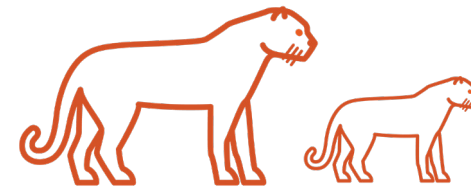
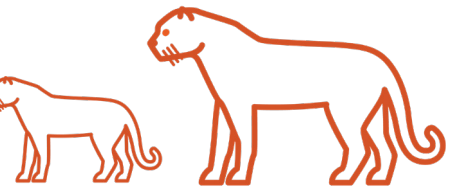


LIONS



There are two subspecies of lion: the Asiatic lion and the African lion. Here we will be focussing on the African lion.

Lions can sleep for up to 20 hours a day!

LATIN NAME: *Panthera* leo*

POPULATION: Fewer than 20,000

WHERE TO FIND THEM: Angola, Benin, Botswana, Burkina Faso, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ethiopia, Kenya, Malawi, Mozambique, Namibia, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Somalia, South Sudan, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia and Zimbabwe.

HABITATS: Forest, grassland, savanna, shrubland, desert.

IUCN STATUS: *Vulnerable**

The IUCN Red List is a critical indicator of the health of the world's biodiversity.

EX	EW	CE	EN	VU	NT	LC
EXTINCT	EXTINCT IN THE WILD	CRITICALLY ENDANGERED	ENDANGERED	VULNERABLE	NEAR THREATENED	LEAST CONCERNED

LIFESPAN: 10-18 years (in *captivity** up to 30 years)

SIZE:

Body Length - 1.5-2.1m

Weight - 122-240kg

DIET: Lions are carnivores (they eat meat), their prey species consist of zebra, buffalo and wildebeest among other antelope. They will also *scavenge** taking over kills made by other carnivores such as painted dogs and hyenas. Hunting as a team, lions can also take down large animals, including giraffe and hippo. They will also eat smaller animals such as rodents and lizards.

COMMUNICATION:



FOR YOUNG READERS: Lions use their very loud roar to communicate with other lions, as well as other sounds like purrs, hisses, growls and snarls. They will also rub heads and lick one another.

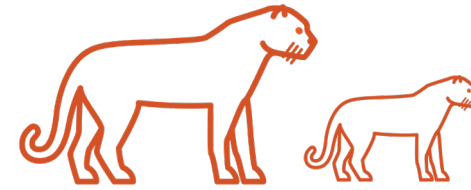
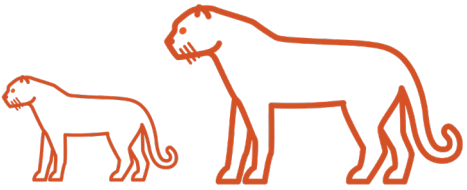
Roaring: like all of the big cats (apart from snow leopards) lions can roar. They have the loudest roar of all the big cats, roaring acts as a warning to other lions to stay away, a pride will roar together to mark their territory.

Spraying: lions will spray urine to scent mark their territory, and male lions will patrol their territory daily on the lookout for potential rivals.

Communication and bonding: lions also communicate and bond with each other by licking each other and by rubbing heads. They make a variety of sounds such as purrs, hisses, growls and snarls.



LIONS



FOR YOUNG READERS:



Most cats like to live by themselves, but lions like to live in a group, a group of lions is known as a pride.

Lions like to eat meat - to catch antelope they move very slowly and quietly until they are close enough to pounce!

Lions sleep up to 20 hours a day. It can get very hot where they live, so they sleep in the shade during the heat of the day and then hunt at night when it is cooler.

In a lion pride, most of the hunting is done by the lionesses (the female lions).

BEHAVIOUR

Prides: unlike other cats, lions are *sociable** animals. Related lionesses (female lions) live together in groups known as a pride. Prides vary in size, but on average contain around 15 females and their cubs, as well as 2-3 male lions who protect the pride's *territory*.* A pride's territory can range from 20-200km² depending on how many prey animals there are; if there is plenty of food a territory can be smaller as the lions don't need to travel so far to find food. If there aren't many prey animals, a pride will require a larger territory to search for prey.

Hunting: the lionesses do around 90% of the hunting, mainly at night, working as a team to ambush prey. They are smaller and lighter than the males, enabling them to stalk stealthily and move more quickly. The success of a hunt varies according to the number of lions taking part, the more lions there are, the more likely it is that a hunt will be successful. Lionesses use several different strategies when hunting, depending on the type and size of the prey.

Feeding: an adult male lion can eat 30kg of meat in one sitting (the equivalent of 363 sausages!)

Stalking: lions stalk their prey; they can't run fast for long distances, so they need to get as close as possible to the animal they are hunting without being seen before they give chase.

