


# LION FACTS - OVERVIEW

- The lion is currently listed by the IUCN as vulnerable to extinction. Asiatic Lions are listed as Endangered and lions in West Africa are listed as Critically Endangered.
- The current estimate used by lion conservationists lead us to believe that there are around 20,000 to 30,000 lions left throughout Africa and around 650 in India.
- Lions are the only true social cat with both males and females generally found living in or being part of a larger group.
- By living together they are able to hunt for much larger prey than other cats similar to their size. Lions like any predator are an important part of the ecosystem by limiting the number of prey animals and targeting the weak, ill and old keeping diseases within prey populations under control.
- Found mainly on large open plains lions have historically been able to survive in deserts, dense jungles, scrub and forest and even the mountains of northern Africa.

**Continue on the next few pages to learn more information in more detail...**



# LION FACTS - HABITAT



Lions used to be found all over the continent of **Africa** and even further afield into the Middle East, parts of Europe and Western Asia but have now become extinct in the vast majority of their historic range. They are now thought to occupy only 8% of their original range which is mostly spread throughout their home continent of Africa.

Lions are most commonly found in open **savannah** and the adjoining bush. These areas of bush are the ideal place to seek refuge in the hot sun, to keep cubs out of harms way and to stalk any potential prey. These large open grasslands are home to a large number of grazing animals, providing lions with ample prey species around as they come to the grasses to eat.

Lions are no stranger to **desert life** and they are still found in these areas including Namibia and the skeleton coast. These lion populations are scattered over vast areas due to the competition for resources. They were also once found living throughout heavily vegetated areas throughout Western Africa and have now been seen in the **jungles** of the Gabon for the first time in 20 years.

The last Asiatic lions are currently found in the **Gir Forest** an area made up mostly of forest and scrubland. Although now mainly found in grassland their historic range shows how **adaptable** these cats are and how they can be found in many different environments across an incredibly widespread area. This made them once one of the most widespread large land mammals on the planet.

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# LION FACTS - DIET

Different habitats provide the lions with different prey species to hunt. Areas of open grassland throughout southern and eastern Kenya are home to a variety of larger prey species such as zebra, buffalo and wildebeest and even giraffe as well as a variety of different antelope species such as topi and impala. Lions found throughout the desert areas in Namibia will largely prey on desert antelope such as gemsbok. Lions in the Gir Forest in India will feed largely on wild hog and various deer species.

Lions that live in the large open grasslands will feed on larger prey because of the nature of the environment and will even hunt giraffe or young elephant if the opportunity arises, because of this the larger prides help to catch larger prey. In forested areas the prey is smaller and the vegetation is more plentiful, this is likely to be one of the reasons why lions do not need to live in larger prides because the prey is smaller than those found on the African plains. Although lionesses can hunt on their own they will work in groups to take down larger prey. Male lions will often scavenge off smaller carnivores as their manes make them unable to stalk prey easily without being seen.



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# LION FACTS - BIOLOGY

## Male Lion Physical Characteristics:

Average Body Weight: 150 - 225kg

Average Body Length: 1.7 -2.5 m

Average Height: 1.07 m

Average Life Span (Wild): 8 - 12

Average Life Span (Captive): 15 - 20

## Female Lion Physical Characteristics:

Average Body Weight: 120 - 182kg

Average Body Length: 1.4 - 1.75 m

Average Height: 0.9 - 10.5 m

Average Life Span (Wild): 10 - 14

Average Life Span (Captive): 15 - 22


Litter sizes can be anywhere between 1-7 with 2-4 being the average and cubs are born blind and deaf. Lions reach sexual maturity at around 2-3 years old but the males won't reach their full size till they are around 4. The mane can take many years to develop fully and the colour is determined by their levels of testosterone and varies in size and colour between individuals. Some manes will extend underneath the belly down to the back legs whereas some male lions in rarer cases can appear maneless. They are the only cats to display sexual dimorphism where the males look noticeably different to the females.

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# LION FACTS - THE PRIDE



The lion has evolved to become the only cat species known to live in **large groups known as prides**. Living in larger groups enables them to catch larger prey, share the rearing of cubs and to protect their territories more effectively. Lions have evolved as their only natural competitor and it is now becoming more widely thought that pride systems are there primarily to **protect** their territory from other groups.

