

Our Lion Family – film transcript



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My name is Tonga Torcida. I am 23 years old. I grew up near Mount Gorongosa and I have lived here all my life.

When I was young, I heard stories about lions that made me afraid of them. It wasn't until I came to work and study in Gorongosa National Park that I learned to understand and admire them.

Lions are one of the most famous animals in the world. They have a flat snout, round eyes and a long tail.

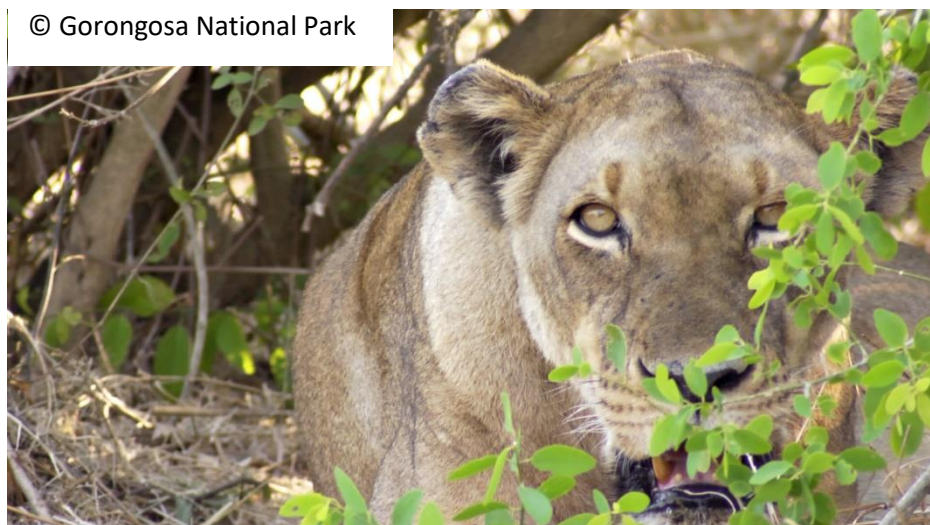
Lions mostly live on grasslands in the savanna. A savanna is an area classified by low grasses and few trees.



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A lion is the second biggest cat species in the world. Only the male species have manes. A male lion can reach 2.5 metres in length and weigh up to 250 kilograms. Lionesses are smaller, up to 1.8 metres in length. They are also lighter, weighing around 180 kilograms. As newborns, cubs are about the same size as a domestic cat.

Cubs cannot fend for themselves; they are dependent on their mother. They are just like us humans – from the day we are born, until we are adults – we need our mothers.



As they grow, cubs learn to hunt and defend themselves, in preparation for adulthood. Female offspring will stay with the pride they were born into for life. At 2-4 years, male offspring will leave their family pride in order to create a pride of their own.



Lions are very social. They communicate, not like we do, but with gestures and vocalizations.

Lions are carnivores, which means they eat meat. They like to hunt plant-eating animals called herbivores; animals such as impala, warthog, wildebeest and sable. These herbivores need the lions as well. Without lions, herbivore numbers would explode. They would run out of food and disease would be much more common. When lions make a kill, they share the meat with their family group. Just like we share food with our families.

Lions may be the kings of the jungle, but they are in big trouble. Lions once lived in almost all of sub-Saharan Africa, but are now only found in small protected areas. Areas such as national parks, game reserves, game farms and hunting reserves. This is due to a loss of their habitat and prey. People open fields for farming, cut and throw away the trees, burn the land, leaving our lion brothers and sisters without any protection, shelter or even shade. When people kill too many wild animals, there are none left over for the lions to eat. Hungry lions die from starvation, or are forced to attack domestic animals and often killed by farmers as a result. Lions also get accidentally trapped in snares set by poachers. A snared lion dies a long, drawn out, painful death due to infection or starvation. A sad waste of a valuable life.

Without our help, there may soon be no wild lions left. What can we do to help lions? Across Africa, people like me are working urgently with restoration projects, like the one here in Gorongosa National Park. The Gorongosa Lion Project is doing research to understand how many lions we have, where they go, what they eat, and what conditions they need to survive. We take photos so we can identify each lion, and put GPS collars on a few individuals, so we can track each family group across the wilderness. With this information, we can draw conclusions and make plans about how best to protect our lions. An important part of this plan is educating people about how they can peacefully co-exist with lions in the Gorongosa region.



These lions are very important to Gorongosa National Park. Why are they important? The answer is very simple. They are such magnificent animals that people from all around the world travel to Gorongosa just to see them. When tourists come to see Gorongosa's lions they bring money. They have to pay to be here, pay to see the animals, pay for accommodation and give tips to our guides. This creates positions of employment, and provides opportunities for small businesses to grow. But this will only happen if the lions are here. Without the lions, the tourists will not come.

Lions are a part of our family. Lions communicate as we do. Lions have brothers and sisters, as we have brothers and sisters. Therefore, it is our responsibility to protect lions as we protect our own families. We must protect the lions, their food and the land that they live on. We must stand together in the fight against illegal poaching and deforestation which puts our lions in danger. Our support is critical in the conservation of these animals that symbolize our nation.

Together in the conservation of nature. Lions of Gorongosa! Oh yeah!