

Bear necessities: cooler home for S. Korea's last polar bear

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South Korea's last captive polar bear, a 23-year-old male named Tongki, is set to swap the country's stifling, humid summers for the cooler surroundings of a wildlife park in Britain

The last polar bear kept in South Korea will be sent to Britain to escape the country's stifling, humid summers and live out his days in more

appropriate surroundings, zookeepers said Thursday.

Tongki—a 23-year-old male named after a Japanese cartoon character of the 1980s—lives in a 330-square-metre (3500-square-foot) concrete enclosure at the Everland theme [park](#) outside Seoul.

Born in captivity at a zoo in the southern city of Masan, Tongki is the only polar bear in South Korea and has been living alone in Everland since his last fellow resident died three years ago.

As temperatures inched towards 30 degrees Celsius Thursday, Tongki cooled off in a pool while zookeepers threw him fish to eat.

This November he will be moved to the Yorkshire Wildlife Park in the north of England.

The park boasts a 40,000-square-metre polar bear reserve designed to replicate the animals' Arctic summer habitat, complete with several lakes.

"I just hope he spends his last years in greater happiness and a better environment," keeper Lee Kwang-hee told AFP, holding back tears.

Four polar bears already live at the Yorkshire park—Victor, Pixel, Nissan and Nobby—although whether Tongki joins them will depend on whether they accept him.

Everland said Tongki will not be replaced, and other South Korean zoos have no plans to import the animals, which are classed as "vulnerable" on the International Union for Conservation of Nature's Red List of endangered species.

Animal rights activists in South Korea, who have long urged zoos not to

keep polar bears, welcomed Everland's decision.

"For [polar bears](#), spending the hot summer in this country is very torturous," campaign group Care said in a statement.

"If he were a man, Tongki would be in his eighties. He has lived life alone without family or friends for too long."

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