



Publication: Sunday Tribune - Main
Title: Charges loom as tiger rescued in KM garden
Publish date: 29 Sep 2024
Page: 8

Reach: 18632
AVE: R 41517.96
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8 Sunday, September 29 2024

SUNDAY TRIBUNE

EXOTIC ANIMALS

Charges loom as tiger rescued in KZN garden

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AUTHORITIES rescued a five-month-old tiger cub from a backyard in Northern Park, Chase Valley, Pietermaritzburg, earlier this month. The incident has highlighted the urgent need for stricter laws governing the possession of exotic animals in South Africa.

The rescue operation was triggered by vigilant members of the public who alerted authorities after discovering the young male tiger caged in a hastily constructed wire enclosure.

The cub, now in the secure custody of the National Zoological Gardens in Pretoria, is being monitored and cared for by the Department of Forestry,

Fisheries, and the Environment.

Samanta Stelli, the Publicity and Communications Officer of the National Council of Societies for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (NSPCA), underscored the gravity of the situation.

"While it is good that the cub was rescued from such a distressing situation, it is sad that the laws regarding the keeping of exotic animals in South Africa are not more stringent," she said.

Stelli reiterated the NSPCA's stance that no exotic or indigenous wildlife should be kept in captivity without a definitive conservation purpose.

Legislation varies across provinces, with permits sometimes required for keeping exotic animals. However, many lack the expertise to provide the proper

care and environment, often leading to severe stress and health issues in the animals. The Animals Protection Act 71 of 1962 applies universally to both indigenous and exotic species, thereby promoting the welfare of all animals within the country.

The female cub, allegedly bought from yet-to-be-confirmed seller in Gauteng, was found to be extremely agitated and stressed. Besides the tiger, several dogs living on the property were also removed. The operation was carried out jointly by the Hawks, the SAPS' Endangered Species Unit, Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife, the Pietermaritzburg SPCA, and Umngeni SPCA, all under the guidance of the NSPCA. The owners of the tiger cub now face charges under the KwaZulu-

Natal Nature Conservation Management Act No. 9 of 1997. According to Wade Whitehead, chief executive officer of FreeMe Wildlife, who aided in the animal's rescue, the feline is adjusting well given the stressful circumstances.

However, he warns that captivity imposes significant psychological trauma on wildlife. "Large cats (and any wildlife) in captivity is seldom a good thing. Wildlife today is exploited through various channels, and this seldom serves the best interests of the animals."

Whitehead elaborated on the adverse effects of captivity, stressing that even captive-bred animals do not comprehend captivity, leading to prolonged psychological and physical suffering.

The FreeMe Wildlife team success-

fully transported the cub to their facility in Howick for health checks and temporary custody until a more permanent and safe arrangement could be made. The incident has sparked discussions on human responsibility toward wildlife and the ethical implications of keeping exotic animals in captivity.

Town Hill police have opened cases of contravention of the Nature and Conservation Act and Animal Protection Act against the cub's owners.



THE five-month-old tiger cub that was illegally kept in a Pietermaritzburg backyard. | SUPPLIED