

9 Species Where Females Rule the Roost

A female queen is the ruler of the honeybee hive, but that's not the only species where females have unique advantages or skills that make them ideal for ensuring survival. And some of these happen to be among the most peaceful species on Earth.

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STORY AT-A-GLANCE

- A matriarchal society is one in which a female leads the family, colony, or tribe
- In the animal kingdom, there are many species in which the females rule the roost
- Examples of matriarchal animal communities include honeybees, killer whales, elephants, bonobos, spotted hyenas, lions, and more

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In the animal kingdom there are many species in which the females rule the roost. This might seem unusual in that the males are typically thought of as the protectors, but oftentimes the females have unique advantages or skills that make them uniquely suited to protecting their species' survival.¹

9 Matriarchal Species in the Animal Kingdom

1. **Honeybees** — The female queen is the ruler of the honeybee hive. She's larger in size than her workers and lives for one to two years, compared to six or seven weeks for workers. The queen's specialty is reproduction, which ensures the survival of the hive. According to Discovery News:²

"Drones usually die upon mating or are expelled from the hive before winter sets in."

2. **Killer whales** — Orcas, or killer whales, live in a matriarchal society and offspring stay with their mothers for life — even after having offspring of their own. A pod of killer whales will be made up of multiple family units, known as matriline, which tend to travel together.

Killer whales are very protective of their young, who are cared for not only by their mother but also by other adolescent females in the pod.

3. **Elephants** — Elephants also live in a complex matriarchal society, in which the oldest and often largest female is the matriarch of the entire herd; she may lead anywhere from eight to 100 elephants.
4. **Bonobos** — Bonobos, a type of great ape formerly known as the pygmy chimpanzee, also live in groups lead by females. Interestingly, they are also said to be among the most peaceful primates on the planet and settle conflicts through sex.
5. **Spotted hyenas** — Female spotted hyenas are larger and more aggressive than males, and it's the females that dominate their social groups (each of which may have up to 60 members). The female hyena's genitals

even resemble the male genitals, making it difficult to differentiate between the sexes.

6. **Lions — 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.

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.

7. **Mole rats** — Mole rat colonies, which may have 20 to 300 members, are lead by a dominant female or “mole rat queen.” The queen chooses the largest, toughest males to mate with several times a year and may deliver up to seven offspring every two months.
8. **Meerkats** — Meerkats live in underground burrows in groups of two or three families, called mobs. Each mob is lead by a dominant female, which leads the group in foraging trips, finding new burrows, and settling disputes with other meerkat mobs.
9. **Ants** — Similar to bees, ants live in colonies lead by a single queen, who focuses on mating and breeding to build the colony while the others tend to the work. An interesting factoid from Discovery News:³

“If population size is a measure of success, then ants are the most successful creatures on the planet. If all of the ants in the world came together in one big mass, they would weigh more than the combined weight of the entire human population on Earth.”

Sources and References

[Discovery News April 15, 2015](#)

^{1,2,3} [Discovery News April 15, 2015](#)