The core of the pride is made up of a group of **related lionesses** all of different ages across the generations and with their young cubs. Lion life is incredibly complex and not all pride members will be together all of the time, sometimes forming into sub groups. If the pride gets too large. These sub groups may join together every now and then when food is plentiful but over time these groups may **split off** permanently but stay within the same territory or relatively close by. Lionesses will seek privacy from their pride members when they give birth and will join back with their other lionesses once the cubs are about 2-3 months old and large enough to cope with the other larger individuals within the pride. Lionesses are fiercely protective of their territory against other prides.



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# LION FACTS - COALITIONS

Male lions will get driven out of their birth pride by older males normally their fathers or rival invading males when they are about two years old and will live **nomadically** until mature enough to take over prides of their own.

These males will form groups called **coalitions** and will compete against other coalitions to hold territories that contain a pride of lionesses. These coalitions are commonly made up of related males but have often been known to consist of unrelated males of different ages. In order to achieve the aim in taking over a pride, success relies on the numbers. The larger the coalitions the more prides they will be able to hold within their territory. Males will aim to keep their territories for over two years to ensure their cubs

reach adulthood. The males spend most of their time away from the lionesses **patrolling** their territory to keep invading males away but will spend time with the lionesses when they are in breeding season or when there is plenty of food around. Male lions are incredibly territorial and fights between coalitions can often lead to severe injuries and are often fatal. Once ousted from their territory older males they will often live a


nomadic lifestyle either succumbing to any long term wounds or dying of starvation over time if they are unable to hunt or scavenge effectively.

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# LION FACTS - THREATS

A male lion with a large, light brown mane is walking towards the camera. The lion's face is in focus, showing its eyes, nose, and mouth. The background is blurred, suggesting a natural habitat.

Lions like all wildlife face many threats in the wild but most can be put down to either **habitat fragmentation** or **human wildlife conflict**. Lion numbers in the wild have decreased by 42% in between 1993-2014 and are now extinct in 16 African countries. The overall population trend throughout Africa shows lion numbers are still decreasing. Many former lion territories no longer hold any wildlife with many areas now turned into agricultural land and used to grow crops and towns and cities have now been built and grown larger. This has now meant that wildlife populations are now **cut off** from one another. This means that lion populations are now becoming more **inbred** as they are unable to travel as far. Studies have shown that lions are more susceptible to **disease** if they have come from inbred population and diseases like canine distemper have already impacted populations in Tanzania and most recently in the Gir Forest, the only wild population found in India.

Wildlife and local communities are now forced closer together than ever before and are now both in direct competition for land. When normal prey species are not seen as frequently and where younger lions are living nomadically confrontation over **livestock** can occur in these community areas. Retaliation by **poison** is the most common method which not only affects lions but many other predators that may scavenge on the carcass. Lions are often accidentally caught in snares (usually placed for other animals) and may be found within the **bushmeat trade**. They are also poached and bred in captivity for their bones and body parts which may then be sold on as part of the **illegal wildlife trade**.

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# WHY DO WE NEED LIONS?

Like all carnivores, apex predators like lions are a hugely important part of any ecosystem for many reasons. As part of their ecosystem they are top of the food chain. A healthy population of predators ensures that the herbivore populations do not become too overpopulated. If they were to grow in number the resources needed for them to survive (the land to graze the grass and water) would not be able to cope. This could lead to droughts and more problems to animal populations. With these animals not able to graze on the right amount of plants and grasses many of them will not survive and over grazing could cause lasting damage to the environment. Most predators also target the sick and the elderly as they are easier to hunt, by doing this predators keep the prey populations relatively free from disease. Without the balance achieved by the presence of large carnivores sickness and disease would be much more widespread across the ecosystem.

Plants → Herbivores → Carnivores



When a large carnivore like a lion dies their body will be eaten by other carnivores including vultures, jackals and hyenas and what is left from their body will decompose into the ground. This means that the nutrients of that animal will be passed back into the food chain and the cycle starts again.

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