

New life at Kabul zoo for lion who lived on a rooftop

March 19 2014, by Sardar Ahmad



Marjan the lion looks out from his cage at the Kabul Zoo in Afghanistan on March 18, 2014

Kabul zoo unveiled its new star attraction—Marjan the lion, who lived on a rooftop in the city until rescued by animal welfare officials last year when close to death.

A businessman in the war-torn Afghan capital had bought the male lion

cub as a status symbol for \$20,000 and kept his pet on a roof terrace.

But the fast-growing animal was seriously ill when Kabul municipal officials tracked him down last October.

"We found him in a very dire condition. He was almost dead. He couldn't move, he couldn't even raise his head," veterinarian Abdul Qadir Bahawi told AFP on Tuesday.

"We were not sure that he would survive. But our efforts paid off, and he is much better. Now he loves to play with us. I think he loves us a lot."

Marjan is named after a famous half-blind lion who lived at Kabul zoo and became a symbol of Afghanistan's national survival after living through coups, invasions, civil war and the hardline Taliban era before dying in 2002.

The first Marjan, born in 1976, was blinded by a grenade thrown by a vengeful soldier whose brother had been killed after entering his cage.

The new Marjan made headlines around the world when AFP found him last year, living on the roof of a compound in the upmarket Taimani district of the capital.



Marjan the lion looks out from his cage at the Kabul Zoo in Afghanistan on March 18, 2014

His owner denied it was cruel and said he was looking after the lion well and feeding him fresh meat daily, but the lion's health declined fast in his unsuitable living quarters.

Government inspectors took him from the owner and started an intense five-month rehabilitation programme at the zoo to bring him back to health, including regular massage and physiotherapy sessions.

"Marjan eats about eight kilos of meat, everyday at 4:00 pm," said Qurban Ali, the lion keeper at the spartan zoo.

"He has been doing very well. He eats a whole cow leg, including the bone."

Marjan, who is aged about one, will soon be on show to the public for the first time after moving to a larger enclosure that he will share with a female [lion](#) donated by China.

Bahawi plans to see if there is any chance of the two lions mating, but he warned that it looked unlikely.

"Marjan is ready, but she is more than 15 years old and has had two serious operations. I think she is too old," he said.

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