Big Cat Rescue

LIONS

MEET CAMERON, JOSEPH, & NIKITA
NOTE: The 70+ photos can only be viewed in Landscape view.

Lion – Panthera leo - This “King of Beasts” once roamed over most parts of the world including Africa, North America and Eurasia. Today, however, they are restricted to the savanna, open expanses, and grassy plains of Africa, and to a small area of western India. There are about 15,000 lions in the wild today. Just ten years ago that number was closer to 50,000. The shrinking numbers are due to hunting and overpopulation of humans.
One hundred and fifty years ago, there lived a subspecies of lion, Panthera leo persica, which was found from India to the Middle East. There are only an estimated few hundred alive today. They can be found in the Gir forest sanctuary in Gujarat, in western India. A sanctuary was set up in 1966 in the Gir forest to try and protect the surviving numbers of Asiatic Lions in India. They are endangered due to hunting and other human factors.

The Lion is the only cat that lives in large social groups, shares its territory, and regularly hunts together. The Lion’s diet consists of wildebeests, antelope, zebras, wild pigs, buffalo, impalas, and other hoofed mammals. The Lionesses do all the hunting in large number of groups or pairs. Prey will be approached with stealth until it is in range, then the cats will lunge and kill the prey by biting its neck. Lions are the dominant carnivores in their habitat and will drive away competitors or even kill them.

The Lion’s head and body can be up to eight feet, two inches, and tail up to three feet, five inches. Its weight can be up to 550 pounds.

Lions are primarily ground-dwellers, but occasionally jump up tree branches. Most Lions will remain in the same territory all year long, however some are nomadic and follow the seasonal prey.

Lions live together in a pride based upon a group of related females (Lionesses) and their cubs. Surprisingly, the pride is led by a dominant female. When a new male joins a pride it will drive away the other males and kill any remaining cubs, then mate with the females to produce his own offspring.

A Lioness will give birth to up to six cubs after a gestation period of 15-17 weeks. All of the Lionesses in the pride share in the rearing of the cubs and the males may even be playful with them.

**NOTE:** The lions discussed below are African and Asian.

**Misc:** The Lion is the only cat with tufted tails (both sexes) and manes (males), with the manes allowing them to be the only cat which you can distinguish gender from a distance. They are also the only true
social cat and live in groups called “prides.” The lion has often been called “the King of the Jungle,” but that would be most inaccurate. The lion’s habitat does not include the jungle, and therefore, the correct phrase would refer to the lion as “the King of Beasts.”

**Sub-species:** Of the known sub-species of lion there seems to be an agreement on 2 as far as genetics go – Pantherinae Panthera leo leo – the African lion, and Pantherinae Panthera leo persica – the Asian lion. Regardless of the area of Africa a lion is found in today, their DNA analysis has shown them to be the same, whereas there is a difference between African and Asian. As of the time of this writing, the Barbary lion has never been tested and compared to these results, and may in fact be a third and distinct lion sub-species.

**Size and Appearance:** Second only in size to the Siberian tiger among the felines, the lion is the largest carnivore in Africa, and the second largest feline predator in the world. Average males weigh 385-550 pounds, and females weigh 250-450 pounds. The males reach an overall length of 11 feet from the tip of the nose to tip of the tail, and females being just a bit shorter.

Lions have a uniformly tawny coat, and the shades of it may vary from light to dark. In the Timbavati region, white lions are found, which is a form of leucism as opposed to albinism. Black (melanistic) lions have not been observed and reports of black lions in captivity have never been confirmed. Males possess a mane and it can range in colors from blonde to red to brown to black. It covers their head, neck and chest, and its development is believed to be strongly influenced by testosterone. Their ears have black spots on the backs, which stay black throughout their lives, unlike the black rosettes that cover their bodies when they are born.

**Habitat:** The lion prefers to live in open woodlands and thick bush, scrub, and tall grassy areas. The lion can and will tolerate a wide variety of habitats, absent only from rain forests and desert interiors. While lions drink water regularly when it is available, they can survive by obtaining their moisture requirements from their prey or from tsama melons. This allows them to survive in very arid climates.

