

Animal species in this Issue

Lion (*Panthera leo*)



Kingdom: Animalia & Phylum: Chordata & Class: Mammalia & Order: Carnivora
& Family: Felidae & Genus: *Panthera* & Species: *P. Leo* (Linnaeus, 1758)

The **lion** (*Panthera leo*) is one of the four big cats in the genus *Panthera*, and a member of the family Felidae. With some males exceeding 250 kg (550 lb) in weight, it is the second-largest living cat after the tiger. Wild lions currently exist in Sub-Saharan Africa and in Asia with a critically endangered remnant population in Gir Forest National Park in India, having disappeared from North Africa and Southwest Asia in historic times.

The lion is the tallest (at the shoulder) of the felines, and also is the second-heaviest feline after the tiger. With powerful legs, a strong jaw, and 8 cm (3.1 in) long canine teeth, the lion can bring down and kill large prey. The skull of the lion is very similar to that of the tiger, though the frontal region is usually more depressed and flattened, with a slightly shorter postorbital region. The lion's skull has broader nasal openings than the tiger. However, due to the amount of skull variation in the two species, usually, only the structure of the lower jaw can be used as a reliable indicator of species. Lion coloration varies from light buff to yellowish, reddish, or dark ochraceous brown. The underparts are generally lighter and the tail tuft is black.

Lions are the only members of the cat family to display obvious sexual dimorphism that is, males and females look distinctly different.