



African Lion Panthera leo



Approximately 300 of the last surviving Indian lion subspecies live in the Gir Forest of northwestern India. Their numbers are slowly increasing in this small, 1,412 km² sanctuary.

Physical Characteristics: Lions are the tallest of the cat family and the second heaviest after the tiger. The African lion weighs 120 - 190 kg and is approximately 1.4 - 2.0 m when standing on their hind legs. Their colouration can range from light tan to yellow, to dark brown. Visually, the male is highly distinctive and easily recognized by its mane which is unique among felines. They have strong jaws, large canine teeth and powerful legs in order to bring down and kill large prey. At full running speed they reach up to 60 kilometers per hour.

Behaviour: Lions are very social and are the only cats that live in groups, known as prides. The pride usually consists of five or six related females, their cubs of both sexes, and one or two males who mate with the adult females.

It is up to the small number of males to defend the pride's territory, which can reach up to 260 square kilometres. The many related females of the pride work together to prey upon the large mammals of the open grasslands. Many of the animals they hunt are faster than them, so working together as a team is important.

Lions are generally inactive for 20 hours a day. They spend much of their time resting with their peak activity typically occurring after dusk when they gather to socialize and groom. They spend an average of 50 minutes per day eating and two hours walking.

Lions have well developed expressive movements and can be seen communicating through gestures such as head rubbing and licking. Lions appear to greet one another by rubbing their face and neck against each other. They also have many vocalizations, varying in pitch and intensity, that are at the core of their communications. These sounds include snarling, purring, hissing, miaowing, woofing and roaring. Their pronounced roar is the loudest of all felines and can be heard up to 8 kilometres away.

Order: Carnivora **Family:** Felidae **Species:** P. leo

Range: African lions can be found today in East and South Africa. They typically live in tall grasslands and temperate woodlands with small and scattered trees for shade.

Diet: African lions are carnivorous. They prefer large mammals including buffalo, zebra, antelope, giraffe, wildebeest and warthogs. A lion may gorge itself and eat up to 30 kg in one sitting. An adult lioness only requires an average of about 5 kg of food per day, while a male needs about 7 kg.

Status: All lion subspecies are considered endangered due to experiencing a, possibly irreversible, population decline of 30 to 50 percent over the past two decades. While the reason for this steep decline is not entirely clear, habitat loss and conflicts with humans are present-day causes of concern. It is estimated the current population range is between 16,500 and 47,000 lions living in the wild.