**Distribution:** The lion was once found from northern Africa through southwest Asia (extinct in most
countries within past 150 years), west into Europe (extinct 2000 years ago) and east into India (relic population of 350 in Gir Forest only). Today, the majority of Africa’s lions can be found in east and southern Africa, with about 1,500 in West Africa. Most of the lions today exist inside protected areas. 2007 surveys estimate only 15,000 lions to be left in the wild and most of those are on game parks where they are hunted as trophies.

**Reproduction and Offspring:** Lions will reproduce any time of the year, and all females of reproductive maturity will breed at the same time. This allows them to give birth in synchrony with each other, thereby sharing the suckling responsibilities. Any lactating female in a pride will suckle any cub that belongs to the pride. Lions give birth to 1-6 cubs after a gestation of 110 days. The cubs are born blind and helpless, and weigh approximately 2-4 pounds. Cub mortality is very high in lions, and less than half will survive their first year. Young males will leave their pride between 2-4 years if they can get away with staying that long, but sometimes they are forced out as early as 13-20 months. Females remain with their natal pride most of the time, although some will disperse and form new prides. While male lions are physically capable of reproducing at 30 months and females at 24 months, they do not generally successfully reproduce until pride membership has been firmly established.

In captivity, lions can live 20 years, as compared to 12 in the wild for males and 15-16 for females. **Social System and Communication:** The lion is the only true social cat and lives in groups called prides. These prides are made up of a single male or a coalition of males (up to 7) and up to 20 females and their offspring. The males defend the females and the territory from strange males, and competition among the males is fierce. A male’s average tenure over a pride is only 2-3 years, but can increase depending on the size and strength of the coalition. Groups of males do better than a lone male. Lions use a variety of vocalizations, most notably the roar. It can be heard over a distance of 5-6 miles, and serves to let other members of the pride know where they are, and as a signal to strange males to stay away. The Africans believe that the lions are speaking and saying “he inchi ya nani – yangu, yangu, yangu” or “whose land is this? It’s mine, mine, mine!” Hear our roars, hisses, snarls,
Hunting and Diet: Lions are very opportunistic eaters, and will take almost any prey ranging from small rodents to young rhinos, hippos and elephants. The majority of its prey, however, is medium to large ungulates, most notably zebra, wildebeest, impala, warthog, hartebeest and waterbuck. They will stay away from adult rhinos, hippos, elephants and even giraffes. The females do most of the hunting, and the male will come and join the females after the kill is made. The females will make way for the males and allow him to eat his fill first. Males will participate on a hunt when it is a particularly large prey item – like a water buffalo – where his size and strength is required to bring down such a large animal (although enough females can do it successfully on their own). Males must also hunt during their bachelor stages, when there are no females to take care of them.

Principal Threats: Lions are generally considered problem animals whose existence is at odds with human settlements and cattle culture. Their scavenging behavior makes them highly susceptible to poisoned carcasses put out to eliminate predators. Where the wild prey is migratory, lions will predate on captive stock during the lean season, thus making the nuisance animals and easy targets for humans to eliminate.

Status: CITES: Appendix II. IUCN: Not listed. (but should be and in 2012 and 2013 BCR petitioned USFWS to add the lion)

2003 Felid TAG recommendation: Lion (Panthera leo). One of the last SSPs to be developed for an otherwise large and widely held felid, the initiation of the African Lion Studbook in 1992 discovered that only two lions could be traced back to wild founders in Africa. All other lions in zoos, regardless of the institution’s size, were acquired as public donations or from other untraceable sources. Only one purebred Asian lion remains in North America. With a target population of 350 animals, only lions with ancestors that can be traced back to the wild are accepted into the studbook and SSP. Since the SSP began, several dozen lions have been imported, primarily from South Africa, but parties interested in importing additional lions need
to ensure that specimens under consideration are unrelated to animals already in this country.

In the case of Asian lions, the wild population will continue to be monitored, with future importations possible from sources within the Indian Lion EEP population. Three institutions had mate killings in the past year.

