

LION-TAILED MACAQUE



notes

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Macaque is pronounced 'ma-cack'. The Lion-tailed Macaque gets its name from its carnivorous African namesake by the similarities in stance and pale face. Also, the Lion-tailed Macaque, unlike any other macaque species, has a long brownish grey mane around the face.

Macaques, a type of monkey, first appeared in fossil records about 24 million years ago in Africa. Macaques then spread to Europe and Asia. Fossil records show that the Asian Macaques did not occur until about two million years ago.

The Lion-tailed Macaque has never been common and the only place they are known to live (other than zoos), is in southern India, in the Western Ghat Mountains. They are found in tropical

broad-leaved evergreen forests at an altitude of 600-2000 metres. Lion-tailed Macaques are the only arboreal macaque species living in trees up to 30m tall. They do occasionally descend to the ground to feed, in fact, macaques are good swimmers, which helps them to escape from predators.

Lion-tailed Macaques live in groups consisting of anywhere between 10-20 individuals with only 1-3 of these being male. Each group has a home range of about 5 sq km and maintains contact through a series of vocalisations by the male as he leads the troops through the forest canopy. This call by the male also serves to maintain the group's territory by making their presence known to other groups. The ranges of different groups

overlap but members of each group rarely enter the core area, about 300ha, of another.

Macaques do not have their first offspring until the age of 5 years. Males generally reach sexual maturity at the age of 8 years, sometimes earlier in captivity. Macaques are polygamous, which means that they have more than one mating partner. Each season, mating begins with the female uttering a 'love call' to attract the male. Sexual activity then begins with an increase in grooming and embracing. The gestation period of all macaques is about five and a half months. Macaques usually give birth to one offspring at a time and will only give birth up to three times in their lifetime. They can have twins, however it is rare.

The average lifespan for Lion-tailed Macaques in the wild is about 9-15 years but they can live for much longer in captivity.

Macaques are diurnal, feeding continuously all day until they huddle together to sleep at night.

Macaques are omnivorous, eating fruits, flowers, leaves, mushrooms, and seeds as well as insects, lizards, frogs, small birds and snakes. Macaques carry extra food in pouches inside their cheeks which they store for later in the day. Male macaques have long, sharp, canine teeth that are primarily used for fighting with other macaques.

Predators, such as the leopard, rarely catch macaques. Macaques inspect the ground for long periods before descending and will quickly escape to the trees at the slightest alarm signal. The male macaques mane serves to scare predators away.

The Lion-tailed Macaque is listed as endangered and is in fact the most severely threatened of all macaque species. There are only about 2000 – 4000 individuals remaining in the wild.

Lion-tailed Macaques have an extremely high level of isolation in small, disjunct patches of forest and the risk of extinction in such fragmented populations is high.

The Lion-tailed Macaque is captured for the illegal pet trade and for use in traditional Asian medicine. However, the major reason for their decline is habitat loss. This is due to the clearing of forests and spread of agriculture, plantations such as teak, coffee and tea and for hydroelectric power dam sites. There continues to be increasing human expansion into the remaining habitat of these animals. Lion-tailed Macaques are often shot to protect crops the locals believe they eat. However, the Lion-tailed Macaque does not travel through plantations or use them as habitat and is unable to adapt to human settlement.

Many zoos throughout the world are working to conserve the Lion-tailed Macaque. Adelaide Zoo has exhibited this species for years and is working to conserve this species through captive breeding, research, education and international cooperation with other zoos. In fact, the first Lion-tailed Macaque was exhibited at Adelaide Zoo in 1890-1897 and then again when a young pair was obtained from India in 1954. The birth of a Lion-tailed Macaque in early 2000, was a second generation birth at Adelaide Zoo.

