



Care For Us
Lion
(Panthera leo)



Animal Welfare

Animal welfare refers to an animal's state or feelings. An animal's welfare state can be good, neutral or bad.

An animal's welfare has the potential to differ on a daily basis. When an animal's needs - nutritional, behavioural, health and environmental - are met, they will have good welfare.

A good life in captivity might be one where animals can consistently experience good welfare throughout their entire life.

Understanding that animals have both sentient and cognitive abilities as well as pain perception, reinforces the need to provide appropriate husbandry for all captive animals, to ensure good welfare.

In captivity, the welfare of an animal is dependent on the environment provided for them and the daily care and veterinary treatment they receive.





Lions are instantly recognisable by all.

They are one of the four big cat species and are separated into two sub-species.

The African lion was once found across much of Africa, including North Africa. Now the population of between 20,000 and 40,000 lions is fragmented across sub-Saharan Africa. They are classified as Vulnerable by the IUCN.

The Asiatic lion is only found in the North-West of India and numbers approx. 600 individuals. They are classified as Endangered by the IUCN.

Lions are carnivores

Lions are members of the cat family and are obligate meat-eaters, which means they have evolved to only eat and digest meat. As carnivores, they have adapted to catching, killing and consuming prey animals. It is important that lions get a balanced and nutritious diet. This prevents them becoming overweight. Carnivores in captivity must not be offered live prey.

Positive behaviours to encourage

Offering lions a varied and appropriate diet will encourage natural feeding behaviours and keep them physically and mentally healthy. Carcass feeding is a good form of enrichment as it allows the lions to consume all parts of the animal. It increases the time they take to eat and keeps their teeth in good condition.



Lions like to rest

A close-up photograph of a lioness lying down in a grassy field. The lioness is looking directly at the camera with its mouth slightly open, showing its tongue and teeth. The background is a soft-focus view of dry grass and some green plants.

Lions have a reputation of sleeping for as many as 18 hours a day. Giving them choice of when and where they rest and giving them clean and dry bedding is important.

It is natural and normal for them to be inactive for long periods but when they are active, they need to have the appropriate social structure, enrichment and diet to encourage natural behaviours.

Positive behaviours to encourage

Lions are generally nocturnal and crepuscular which means they are active at night and during dusk and dawn. They will rest in the middle of the day, particularly in hot climates. By timing when you give food and enrichment you will encourage natural activity and resting behaviours.

A photograph of two lionesses in a savanna setting. One lioness is lying down in the foreground, looking towards the camera, while another lioness is partially visible behind her, resting its head on the first lioness's back. The background is a blurred landscape with green grass and some dry branches.

Lions are social

Lions are the only member of the cat family which lives in a social structure called a pride. The pride is normally made up of related females and their young and unrelated males. Young male lions born in the pride leave when they near adulthood, the female sub-adults usually stay within the pride. The pride of lions will defend their territory and cooperate when hunting and looking after their young. The bond between the pride females is very strong.

Positive behaviours to encourage

Keeping lions in appropriate social groups is very important and encourages natural behaviours. To keep lions in a pride they need space so they can choose when and where they socialise with other lions in their pride.

A photograph of two lion cubs on a grassy field. One cub is lying down, and the other is on top of it, with its mouth open as if playing or roaring. The background is a soft-focus natural setting.

Lions like to play

From an early age, lions learn how to hunt through play. Stalking, chasing and pouncing behaviours continue into adulthood. Using enrichment to stimulate this behaviour replicates those natural instincts and allows the lions to exercise and imitate hunting.

Positive behaviours to encourage

To encourage play behaviours, you can give lions food and non-food enrichment. Hiding or hanging their food gives them exercise. Sacks or cardboard boxes with different scents and straw inside encourage play.

Lions like to use their claws

Lions are very strong and have powerful legs and paws with retractable claws. Lions like to keep their claws sharp and clean by clawing logs and trees. They also like to use their claws for climbing up trees, poles and platforms.

Positive behaviours to encourage

You can provide lions with logs, poles and trees to claw and climb. Wrapping trees trunks with thick rope protects the tree bark. Lions will happily climb poles and trees to find food. This is good exercise and replicates hunting behaviour.



A lioness is lying down on a thick, horizontal tree branch. She is looking towards the left of the frame. The background is a dense, green forest with sunlight filtering through the leaves, creating dappled light on the lioness's fur and the tree bark. The lioness has a tawny, golden-brown coat with some darker spots. Her head is resting on her front paws.

Lions like a view

Lions have powerful binocular vision and can see a long way (in contrast they find it difficult to focus on objects very near them).

In the wild, lions will find vantage points to look across the savannah for prey. They also feel safe when resting in elevated positions.

Positive behaviours to encourage

Giving lions raised platforms, structures or large trees will allow them to look across long distances. It will also give them a safe place to rest.



Lions enjoy...

Patrolling their territory and scent marking, engaging in hunting behaviours by playing with enrichment and eating natural food such as whole animal carcasses.

They are a social species and need the company of other lions. It is important to remember that large social groups need the space and facilities to manage them well in captivity.

They also like to sleep!

WILD
WELFARE