VIDEO: Lions and Tigers of Big Cat Rescue

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P297Pq_OiEY&feature=player_embedded

VIDEO: Big Cat Rescue Lion Road (HD)

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g5FvJveyyVM&feature=player_embedded
CAMERON
What was to happen to a lion named Cameron when an owner of the roadside zoo where he lived suddenly died and the zoo was forced to close? Luckily for Cameron, he came to live at Big Cat Rescue on 5/3/04. At the zoo, he had been raised with Zabu, the white tigress, with the hopes of cross breeding them and selling the resulting Liger cubs.

People often hybridize lions and tigers because they are either trying to create a novelty that people will pay to come see or trying to avoid the law. Until recently, some state’s laws did not recognize a 500 pound cross between a lion and tiger to be either. Therefore, people would buy them and claim that laws against owning a lion or tiger did not apply to them.

Even though Cameron went through a very tough time, in which his former keepers said he had lost over 200
pounds due to starvation, Cameron paced himself to survive. It was up to us to help turn his life around.

Since Cameron and Zabu were true companions, we had to do whatever we could to make a long life together possible for them. The first step was to build a 3-acre cat-a-tat designed especially for 2 large carnivores. Next we had to address the issue of neutering Cameron. We learned that if we neutered him, there was a strong possibility that he would lose his gorgeous, thick mane. To prevent that, we chose for him to undergo a vasectomy instead and he remained separated from
Zabu (who we also spayed) until we were sure no breeding could take place. Reuniting them was a special moment and they are now very happy and very popular residents of our sanctuary.
**A Lion Pride of a Different Stripe**

It took the combined efforts of USDA, undercover agents and concerned citizens seven years to shut down Diana McCourt (aka Cziraky) and her Siberian Tiger Foundation. It wasn’t until her landlords, Donnalynn and Christian Laver were able to evict her from the property that Knox County was able to seize the six cats who had been used for years as props in Diana McCourt’s “tiger training” scheme.

By the end of the ordeal eye witnesses said that the cats were starving and they still have inadequate shelter from the elements. Even though McCourt lost her USDA license to operate the tiger-tamer camp in 2000, and permanently in 2006, she still continued to charge people to come into her back yard in Gambier, OH and pet the adult lions and tigers.

**DOB 8/19/98 Rescued 10/21/07**

Joseph the lion was rescued along with several other lions and tigers who had been bred to be used as photo and ego props.

Sponsor: Joseph [http://www.bigcatrescue.biz/servlet/the-1001/Lion-Sponsorship/Detail](http://www.bigcatrescue.biz/servlet/the-1001/Lion-Sponsorship/Detail)
The cats would often be chained down so that people could touch them or have their photos made with the cats.

To make the cats more pliable McCourt had their teeth and claws removed. (Joseph still has his canine teeth) Despite the abusive violations to their bodies and mobility, the USDA investigation included eight allegations of attacks on visitors in an 8 month period.

Most cases that 6 years or more to prosecute so animals suffer most or all of their lives waiting for help to arrive. The only way to put an end to the suffering is to end the private possession of big cats and eliminate the USDA loophole that allows people to keep big cats if they have a $40 USDA license. It is too easy to get and too hard to lose to provide any sort of enforcement of the Animal Welfare Act.

VIDEO: Lion & Tiger Rescue (Joseph’s Pride)

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kIVp21JQJs4

In May of 2007 Diana McCourt emailed Carole Baskin asking if she could move her operation to Tampa and bring her cats to Big Cat Rescue. Our response was that her cats were welcome here but her brand of animal abuse was not. By August McCourt had been evicted and Knox County was awarded custody of the four tigers and two lions. Dean Vickers, the State Director for the Ohio branch of the HSUS contacted Big Cat Rescue and asked if we could take the cats, but six more big cats increases our annual budget by $45,000.00.

When Sarabi, our lioness died, her half acre enclosure was opened up so that Nikita our only other lioness could have the run of both half acre enclosures. This large enclosure has an open roof and is only suitable for lions because they don’t climb, or very old, declawed tigers, who would be unable to climb. Taking on two lions, age 9 and 13, who have a 20 year life expectancy means a cost of
$15,000.00 annually and $150,000.00 in the long run. Lions often end up in canned hunts, especially males who are coveted as wall trophies, so we felt certain our donors would help us rescue these two cats. Our board convened and agreed that the lions would be rescued as soon as we could make travel arrangements for them.

