

Lions and Tigers

Lions and Tigers, despite their differences, are quite often confused with each other. Both are incredibly powerful members of the cat family but there are many ways in which you can tell them apart, beyond just the fur on their backs.



Lions

Lions have retractable, large, sharp claws which they use for defence and hunting. Sharp teeth help them to grasp onto and tear into prey. Their rough tongue also helps with feeding as it effectively peels the skin of the prey away from its flesh. They have sensitive whiskers which allow them to accurately estimate the size of any gap they are about to move into. This can be very helpful when they are trying to hunt silently as with their soft, padded feet which make little sound on the ground. The mane (almost always found on male lions) helps protect the lion's face and head when it engages in fights.

Lions can be found in different habitats in Asia and Africa including savannas, open woodland and scrubland. They are carnivorous and so hunt many species of mammal – like antelope and zebra- within their habitat. They are nocturnal and so usually hunt for food at night.

Lions live in groups called 'prides' which usually contain around 15 animals but sometimes as many as 40. A pride will usually only contain 2 adult males. Young males will leave to find their own pride once they are old enough. Lions in a pride hunt, eat, sleep, raise cubs and defend their territory together.

Tigers



Tigers are native to Asia and occupy a variety of habitats: tropical forests; evergreen forests; woodlands; mangrove swamps; grasslands; savannah and rocky country. Like lions, they are carnivorous and nocturnal therefore spend much of the night hunting for prey such as: moose, deer, pigs, cows, horses, buffalo and sometimes even bears.

Tigers are territorial and therefore usually live alone unlike lions. Females look after cubs single handedly until the cubs are about 2.5 years old and able to effectively look after themselves.

Despite many similar attributes, lions and tigers are very different in their behaviours. Tigers operate solo whereas a lion without a pride is in great danger of starving. Tigers are deadlier and can take down larger prey than Lions but with the pride working together, lions are far more likely to catch and kill their prey. Tigers are well adapted for a wider range of habitats than a lion, making them more adaptable to change yet they are the ones who are more endangered.

The familiar and stunning stripes on a tiger's back, very different to the plain coat of a lion, are not there simply to make it look attractive. The bold colours break up the outline of the tiger's body and help it to blend into long grasses. Tigers have saggy skin under their stomachs which helps to reduce injury when they are kicked during battles with prey. Like Lions, they are well adapted for hunting with large, retractable claws; sharp teeth and a rough tongue. The back legs on a tiger are longer than the front legs which helps the tiger jump. Tigers also have more flexible muscles than lions which means they have a very powerful paw swipe (the deadliest of all big cats). Tigers also have webbed paws to help them swim in swampland.