

A mother lion adopts a leopard cub in India

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Image 1. The mother lion, her lion cubs and her adopted spotted leopard baby all get along just fine. Photo by: Dheeraj Mittal/Deputy Conservator of Forests in India

Gir National Park is a wildlife area. It is in Gujarat, India. In December 2018, scientists saw something very strange there. A lioness had adopted a baby leopard. She treated it as one of her own cubs. She fed him her milk. The little leopard cub was about 2 months old. He played with her two lion cubs. They were around the same age as him. This puzzled the scientists. It was weird, they said.

Rare In The Wild

This is rare in the wild. It does not make much sense to care for another animal's babies. It takes time to raise babies. It also takes energy. A mother has to feed babies milk. She has to get food for them. She has to keep them safe.

Wild animals sometimes raise other animals' babies. This mostly happens among the same type of animal. Cheetahs do this, for example. Cheetah moms sometimes adopt cheetah cubs. They do this if the cub's mother has died. This helps the cheetahs survive as a group.

Lions and leopards are different types of animals. They both hunt for the same food. That makes them enemies. They do not get along. Lions kill leopards. Leopards kill lion cubs. Even so, this lion mother adopted this leopard baby. She cared for him like he was a lion.

Then the baby leopard died. He was not attacked. He was born with a health problem. This caused him to die young.

A New Mom

Scientists do not know why the leopard was adopted. The lioness was young. She was a new mom. She did not know much about being a mother. She was already making milk for her cubs. Maybe she did not notice that one of her cubs was a leopard.



In India, male lions do not live with female lions. Lionesses are left by themselves after they give birth. A male lion may have acted differently. Maybe it would not have let the leopard stay with them.

We will never know for certain. The cub died so young.

Stotra Chakrabarti is a scientist. He studied the lions.

"It would have been fantastic to see, when the leopard cub grew up, how things would be," Mr. Chakrabarti said.

Quiz

- 1 Which sentence from the section "Rare In The Wild" explains why it is so strange for a lioness to care for a leopard cub?
- (A) This is rare in the wild.
 - (B) A mother has to feed babies milk.
 - (C) Lions kill leopards.
 - (D) She cared for him like he was a lion.
- 2 What is a reason why scientists think the lioness might have cared for the leopard?
- (A) She did not realize that one of her cubs was a leopard.
 - (B) A male lion would have killed the leopard.
 - (C) The lioness was friends with the leopard's mother.
 - (D) The leopard played with her other cubs.
- 3 Why did the leopard cub die?
- (A) He was attacked by a lion.
 - (B) He drowned in a river.
 - (C) He had a health problem.
 - (D) He was abandoned by the lions.
- 4 Why did Chakrabarti want the leopard to grow up?
- (A) He wanted the leopard to find its mother.
 - (B) He wanted to keep studying its life with the lions.
 - (C) He hoped other scientists could study the leopard.
 - (D) He hoped the lioness would keep caring for the leopard.