

These Heroic Animals Protect Humans – We Must Save Them Too

Surprisingly, 3 of them protected an Ethiopian girl who was abducted in 2005 by men trying to force her into marriage. She was found a week later guarded by these 3 'killers.' Discover these 9 other fascinating facts about them ... and find out about the dangers they face.

Analysis by Dr. Karen Shaw Becker

STORY AT-A-GLANCE

- Lions live in prides with related females and up to three unrelated males; female lions live together their entire lives
- Male lions are the only big cat species with manes
- Female lions do the hunting (together in groups) while male lions stay home to protect the pride

Editor's Note: This article is a reprint. It was originally published May 02, 2015.

Lions are often thought of as ferocious predators; the "King of the Jungle." They have a mysterious, majestic air to them that draws people in (usually to see them at a zoo or, if you're lucky, on a wildlife safari). If you're a cat lover, however, you may notice some surprising similarities between these big cats and your house cat. For instance, the way kitties like to rub up against their human's legs.

Lions in the wild exhibit a very similar behavior, especially when subordinate females or younger animals meet up with more dominant lions in the pride. When a subordinate lion comes upon a dominant lion, she lowers her head, lifts her tail, and rubs her head against the other animal.¹ Establishing a "family scent" as she is doing is important in preventing and diffusing aggression among lions in the group. All members of a pride must bear the family scent in order to steer clear of trouble.

Lions have also been described as heroic, even in protecting humans. For instance, a 12-year-old Ethiopian girl was abducted in 2005 by men attempting to force her into marriage. She was found a week later protected by three lions who "stood guard until we [police] found her and then they just left her like a gift and went back into the forest."² What else is there to know about lions? Plenty, and Paw Nation has compiled nine fascinating examples.³

9 Lion Facts You Should Know

1. **A complex social structure** — Lions live in large groups called prides, similar to wolves (but not most other cat species). A pride consists of multiple related females and their dependent offspring along with two or three unrelated males. A typical pride has about 15 members, although some prides as large as 40 members have been observed.
2. **Second largest big cat** — A male lion weighs about 500 pounds and grows to eight feet in length. It sounds impressive, but tigers are actually larger, reaching 850 pounds and 11 feet long.

3. **Lions don't live in the jungle** — Even though lions are known as "King of the Jungle," they live in grasslands and plains – not the jungle. Also unusual in the animal kingdom, female lions do the hunting (usually in groups) while male lions stay home and watch over the pride. The males, however, are first to eat when the female lions come home with their kill.
4. **Lion babies aren't only called cubs** — Baby lions may be referred to as cubs, whelps, or lionets. A "whelp" actually refers to any young member of a carnivorous species, while "lionet" means "small lion" in Middle French.
5. **Females live together for life** — Female lions, sisters, live together for life. Their female cubs also stay with the pride, even after they're grown, but male cubs must venture out on their own once they reach maturity.
6. **The only big cats with manes** — Male lions have majestic manes that make them appear larger and more intimidating. Female lions are also attracted to fuller, thicker manes.
7. **They once roamed the globe** — Lions once lived in Europe, Africa, the Middle East, North America, and Northern India. Now lions primarily live in Africa, aside from a small group (about 300) Asiatic lions that live in India's Gir Forest.
8. **The loudest roar** — A male lion's roar can be heard from up to five miles away – the loudest roar of any big cat species. Their roar helps them find other lions as well as to proclaim their territory. A pride's territory may include up to 100 square miles.⁴
9. **A national symbol** — Lions are associated with pride, courage, and strength, making them a perfect national symbol. Albania, Belgium, Bulgaria, England, Ethiopia, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, and Singapore all regard the lion as their national symbol.

African Lions May Be Extinct by 2050

Last year the US Fish and Wildlife Services announced that African lions may be facing extinction by the year 2050. The agency proposed listing the lions as "threatened" under the Endangered Species Act. According to Scientific American:⁵

"The decision to list the big cats as threatened—one level below endangered—would allow the U.S. government to provide some level of training and assistance for on-the-ground conservation efforts and restrict the sale of lion parts or hunting trophies into the country or across state lines."

The greatest threats facing lions are habitat loss, loss of prey (largely due to the bushmeat trade), and human-lion conflict, including sport hunting and retaliation kills, in which lions are killed after attacking area livestock.⁶ There are only about 34,000 lions left in Africa, which is about half the number that existed 30 years ago. About 70% of these animals live in just 10 regions of the continent, mostly in southern and eastern Africa. In West Africa, fewer than 250 adult lions remain.

Sources and References

[Paw Nation August 29, 2014](#)

¹ [HuffPo March 18, 2013](#)

² [Buzz Feed December 16, 2013](#)

³ [Paw Nation August 29, 2014](#)

⁴ [National Geographic, African Lions](#)

^{5,6} [Scientific American October 27, 2014](#)