Some Wild World Wildlife News from IWMC eNewsletter

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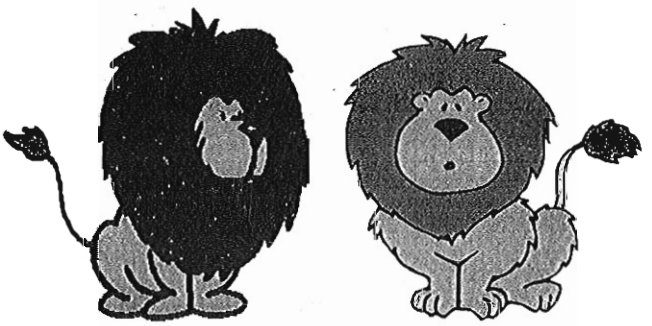
Hey ! That's A Cute One! Female Lions like Dark Manes

On the Serengeti Plain, the lady lion prefers a swain with a black mane. That's the finding of a study analyzing how the dense collar of hair about the neck of male lions affects the love life of Africa's biggest cat.



Peyton M. West, a researcher at the University of Minnesota, said it's the mane color, not the length, that matters most to the female lions of Tanzania.

"We were completely surprised by this", said West, first author of the study appearing in the journal *Science*, August 2002. West said the female lions may instinctively be drawn to the black manes because males with darker manes seem superior in a number of ways.

"A dark mane is apparently a marker the female uses to evaluate the fitness of a male", she said. This suggests that lions' manes evolved over time through sexual selection, said West. Dark-maned male lions generally have a higher level of testosterone "which means they are more aggressive fighters", said West, and this can be key to raising cubs successfully.

An aggressive male is more able to chase away invading bachelors who try to take over the pride, said West. This is important because if there is a change in male leadership of a pride, the new dominant male routinely kills all the young cubs sired by the deposed male. Thus, by choosing to mate dark-maned, aggressive males, a female lion gives her young a better chance of surviving, the researcher said.

West said that records collected for decades by scientists observing lions in Tanzania's Serengeti National Park show that male lions with dark manes are more likely to recover from wounds. She said it is not clear why this is so.

She noted that dark manes seem to intimidate other male lions, which means a lion with a black collar of hair has to fight less often and therefore has fewer injuries.

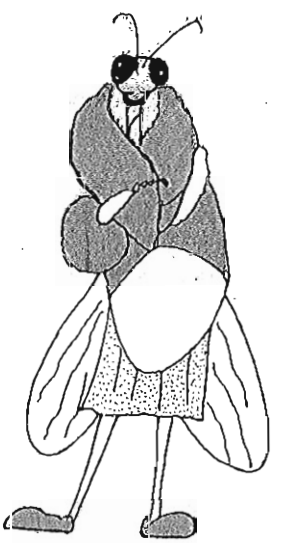
West and her co-author, Craig Packer of the University of Minnesota, investigated the effects of mane color with life-sized models of lions near where the animals lived in the Serengeti. She said they found that female lions, when given a choice, would try to seduce the models that had the darker mane, ignoring those with blond hair. "
(Source: St. Petersburg Times, 23 August 2002)

Scientists: Suckers for Cuteness?

If you put a panda on your wildlife conservation brochure you are far more likely to raise money than if you use a clam or an insect." So says Alan Clark, a zoologist at the University of Washington, citing a recent review of some 32,000 articles on conservation research revealing a tremendous bias in the types of animals studied by scientists. The cuter and furrier the critter, the more likely it is to receive attention from the scientific community.

Invertebrates tend to be at the bottom of the food chain-and at the bottom of the list when it comes to research and conservation efforts. In the 1990s, state and federal research agencies charged with saving endangered species spent an average of $1.1 million a year for each protected bird, $684,000 for each mammal, and only $44,000 for each invertebrate. Though researchers have been aware of the discrepancy for some time, Clark says there has been little or no improvement over the last 15 years-which is alarming when you consider that invertebrates make up nearly 80 percent of known species.

The solution, says Jeff Baumgartner, who directs the Developing Strategies Group of the Nature Conservancy, may well be an approach called "conservation by design, which essentially means preserving entire ecosystems, rather than individual species".
- Rob Barnett (Source: Popular Science October 2002)



This drawing by Arnab Roy, Zoo Outreach Organisation