, in pairs or as a group. Females usually do most of the hunting, while males are mainly concerned with protection of the members within the pride.
- Various feeding habits have been observed in different prides. In some groups the animal that makes the kill is allowed to eat first, in others males eat first, while others share among the pride without any real problems.
- Lions tend to gorge on a meal and then slip off to rest for prolong periods while digesting.
- It is not unusual for lions to sleep up to 21 hours in a day, becoming active generally at night or at dusk. Most hunting takes place during this active time.
- Lions, like most cats are considered nocturnal.
- Young males are usually chased off by about age 4. They will then mature and seek out their own prides, usually by challenging an older male for his females.
- Usually a pride is headed by a single dominant male. Some prides may be run by more than one male and breeding rights in these situations usually go to the male that first discovers a ready female.
- Males that co-manage a pride will band together to defend their group.

theZOO  
LOUISVILLE



photo by C. Jerry Abraham

Order:	<b>Carnivora</b>
Family:	<b>Felidae</b>
Genus:	<b>Panthera</b>
Species:	<b>leo</b>

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### POINTS OF INTEREST:

- African lions have excellent eyesight, good hearing and a keen sense of smell.
- Lions will communicate over great distances with deep bellowing sounds that have been known to carry as much as five miles.
- They are also known for their very quick reflexes, which aids in hunting agile animals such as antelope.
- Lions are the only big cat with a prominent mane found on males. The mane begins to develop in males as they approach maturity and tends to darken with age.
- There is some evidence that males with darker manes are often sexually selected or favored by females.
- A typical pride may consist of as few as 3 individuals, up to as many as 30.

### STATUS:

Stable. Lions are still hunted for sport. Overgrazing of land by livestock is destroying the habitat of the wild ungulates on which they depend for food. They breed well in captivity.

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