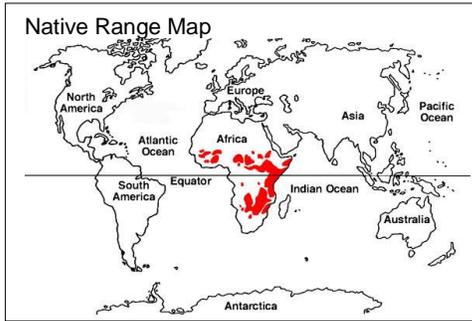


African Lion



Kingdom: Animalia
Phylum: Chordata
Subphylum: Vertebrata
Class: Mammalia
Order: Carnivora
Family: Felidae
Genus: *Panthera*
Species: *leo*



Photo courtesy of Karen Marzynski

Habitat

- **In the Wild:** African lions prefer grassy plains, savannas and semi deserts found in much of Africa south of the Sahara Desert, especially the southeastern part of the continent.
- **Exhibit Location:** Social Animals

Characteristics

- The African lion is the second largest cat, with males weighing up to 550 pounds and females weighing between 260 and 400 pounds. They are 8 to 10 feet long, not including the tail. The coloration is yellow-buff with the males having a mane, which darkens with age. They are very muscular, with back legs designed for pouncing and front legs made for grabbing and knocking down prey. The lion's roar can be heard up to five miles away, the loudest vocal sound created by any felid.
- **Lifespan: In the Wild** 10 to 15 years; **In Captivity** average 17 years

Behaviors

- The female lion is the primary hunter. She stalks the prey to within 100 feet. Lions are very agile with quick reflexes. They can run up to 35 mph, but only for short distances. Once close enough, the lion uses its paws and weight to knock down the quarry, then secures its meal with a bite in the throat or neck. Food is now shared with the pride with the strongest eating first. The males eat until satisfied, then the females and lastly the cubs.
- The leading cause of death among the cubs is starvation. There is a successful kill about one out of every 5 attempts.
- Lions live in groups known as prides, comprised of from 4 to 37 individuals (average is 15), with at least two males and several females. Lions are the only cats that live in family groups.
- **Enrichments at the Zoo:** scents, toys, barrels, balls, bones, papier-mâché

Reproduction

- Females mature about age 4 and have cubs about every 2 years.
- Breeding occurs mostly year round, but the females must be in estrous. The first male to encounter a female in heat is given a dominant status over the other males.
- Gestation is about 105 days and 2 to 4 cubs are born. The cubs are born with dark spots for protection. They are hidden from the pride for about a month. Their eyes open in about 3 weeks. After 3 months, the cubs accompany their mother on the hunt and will stay with her for their first two years.

Diet

- **In the Wild:** buffalo, warthogs, giraffe, zebra, antelope, gazelle, wildebeest and elephant calves; scavenging makes up about 15% of their diet
- **At the Zoo:** beef feline diet, rabbit (1 per week), beef soup bones

Conservation Status

- IUCN status: Vulnerable on Red List 2004; CITES Appendix: None
- Lions are high on the food chain and therefore have almost no natural predators.
- Most natural danger occurs during the first few years of life. The cubs are vulnerable to predators such as hyenas. The biggest danger is from the males in the pride. Once a male becomes dominant, he will kill all the young of defeated rivals, therefore solidifying his position.
- Lions are at odds with human settlement and farming. When the prey base is scarce, the raiding of farm animals increases and farmers put out poisoned carcasses to eliminate the lions.
- There is a significant level of trophy hunting of lions in Africa.
- Educational programs for the native population stresses respect for traditional lifestyles, hopefully minimizing the killing of lions. The maintaining of natural habitats aims to promote tourism in national parks and preserves set up for the protection of both the lions and the native population.

Did You Know?/Fun Facts

- Lions are the only social cat species.
- The female lions in the pride are closely related and enter breeding season together and give birth at the same time. This allows them to share nursing and other maternal duties.
- The lions at the RGZ will not be bred because they are siblings and their origins cannot be traced back to the wild. Therefore, the male has had a vasectomy.

Sources:

- Busch Entertainment Corporation, (n.d.). Seaworld/busch gardens animals. Retrieved April 26, 2005, from Animals: Explore, Discover, Connect Web site: <http://www.seaworld.org/animal-info/animal-bytes/animalia/eumetazoa/coelomates/deuterostomes/chordata/craniata/mammalia/carnivora/african-lion.htm>.
- The Big Zoo.Com, (n.d.). African lion. Retrieved April 13, 2005, from The Big Zoo.com Web site: http://www.thebigzoo.com/Animals/African_Lion.asp.