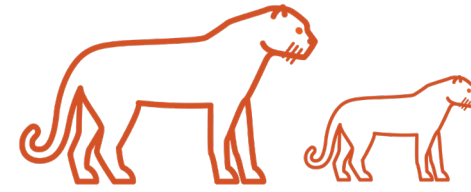
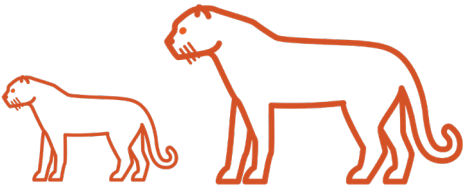
Experienced lionesses will stay very close to the ground and hide behind thickets until the last moment when they pounce. Successfully ambushing your prey takes a lot of patience and practise. They can pounce up to 10m in one jump and over short distances can reach speeds of up to 81kmph.

Nocturnal: if prey is plentiful lions will sleep for up to 20 hours a day in the shade of trees and rocks, choosing to hunt in the cooler parts of the day, either at night (nocturnal) or during dusk and dawn (crepuscular), when there is also low light and prey animals are less likely to see them coming.

Desert lions: lions can live in a variety of habitats including deserts. The lions living in deserts get the water they need from the animals that they eat, so they don't need to try to find water sources. They will also drink from some desert plants.



LIONS



LIFECYCLE:



FOR YOUNG READERS: Baby lions are called cubs, there are between 1-6 cubs in a litter.

Ready to breed: female lions are ready to have cubs by the time they are four years old; they have cubs around every two years.

Cubs: lionesses are pregnant for around 110 days, often two or more lionesses in a pride will give birth to their cubs at the same time, they can be born at any time of the year. They give birth amongst rocks or in thick undergrowth, away from the pride and the male lions who can be aggressive towards the cubs. There are usually 1-6 cubs in a litter, they are born blind and unable to walk, their mother looks after them alone until they are 6-8 weeks old, regularly changing den sites to avoid being found by predators such as hyenas.

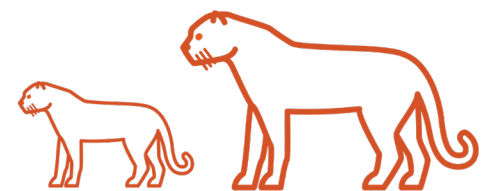
Meeting the pride: after two months the cubs are ready to meet the rest of the pride. Raising the cubs is done as a team by all the lionesses, they will even suckle each other's cubs. The cubs spend a lot of time 'playing', practising the skills they will need to hunt as adults. Whilst the female lions hunt, the male protects the cubs from rival males and other threats. If a lioness is killed, often the others in the pride will take over raising her cubs. Once the cubs are a year old, they can be left alone and start to join in with the hunts at around 11 months. By the time the cubs are two years old they are able to survive on their own. Lion cubs have a low survival rate, with only an estimated 50% surviving their first year.

Growing up: male lions are forced to leave their *natal** pride by the dominant males when they are three, they then live alone or with small groups of males. They may try to take over another pride when they are five years old or they may stay wandering nomads for life. Females usually stay with the pride for life.

Rivals: dominant adult male lions typically only stay in a pride for around two years before rival males take over. If a pride is taken over by rivals, they will kill any cubs so that they can father their own.

Female lions reach two-thirds of their adult size by the time they are two years old.





LIONS



ADAPTATIONS:



FOR YOUNG READERS: Male lions have a mane of hair around their necks which helps them to look bigger and protects their necks if they get into fights with other lions.

Lions have long claws which they use to grab hold of the animals that they want to eat. They have very good eyesight in the dark to help them find the animals that they want to eat. The colour of their fur helps them to blend in with the grass which helps them to hunt. Their tongues are covered in bumps a bit like sandpaper which helps them to lick meat off bones.

Size: lions are the second largest living big cats (the largest is the tiger), this gives them an advantage when hunting prey and means that they don't have any natural predators. Although, buffalo and elephant may attack them if they or their young feel threatened.

Manes: male lions have a mane of long hair around their heads, they are the only cat species to have this. The mane makes the lion look larger and more intimidating to other lions in disputes over territory and breeding. It also helps to protect their necks in fights with other lions. Lions' manes become darker as they get older - these darker manes are preferred by female lions as it is a sign that the male is in peak condition for breeding and able to defend his pride.

Claws: long, sharp claws are kept hidden inside their paws as they walk so that they can move silently, they expose their claws when they are about to attack.

Eyesight: lions have excellent eyesight, their eyes are six times more sensitive to light than ours, this helps them to hunt in low light.