Calling with the good news, that at least the lions would be spared, we were told by the landlord, who has been caring for the cats since evicting Diana McCourt, that the male tiger, Nikita, would be heartbroken that his best friend in the world, Joseph the lion, would be leaving. As the conversation unfolded it appears that for the last 13 years, two tigers and two lions have shared a cage. (Joseph only coming along in the past 9 yrs) Instead of being elated for the lions, we now felt sick that they would be separated from the only pride (albeit tigers) they had ever known. And thinking about how they would feel, of course, led to thinking about how the tigers left behind would feel.

We appealed to our supporters, asking if they would be willing to help us rescue all four cats who have lived together and the response was an overwhelming, “YES!”

On Oct. 19th Big Cat Rescue’s President Jamie Veronica, VP Cathy Neumann, Operations Manager Scott Lope and Veterinarian Dr. Liz Wynn, DVM flew to Columbus, OH to rendezvous with the International Fund for Animal Welfare (IFAW) staff and a driver and vet tech from the Animal Sanctuary of the United States (ASUS) at the Columbus Zoo at 6 am on the morning of the 20th. From there the entourage drove an hour to the Gambier, OH facility and met with the property owner and the Knox County Animal Control Officer, Rich Reed who had been granted possession of the six cats.
Within just a few hours all of the cats were safely loaded and on the way to Florida where they arrived at 6 am the morning of the 21st. While the weary drivers slept, the Big Cat Rescue team unloaded Nikita, Simba, Sasha and Joseph into their new enclosure, which is a little more than half an acre of lakeside living with high grass, cave like dens and hills from which they can survey their new kingdom.

We let you know that the rescue would cost us $34,000.00* and 294 of you responded. As of 11/16/07 $29,435.00 has been raised to save these four cats. The International Fund for Animal Welfare (IFAW) agreed to help rescue the last two cats and IFAW paid to transport all six cats to their final destinations. That saved us $4,000.00! We are now only $565.00 short of what this rescue will cost us in the first year. Thank you everyone who has helped so far! If you haven’t helped yet, keep in mind that your donations are tax deductible and that these cats rely entirely on your generosity.

The International Fund for Animal Welfare (IFAW) agreed to help rescue and place the last two cats, Sierra and Ekaterina who are now at Wildcat Sanctuary.
NIKITA
DOB 2/3/01  Rescue 11/30/01

Nikita Lioness seized in drug raid!

Nikita was seized by police in a drug raid and when she arrived at Big Cat Rescue she was severely underweight and had developed growths on her legs from lying on a hard surface all the time. Since then eating a grrreat diet and having a one acre enclosure to run around in, she as made a full recovery and is a very large and very beautiful mature lioness!

Nikita was found chained to the wall in a crack house during a drug bust in Tennessee. Because she had been confined to a concrete floor, she had huge swellings on her elbows that took months to heal. She was so thin that you could carry her under one arm. She would only eat white rabbits, so she had a plethora of nutritional issues to deal with as well.

The authorities took her to the Nashville Zoo at Grasmere, but she had been declawed and could not live with the zoo’s other lions. They had to find a new home for her, so we received the call. Big Cat Rescue agreed to take Nikita in, as well as three other Bobcats who all arrived on 11/30/01.

Nikita has flourished under our care. She has grown into a tall, lanky, healthy lioness. She’s extremely playful and loves to roll on her back and grab her paws or try to do somersaults whenever she has visitors stopping by to talk with her. Though we wish she had the freedom she deserves, we’re so happy that she survived her earlier ordeals to enjoy the blissful days we try to provide for her here.

Sponsor Nikita http://www.bigcatrescue.biz/servlet/the-1001/Lion-Sponsorship/Detail

NEW Lion home!

VIDEO - Watch Nikita the Lion explore her new enclosure: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1R8qLEZAzVE
VIDEO - LION VS Big Yellow Ball!

http://www.youtube.com/watch?
feature=player_embedded&v=jxOzUgL964

LION VS Big Yellow Ball = Lion Wins! Watch our goofy lioness Nikita take on her new yellow boomer ball! Enrichment is an important part of our cats lives at the sanctuary they will never be free and wild, so we have to keep their minds stimulated with new toys and enrichment, ensuring the best quality life in captivity.