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A RARE BREED INDEED!

Visit the NEW White Lion Exhibit at the Zoo



May 4, 2012 Toronto, Ontario: We are very excited to be welcoming the return of white lions to our collection! Toronto Zoo introduces new white lions, which will be on exhibit in a variety of combinations, as a permanent addition to our African Savanna family. Unique to the Timbavati region of South Africa, these rare and beautiful cats have not been seen in the wild in over 15 years. The first reintroduction of white lions into the Timbavati area occurred in 2003. They carry the recessive gene known as a colour inhibitor of the Kruger subspecies of lion (*Panthera leo krugeri*). With lion populations dwindling, they are now classified as a vulnerable species. Come see our new white lions, catch a daily Keeper Talk and help the Zoo bring awareness to the plight of the African lion in the wild.

"White lions are not albinos but a genetic rarity that is endemic to the Timbavati region of South Africa and Southern Kruger Park. As an entity, white lions are critically endangered and are a symbol of community conservation, protection, and restoration efforts in the region," says Dr. William Rapley, Executive Director of Conservation, Education and Wildlife, Toronto Zoo. "Being a vulnerable species, the Zoo is committed to the conservation of African lions. We will offer Keeper talks, events and programs to educate our visitors on this popular and interesting animal. The white lions have returned to the Zoo after 17 years, and we are certain this exhibit will be a real favourite for our visitors.

GRRRREAT Facts about Lions:

- **girl power** Unlike any other cats, lions hunt in groups, and guess who does the hunting? The lionesses! Despite power in numbers, females are much smaller than the males, who are huge! They can weigh between 150 - 250 kg, and stand about 121 cm tall at the shoulder, 243 cm long, not including the tail, which averages about 91 cm long.
- **daddy daycare** The male lion usually stays and watches it's young while waiting for the lionesses to return from the hunt.
- **mane event** Lions are the only cat species that you can easily tell males and females apart – males have a mane, females don't.
- **spots check** Lions are born with brown rosettes (spots) like a leopard. These spots fade as they get older.
- **chillin' together** Lions are more social than any other cat, living in groups, called 'prides', of up to 30 individuals.
- **muzzle id** Dark spots on the muzzle are unique to each lion, like fingerprints of a human.
- **hunting zzz's** Lions may spend up to 20 hours a day resting or sleeping.
- **hear me purr!** Lion sounds include snarling, purring, hissing, coughing, meowing, woofing and roaring.
- **incredibly loud** Lions have the loudest roar of any big cat. They typically roar at night to announce their presence.

They may be the King of the Beasts, but they are in great danger from their only enemy: HUMANS. Lions are losing ground to people in Africa. With less and less land and prey available to them, they sometimes resort to killing livestock. To protect their livestock, farmers shoot and poison the lions. Disease (feline immunodeficiency virus (FIV), bovine tuberculosis, canine distemper), spread by domestic animals, is also having a negative effect on wild lion populations. And sadly, the hunting of lions for "sport" is still encouraged as a revenue producing industry by many African governments.

Regional conservation strategies have been developed for lions in west and central Africa and eastern and southern Africa. These strategies include reducing lion-human conflict, and to conserve and increase lion habitat and wild prey base. One of the Toronto Zoo's mandates is to focus on establishing a genetically healthy captive population and at the same time working on conservation programs in the wild.

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About Toronto Zoo:

The Toronto Zoo is Canada's premier zoo and a leader in animal preservation and environmental protection. More than a tourist attraction, the Toronto Zoo boasts a number of leading programs for helping wildlife and their natural habitats – from species reintroduction to reproductive research. A world-class educational centre for people of all ages, the Toronto Zoo is open every day except December 25 and attracts approximately 1.3 million visitors each year.

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