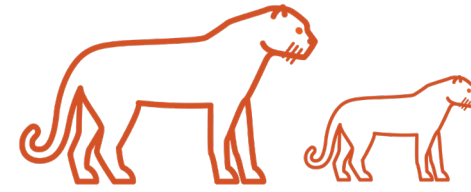
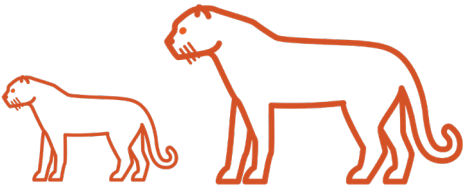
Teeth: lions have very long canine teeth for holding onto prey and sharp *carnassial** teeth for tearing off meat.

Jaws: strong jaw muscles for gripping prey and suffocating it.

Paws: soft pads on their paws help them to stalk their prey without being heard.

Camouflage: the lions' tawny coloured coats help them blend in with the grass, keeping them camouflaged so that they can ambush prey without being spotted. Cubs have brown rosettes on their fur which help them to blend in with the grass and stay hidden from predators, these fade as the cubs get older.

LIONS



WHY LIONS ARE IMPORTANT:



FOR YOUNG READERS: By eating grazing animals like zebras and gazelles, lions help to make sure that the numbers stay balanced and they don't end up eating too much of the vegetation.

Keystone species: lions are keystone *species*;^{*} they are vital to the *ecosystem*^{*} where they live. They mainly hunt hooved mammals who live in herds e.g. zebra, gazelle, wildebeest and kudu, they catch the weaker and sicker individuals and by doing so improve the overall health of the herd.

Balancing the ecosystem: by eating these animals, they are also controlling the population of herbivores (plant eating animals), without lions the number of herbivores would increase and they would overgraze the habitat, changing it and altering the balance of the ecosystem.

Tourism: lions also help to attract tourists to the areas where they live, bringing jobs and income into the local economy.

WHY DO LIONS NEED OUR HELP?



FOR YOUNG READERS: People are using the areas where lions used to live, so there is less space for the lions and for the animals that they like to eat.

The number of lions has decreased by over 40% in the last 20 years, it has been estimated that as few as 20,000 lions remain in the wild today.

Habitat loss: as human settlements expand and more land is converted into farmland to grow crops and graze livestock, there is less space available for lions. What little space remains is *fragmented*,^{*} making it harder for lions to move between areas and isolating them from one another, this makes them genetically weaker and more susceptible to disease.

Human-wildlife conflict: habitat loss is forcing lions to live closer to humans, there is also less space for their prey animals, this sometimes leads to lions attacking livestock and farmers may retaliate by shooting and poisoning them.

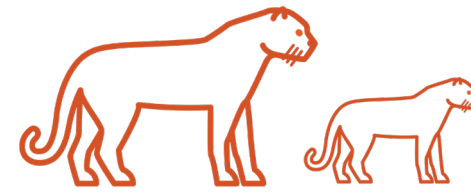
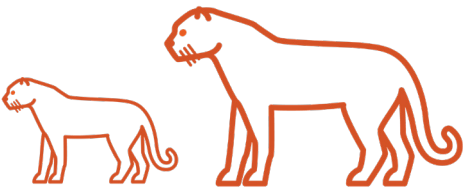
Bushmeat: *poaching*^{*} of wild animals for bushmeat means that there are less prey animals available for lions. It also means lions can sometimes get caught in the snares set for antelope.

Hunted: some people kill lions as hunting 'trophies'. Others believe that the lions' body parts such as bones, teeth, and claws, can be used as a medicine.

Disease: as lions are having to live nearer to humans due to habitat loss, they are more likely to pick up diseases from domestic dogs and cattle.



LIONS



HOW DOES DSWF HELP?

DSWF funding is helping conservationists better understand the issues and threats faced by lions in Uganda. Researchers are trying to count the lions in two of Uganda's national parks. DSWF also supports anti-poaching and park protection projects to give lions the greatest possible chance to thrive in their natural habitat.

HOW YOU CAN HELP:

USE YOUR VOICE - to let others know about the problems Africa's lions are facing and how you can help protect them.

BE MORE GREEN - Small changes to our daily lives add up to big differences for the planet when we all do them! [Click this link](#) to find out how you can help!

*GLOSSARY:

- *Captivity*: kept by humans, for example in zoos.
- *Carnassial*: molar and premolar teeth modified for shearing flesh by having sharp cutting edges.
- *Ecosystem*: a community of living things interacting with each other and their environment.
- *Fragmented*: broken into small pieces or areas.
- *Keystone species*: a species that has a great impact on an ecosystem.
- *Natal*: the place of birth (in this case the pride that they are born into).
- *Panthera*: the genus of the cat family which contains the big cats: lions, leopards, tigers, snow leopards and jaguars.
- *Poaching*: to illegally hunt.
- *Scavenge*: to eat something that another animal has killed.
- *Sociable*: to enjoy companionship.
- *Territory*: an area occupied and then defended by an animal or group of animals.
- *Vulnerable*: likely to become endangered.

**World
Lion Day is
celebrated
annually on 10
August.**