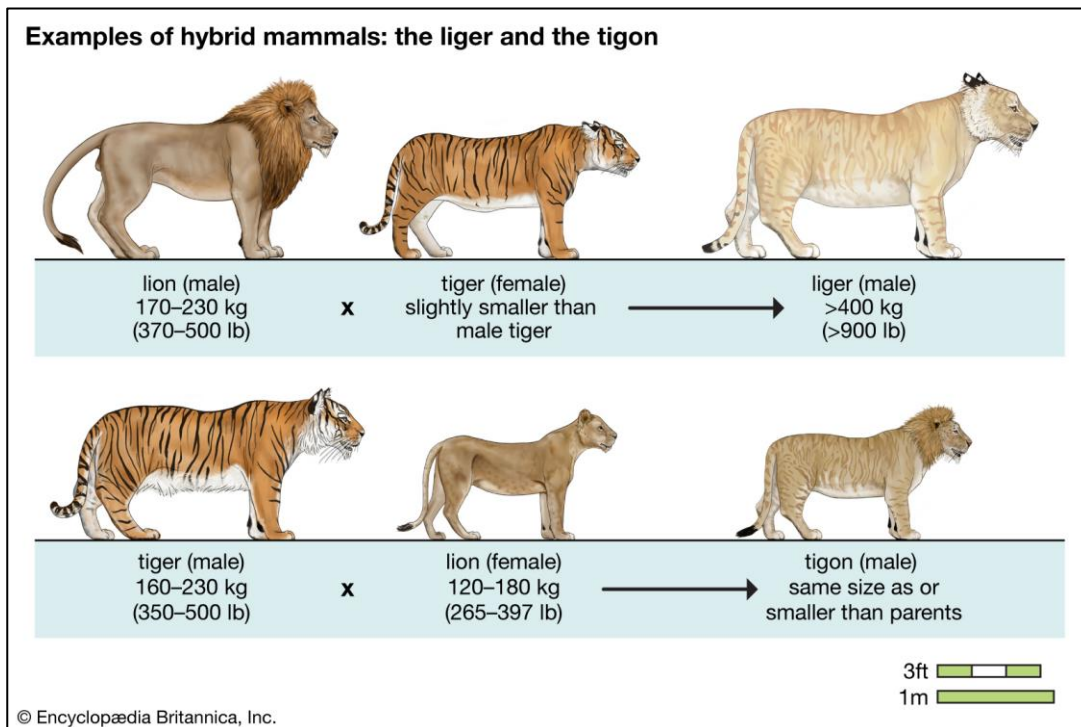




## LIGER FACTS

### What are ligers?

- Ligers are offspring of a male lion and a female tiger, whereas the offspring of a male tiger and a female lion are called tigon.
- Ligers are generally much larger than their parent cat species due to what is called growth dysplasia. Under natural conditions, the male lion carries a growth-promoting gene and the lioness a growth-inhibiting gene, which counteracts the male gene and keeps the off-spring's growth in check. However, the liger lacks the growth-inhibiting gene, because the female tiger is adapted to a non-competitive strategy and doesn't carry such a growth-inhibiting gene. Read more [HERE](#).
- Male ligers are commonly sterile, but females can be fertile.
- In the late 1800s/early 1900s, zoos around the world started breeding ligers for exhibition purposes, including Bloemfontein Zoo where many ligers were born. The most famous Bloemfontein liger was called Tokkelos and allegedly weighed around 360-400 kg!



### Health issues

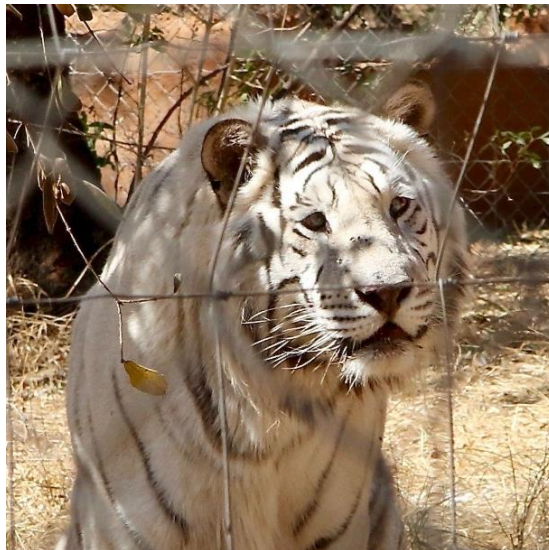
Breeding ligers can create a range of health issues:

- Many are born with (often fatal) birth defects.
- The tiger mother may experience birth complications, due to the unnaturally large size of the cubs, and C-sections are often required.
- The abnormal growth rate puts immense stress on the liger's organs.

- Ligers often suffer from obesity.
- Due to these health complications, ligers often die young.
- In terms of behaviour, lions (social animals) and tigers (solitary cats) are very different making it difficult for a hybrid to interact with its peers.

### Can ligers exist in the wild?

- The vast majority of lions and tigers cannot mate in wild, as they are geographically spread across different continents (Africa vs Asia).
- Lions and tigers do not co-exist in the same habitat and their behavioural differences also prevent them from cohabiting.
- There is a small population of lions in India's Gir National Park that live in the same protected area as tigers, where theoretically ligers could exist in the wild. However, there is no proof that ligers exist here naturally or have ever existed in the wild on the Indian continent.
- Even if breeding in the wild could occur, this goes against the survival of the fittest rule, as it would result in compromised genetics that would make the species less likely to survive.



### What is hybridisation and how does it occur?

- Hybridisation (or “interbreeding”) means the cross-breeding of individuals from two different species, subspecies, breeds, or varieties. The individuals are generally related (of the same genus) but are genetically different species. Hybridisation results in decreased genetic diversity.
- Human intervention is the primary cause of hybridisation. The hybridisation of lions and tigers are solely due to accidental or purposeful mating in captivity.
- Since most male hybrids are born sterile, the lineage stops with the offspring. Additionally, offspring that are not sterile would not share breeding traits, geographical ranges, or reproductive characteristics with potential mates in a wild setting. This would only occur in forced captive situations.
- Captive-bred hybrids have no conservation value.
- Although very rare, hybridisation of related species has been observed as a result of climate change, habitat destruction, deforestation, and/or urbanization, when species are forced to seek new habitats. This can lead to higher densities of animals moving into a single area, increasing competition for resources and/or reproductive opportunities becoming increasingly limited.

## Why is it unethical to breed ligers?

- The myriad of health issues they experience, including neurological defects, sterility, cancer, arthritis, organ failure, and diminished life expectancy.
- Ligers are a species that does not occur in the wild. Lions and tigers do not co-exist in the same habitat and their behavioural differences also prevent them from cohabiting.
- Such hybrids are bred in captivity purely for commercial gain and human entertainment. Ligers have no conservation value. Efforts should instead focus on the conservation of lions and tigers in the wild.



## Sources:

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