# Lions rescued from Ukraine find sanctuary in England



Five lions, rescued from the conflict-ridden areas of Ukraine, have found a new home at the Big Cat Sanctuary in England following a significant international rescue effort. The lions, all of whom have been victims of neglect and mistreatment, arrived after a lengthy journey by road and ferry from temporary shelters in Belgium. Their relocation comes as part of a concerted initiative to provide safety and care for animals abandoned amidst the ongoing war.

The male African lion, Rori, and lionesses Amani, Lira, and Vanda landed in England this month, joining lioness Yuna, who had arrived earlier in August. All five lions were discovered near the front lines of the war, having been left behind by their owners. Cameron Whitnall, managing director of the Big Cat Sanctuary located approximately 80 kilometres southeast of London in Ashford, noted, “All of these five lions were originally from the illegal pet trade and wildlife trade. None of them came from zoos.”

The conditions in which the lions lived before their rescue were dire. For instance, Yuna was confined to a small brick cell and was left traumatised by the sounds of missiles near her enclosure. Similarly, Rori suffered mistreatment in a private menagerie, while siblings Amani and Lira were bred under exploitative circumstances to pose for tourist photographs when they were cubs. Vanda presented a particularly severe case, having been kept in an apartment, which left her malnourished and plagued by parasites.

Whitnall expressed optimism for the lions' future, stating that in their new environment, they can “become the lion they deserve to be.” The support of the Wild Animals Rescue Center, spearheaded by Ukrainian activist Natalia Popova, has been crucial to their rescue. Popova has dedicated herself to the welfare of abandoned pets and zoo animals since the onset of the Russian invasion in February 2022, successfully rescuing a wide range of animals including lions, tigers, leopards, and wolves.

To facilitate the transfer of the five lions to the UK, a fundraising campaign launched in May 2024 amassed over £500,000 (approximately $650,000) to cover their transportation, veterinary care, and the construction of a new habitat at the sanctuary.

Adaptation to their new surroundings appears promising, according to the sanctuary’s staff. Enclosures have been specially designed to meet the individual needs of each lion. For example, Yuna and Rori, who struggle with coordination issues, have been provided with landscaped areas that minimise the risk of falling. Amani and Lira benefit from climbing trees in their enclosure, while Vanda enjoys a setup that includes a water feature, catering to her playful nature.

Curator Briony Smith shared insights into their adjustment process, stating, “I’m sure it’s a bit of a journey. We've got more to do, but they are taking everything so incredibly well.” She noted observable improvement in their overall care and welfare, reinforcing the sense of progress made since their arrival.

The relationship between the sanctuary staff and the lions is growing stronger. Whitnall highlighted Yuna’s remarkable recovery after her traumatic past, revealing that she was nearly euthanised due to her condition prior to being rescued. “We’re just so happy with her progress,” he said, as he expressed delight in caring for Yuna, whose favourite treat is raw chicken legs.

The Big Cat Sanctuary is preparing to formally open its new Lion Rescue Center on Tuesday, further solidifying its commitment to the rehabilitation and care of these remarkable animals.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## References

* <https://www.ifaw.org/press-releases/first-of-five-lions-arrives-in-the-uk-from-ukraine> - This article supports the claim that lions, like Yuna, were rescued from Ukraine due to the war and have been relocated to the Big Cat Sanctuary in the UK. It details Yuna's traumatic past and her arrival at the sanctuary.
* <https://thebigcatsanctuary.org/big-cats-in-crisis/> - This webpage explains The Big Cat Sanctuary's Big Cats in Crisis campaign, which aims to rescue five lions from Ukraine. It provides details on the lions' backgrounds, the rescue process, and the need for fundraising to build a new habitat.
* <https://www.columbianprogress.com/5-lions-rescued-war-ukraine-settle-new-life-england> - This news article confirms that the five lions, including Rori, Amani, Lira, Vanda, and Yuna, have settled into their new life at the Big Cat Sanctuary in England after being rescued from war-torn Ukraine.
* <https://www.ifaw.org/news/rescued-lions-arrive-at-the-big-cat-sanctuary-in-england> - Unfortunately, this specific URL does not exist based on the provided search results. However, similar news can be found on IFAW's website regarding lion rescues and rehoming efforts.
* <https://www.noahwire.com> - While this is the source of the original article, it does not directly provide additional external evidence beyond the main story. However, it could contain internal links or articles that support the claims.