

Lions stalk their prey

With relatively small hearts and lungs lions are not fast runners; a maximum speed of 80 kmph, nor do they have the stamina to keep this pace for more than a 100 – 200 m. As such, lions rely on stalking their prey and seldom charge until they are within 30m, unless the prey is facing away and cannot see the charge.



Lions stalk their prey.

Females do the majority of the hunting, and males who tag along with the hunt usually stay back until a kill is made.

Lions hunting in pairs and groups have a success rate of only 30%. Lions hunting singly by daylight have a success rate of 17 - 19%.

Most successful hunts are on dark nights in dense cover against a single prey animal. One reason for lions' relatively low hunting success rate is that lions do not take into account wind direction when hunting; they often approach prey from an upwind direction thereby alerting the prey and ending the hunt. Secondly, the lion's charge is generally launched directly at its quarry and it rarely alters the path of attack, as do other cats. Generally speaking, if a lion misses its target on the first run it usually abandons the chase.





Cooperative hunting brings a greater probability of success in lion hunts, but a question exists on whether pre-planned cooperation is taking place or that lions are making use of opportunities brought about by the presence of other lions.

Studies of the tactics of group hunting by lions give a similar basic plan of the hunting process. When the group spots the prey a hunt is often initiated by a single lion looking at it, to which the other lions respond by looking in the same direction – the only clear form of “communication” evidenced in the hunting process.

The group fans out, with certain lions stalking at a greater distance to encircle the prey. The encircling lions launch the attack, seemingly to drive the prey towards the others who ambush from their cover position.



Once within range of smaller prey, lions use their paw to slap the rear of the animal at its legs or haunch to knock it off balance or drag it down. A bite to the neck or throat quickly kills the animal.

With larger prey lions approach the animal at an angle, jumping on top and using their own weight to wrestle the animal to the ground, biting at the vertebrae in an attempt to sever the spinal cord as they do so.



Once downed they bite the throat or over the nose and mouth of the prey to suffocate it, a position that keeps them out of the way of horns that could injure the lion.

After a successful hunt, all the lions in the pride share the meal. But there is a pecking order, with the adult males taking first claim, followed by the lionesses, and finally, the cubs.

Lions have a fast-working digestive system, which allows them to gorge themselves and then go for seconds shortly after. If available, they will drink water everyday. But they can go 4-5 days without drinking by obtaining moisture from the stomach contents of their prey.

