

Lions

- Scientific name:** Felidae Panthera leo
- Home:** The African lion inhabits grassy plains, savannahs, open woodlands and scrub country.
- Description:** Pretty heavy (330-550 lbs), long (Head/Body 5.4 to 8.25 ft) and high – for a cat! (4 Ft; Male can be 50% larger than Female).

Lion Facts

Known as the “King of the Beasts” lions have roamed African plains and woodlands for many thousands of years. They are feared by most animals, with the exception of elephants and rhino’s who don’t normally fear anything!



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A male lion enjoys a rest and a drink in the Luangwa National Park, Zambia.

Lions live in large family groups called “prides”. The head of the pride is a male lion who looks after his pride which normally contains a number of lionesses and their cubs. A male lion will kill any cub that is not one of his own!



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Lionesses watch a male lion in the Luangwa National Park, Zambia.

Any young male lion seeking to take over the pride will have to fight for the privilege.

Some other useful facts about lions include:

- A male lion's roar can be heard up to 5 miles away;
- The hunting grounds for a pride of lions can range from 8 to 150 square miles;
- Lionesses hunt in groups. While one group of lions drives the prey to a certain area, another group will wait to ambush the approaching animals;
- A lion's eyesight is five times better than a human's, and it can hear prey that is more than a mile away.
- Lionesses do most of the hunting and the males defend the territory. The diet of Zebra, buffalo giraffe, carrion, wildebeest is very meat-orientated. I don't think you get any vegetarian lions!
- Lions commonly live up to 16 years of age.

My Lion Experiences

Zambia

South Luangwa National Park

While staying in the South Luangwa National Park in Zambia we were enjoying a morning game drive. It was very hot and dry so the game we spotted was either close to water holes or in the shade of trees.

We crossed a dry river bed and drove through some dry bush towards a large thorn tree. Our Landrover had no doors and we were sitting on benches in the back of the vehicle. It was very quiet; there were no birds singing and the normally busy baboons were in the trees rather than foraging on the ground.

Suddenly, we drove up a steep bank to a large tree under which we discovered a small family of sleeping lions. There were a couple of lionesses and six cubs. The piercing eyes of the lionesses looked straight through us. I suddenly felt very exposed, particularly as there were no doors on the vehicle to protect us!



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Lion cub snoozing in South Luangwa National Park

However, the lions resumed their snoozing. They seemed quite happy under the shade of the trees idly flicking flies away with their tails.

All of a sudden, one of the lionesses startled us all by waking up and staring at some bushes about 50 metres away from us. Within a split second both lionesses sprinted off into the bush, leaving the cubs looking slightly bemused.

It appeared that a buffalo had approached the trees, without being aware of the lion families presence. Having chased the buffalo away, the lionesses returned to the cubs and proceeded to groom them before settling back into a sleep.

We were very excited by this sudden commotion and also extremely relieved that the lionesses were not upset by our appearance like that of the buffalos!

Lower Zambezi National Park

This was probably the most frightening experience I have had to date in Africa. On a game drive from Sausage Tree Camp we enjoyed an evening watching elephants swimming, hippo's basking in the evening sun and lots of buffalo and other grazing animals drinking after a long hot day from the Zambezi River.



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Elephant paddling in the Zambezi River.

Our journey back to the camp took us through lots of woodland which was very dry. The Landrover we were driving in was totally open with no doors. Our guide and his assistant were sitting in the front of the vehicle. Hazel and I were in the back.

As it got darker a spotlight was used to see if we could see any game wondering through the trees and bushes. We caught glimpses of elephants and zebras. We did

not see any of the big cats such as a leopard whose eyes would have been illuminated by the powerful spotlight.

The vehicle continued to drive slowly through the trees winding its way along the river bank. We came to a bend in the road where bushes and trees were growing on either side of the track.

Suddenly the assistant told the driver to stop. Emerging around the bend in the road about 10 metres ahead of us was a pride of lions, led by a large male lion with a full mane.

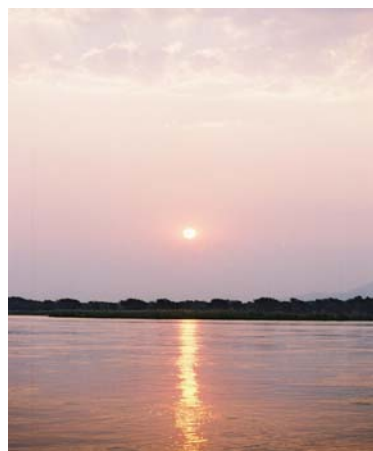
With him were three lionesses and a number of cubs. But I was not watching the cubs. Because of the narrow track and limited space either side of the road, it seemed as if the pride were walking straight towards us.

And they were! There was no time to get the camera out, nor did I want to. The prospect of a fully grown male and his family walking towards me made me think about only one thing – how were we going to avoid them!

Our guide told us to sit quite still and not make any sudden movements that might distract the lions. They got closer and closer. The male and one of lionesses then went along the left hand side of the vehicle. The others went down the right hand side of our Landrover.

We could have reached out and touched these lions as they walked past. I stared rigidly ahead! It seemed ages before they had walked past, not even bothering to stare at what I thought was going to be their next meal - us!

They passed by and left us to get back to the camp with some unforgettable moments to share with our fellow guests.



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