

Would You Like to Be a Lion?

People have admired lions for hundreds of years. Artists have made thousands of colorful pictures and statues of lions. Huge carved lions often stand in front of the main doors to museums and castles. People have also written many stories about lions. Have you read *Androcles and the Lion*? It tells about a slave who removed a thorn from a lion's paw. Later, the lion saved the slave's life. A number of countries, such as Great Britain, have lions on their flags and **emblems**. People like to think they are as brave and noble as lions.

The lion's life is not as grand and pleasant as we might think it is. Lions have been killed and driven away from most parts of the world. Those that are left live in **game preserves** in India and Africa. Lion cubs are called whelps. They have a particularly difficult life. Only one-half of them grow to adulthood. When the adult lions make a kill, they eat all they want. The whelps get only what is left over. When **prey** is scarce, the whelps often starve to death. Very old lions also have a difficult time. Because they can no longer catch large game, they must live on field mice, scorpions, and rotten meat left over by other animals.

Lions hunt at night. Like other cats, they can see in the dark. They hunt in groups called prides. There is a common belief that only females chase the prey. This is not true. When lions search for food, they need all the help they can get. Scientists have observed

Words you'll need to know...

emblems symbols representing a nation or group of people.

game preserves parklike outdoor zoos

litters newborn babies

prey animals eaten by other animals

that lions only catch one out of four animals that they try to kill. In many cases, one of the lions in a chase will simply hit smaller prey with its powerful paws. This is more than enough to break its neck.

Most of the lions that are in zoos have never seen Africa. Lions multiply easily in captivity. They are given medical care and the cubs are protected. Well-fed zoo mothers have much larger **litters** than females in the wild. A few people have tried to keep lions as pets. This is dangerous. Even the friendliest lion is wild. They can never really be trusted.



Questions and Discussion

1. You are getting animals for a circus. What two criteria would you consider most important? Check them.

- a. The animals cost very little to buy.
- b. The animals are popular with the public.
- c. The animals are not dangerous.
- d. The animals can do lots of tricks.

2. You are photographing animals. What two criteria would you consider most important? Check them.

- a. The pictures show family groups.
- b. The pictures show animals in action.
- c. The pictures show bad treatment of animals.
- d. The pictures show the same animals as they grow up.

3. Do you think it is wise to keep lions in zoos? Why or why not?
