

# ASIATIC LION

## What are some of the basic differences between African and Asiatic lions?

Asiatic lions are generally smaller than their African cousins. The most noticeable physical characteristic found in all Asiatic lions, but rarely in African lions, is a longitudinal fold of skin running along the belly. The mane of the Asiatic lion is generally shorter than that of the African lion, so the ears are always visible.

Studies on Asiatic lions in India show the adult males weigh between 160 to 190 kg, while adult females weigh between 110 to 120 kg. The largest Asiatic lion on record measured 2.9 m. Also, the Asiatic lions prey on animals that are generally smaller and their hunting groups tend to be smaller as well.

## Vital statistics

Here is your quick 'at a glance' guide to the key facts and figures about the Asiatic lion.

Weight: Male 150-250Kg; Female 120-180Kg  
Length (head and body): Male 1.7-2.5m; Female 1.4-1.75m  
Length (tail): 70-105cm A tale almost 1 metre long!  
Sexual Maturity: Male 5 years; Female 4 years  
Mating season: All year round  
Number of young: 1 to 6  
What do they eat? Deer, antelope, wild boar, buffalo  
How long do they live? 16-18 years

## Key Features

Has a shorter mane than the African lion, and a distinctive fold of skin along its belly. Also lives in smaller, looser prides. Eats mainly small deer and antelope, but also takes domestic cattle. After years of hunting and forest clearance, only 300 survive in the wild in one part of India. Species is listed as endangered.

## Where In The World?

Only found in Northwestern India.  
The last sighting of an Asiatic lion outside India was in southern Iran in 1942.  
In the 1980s almost all 200 captive-bred 'Asiatic' lions outside India were discovered to be hybrids.

## Creature Comparisons

Historically, the Asiatic lion roamed a huge area stretching from northern Greece and Turkey, through the Middle East to central India. Its former habitats included forests, grasslands and desolate mountain ranges. Its present habitat in Girisahilly area (India), mainly of teak woodlands.

Whereas a pride of African lions contains up to six lionesses, its Asiatic counterpart usually comprises just two related lionesses and their young. Recent studies indicate, however, that these small prides may be dispersed units of larger, looser groups. Male Asiatic lions, meanwhile, tend to be much less involved in pride life than male African lions. They do not compete with each other for domination of a pride, but defend its territory in loose groups, known as coalitions. These differences may be because the wild prey animals in Gir (India) are generally smaller than on the plains of Africa.

Such prey feeds fewer lions at a sitting, so the males tend to hunt their own. Only when the lionesses in a pride kill large domestic cattle, which have more meat on them than wild prey, do the males sometimes share the kill.

There is no more room for lions in Gir, and disease could wipeout all the lions there in one go. Worldwide there are over 100 zoo bred Asiatic lions, and the aim is to set up new populations in India. But it is hard to find suitable areas with plenty of prey, no competition from tigers-and no opposition from local farmers.

Source: The Asiatic Lion Information Centre©2000

## Why are they at threat?

- The invention of gunpowder and 'sport hunting' has proven deadly for the Asiatic lion
- "Vast tracts of jungle forest were cleared to extract wood for commercial use and to make way for the increasing human population", which decimated the lion's habitat
- "With the entire wild population of Asiatic lions confined to just one area, that population is highly vulnerable to any kind of biological, climactic or man-made catastrophe"

## • How can you help?

Helping save the planet is something that we need to start right now. And if it is going to have any real effect, it's something that we all need to do together. Encourage your school friends and family to help protect the environment. Tell them about the issues that affect the future for all of us. There are heaps of eco tips: <http://wwf.org.au/act/ecotips/>