Cheetah vs lion: who would win? What Peabody can say

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Peabody never shows fights. See the cheetah and lion side by side: size, weight and speed from named sources, and why there is no race yet.

Peabody can't tell you who would win a fight, because it never shows one, and it can't tell you who would win a race either, because it has no checked top speed for the lion yet. What it can do is stand the two big cats side by side at their true size, with numbers from named pages. Here is what those pages say.

The cheetah and the lion, side by side

- Length, nose to tail tip · Cheetah: 5.8 to 7.4 ft (1.78 to 2.26 m) · Lion: 8.5 to 11.5 ft (2.6 to 3.5 m), males
- Height at the shoulder · Cheetah: 30 in (0.77 m) · Lion: 3.5 to 4 ft (1.07 to 1.22 m)
- Weight · Cheetah: 75 to 141 lb (34 to 64 kg) · Lion: 414 lb (188 kg), the average for males
- Top speed · Cheetah: 60 to 70 mph (96 to 112 km/h), running · Lion: no checked number yet
- How long it lives in the wild · Cheetah: 8 to 10 years · Lion: up to 16 years

The cheetah's numbers all come from the Smithsonian's National Zoo. The lion's height and lifespan come from the zoo too, and its length and weight come from the US Fish and Wildlife Service's 2015 notice about listing two lion subspecies in the Federal Register.

Look at the notes before you do any sums. The lion's length and weight are for males, so this is a male lion beside a cheetah. Peabody's cheetah vs lion page turns the figures into plain lines: the lion is about one and a half times as long as the cheetah, and it weighs about 4 times as much. It also says the lion usually lives about twice as long, but the lion's 16 years is an "up to" and the cheetah's is a range, so I wouldn't lean on that one.

Why there's no race

Peabody's race is a short dash to a tree, decided by checked top speeds. Each speed also says how the animal moves, so the card can warn you when a race isn't fair. For these two, the card says: "We don't have a checked top speed for the lion yet, so there is no race."

I could fill in a number from memory. I won't. If a page I can point to doesn't give one, Peabody says so, and the guide Where do the numbers come from? explains why a gap beats a guess. The cheetah has a number, and its page calls it the fastest runner on land. For a speed contest, the honest answer today is that one cat has a number and the other doesn't.

Why Peabody never does fights

Peabody races animals by speed only and never shows fights. The race card says: "We only race. Real animals mostly avoid each other." The two cats can live in the same kind of place, since the cheetah page puts it on the grasslands of eastern and southern Africa, and a few in Iran, and the lion page puts it on the savannas of Africa and in one forest in India. But living in the same country isn't the same as meeting.

A race has an answer a child can check against a sourced number. A fight doesn't. Size, weight and speed don't add up to a winner, and there's no number on any page I trust for who wins. The guide Why we race and never fight says more.

Better questions to ask

- Which is bigger? The lion, by the figures above, with the male note.
- Which one lives in a family? The lion page calls it the only big cat that lives in a family group, called a pride.
- What can the cheetah race? Anything with a checked speed. Try cheetah vs pronghorn, cheetah vs ostrich or cheetah vs gray wolf.
- What about the other big cats? Stand the lion beside the tiger or the cheetah beside the tiger and read the rows.
- Who gets it right? The faster or slower quiz asks eight three-box questions about top speeds, read aloud.

Try it tonight

Ask your child which cat is bigger and which is faster, and let them say why. Then open Compare Two on the cheetah and lion and check each guess. One answer will have a number behind it, and one will say "no checked number yet." Ask what we'd need to find out, and where we'd look. That question is where a lot of real science starts.

Questions grown-ups ask

Which is faster, a cheetah or a lion?

Peabody has a checked top speed for the cheetah, 60 to 70 mph (96 to 112 km/h) from the Smithsonian's National Zoo, and none for the lion yet. So it doesn't pick.

Which is heavier?

The lion, by the figures Peabody has. The Fish and Wildlife Service notice gives 188 kg (about 414 lb) as the average for males, against the zoo's 34 to 64 kg (75 to 141 lb) for cheetahs.

Do cheetahs and lions live in the same places?

They can live in the same kind of place, grassland. Peabody's lion page also names one forest in India, and its cheetah page names a few cheetahs in Iran.

Peabody (peabody.kids) is free through the end of 2026, with no ads and no sign-up on the animal pages. When you've finished with the cats, the library has stories to read next. Every figure here was read off its page and checked on 30 October 2026; the sources are the National Zoo's cheetah and lion pages and the Federal Register notice.

Free at peabody.kids/blog/cheetah-vs-lion-who-would-win