

The lion is the largest African carnivore and one of the largest terrestrial carnivores and the *star* during a game drive, let's discover some curiosities on lions.

White lions, or specimens with a distinctive white ivory mantle, are extremely rare and naturally located in the Timbavati area of South Africa, bordering on the Kruger National Park. It is not a subspecies of its own but the effect of a genetic variation, that occurs in many animal species, known as leucism, that involves poor or incomplete pigmentation. The phenomenon is different from that of albinism, that instead is determined by the total lack of pigmentation of hair, skin and iris.

Another physical peculiarity that does not allow to speak of subspecies, but is more easily found in some populations, is the almost total lack of mane in the male. Males with almost or completely absent mane are common in some arid areas of Eastern Africa, such as Northern and Eastern [Kenya](#), the Tsavo area in particular.



To explain this peculiarity, various hypotheses have been advanced, including the most



striking that those lions represent a line of evolutionary phylogenetically different from that of the other lions and closer to their prehistoric ancestor. However, the most probable and acclaimed explanation defines the absence of mane as an adaptation to the environment by populations inhabiting the arid and warmest areas. In fact it would be an adaptation for which the growth of the mane is delayed and very slowly compared to the lions of other areas.

“You know you are truly alive when you’re living amongst lions.” - **Karen Blixen**

Along with physical adaptations, we have already seen how some lion prides are capable of developing “cultural” adaptations, that is, non-innate behaviors, typical of some communities, and somehow learned and handed them down within the community itself. An example is the lions of the [Tarangire National Park](#) and the Lake Manyara National Park in Tanzania, which have developed a very particular habit. These cats are not experienced climbers like leopards, but here they are usually climbing the trees and spending part of the time on rest. However, this is a behavior observed, more rarely, in herds of other areas of Africa, for which several explanations have been proposed. In particular during the seasons with higher rainfall and wetlands, lions prefer to avoid contact with too soft or muddy soils.

In addition, a higher elevation from the ground would also provide a minor presence of annoying insects and gnats that often do not give respite among high grass. As it often happens, even in this case it is reasonable to think of a number of factors that induce behavior rather than a single precise cause.



Tree-Climbing Lion