

Genetically distinct lion population should be conserved

Every day 20 unusual lions greet visitors at a tiny animal park in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. These lions, which have spent generations in captivity, are not like most African lions (*Panthera leo leo*). For one thing, they are slightly smaller than the wild lions found elsewhere on the continent. For another, the males carry distinctive black manes that extend from their shoulders to their stomachs and are much darker than those sported by other lions. And finally, new research reveals that these rare lions also have unique DNA, although not enough to declare them a separate species or subspecies.

“I think they are genetically distinct enough to justify conservation efforts,” says Michael Hofreiter, professor of evolutionary biology and ecology at the University of York in England and one of the authors of a study about the Ethiopian lions’ DNA that was published in the October [*European Journal of Wildlife Research*](#).

The authors have called for renewed efforts to conserve this one-of-a-kind population. The first step, they recommend, is establishing a formal captive breeding program.

View the original article here: [DNA Reveals the Last 20 Ethiopian Lions Are Genetically Distinct](#)