

Havana Zoo introduces Yanek, a rare white tiger, Cuba's first

June 9 2021



Bengal tiger Fiona gave birth to four cubs: Yanek, a white tiger, her sisters Melissa and Gaby, and a brother, Miguel.

A Havana zoo has introduced the country's first-ever white Bengal tiger,

a rare type not known to exist in the wild.

Mother Fiona gave birth to four cubs—including white tiger Yanek—at the National Zoo of Cuba in March; but only now, it said, are the cubs independent enough to be presented to the public as they play and swim in their special zoo pool.

"We are very happy that a white tiger has been born in Cuba; it is the first time that this has happened," said the animals' caretaker Angel Cordero.

They were also the first tiger cubs born on Cuban soil in more than 20 years.

Along with Yanek, Fiona and fellow Bengal tiger Garfield are the proud parents of sisters Melissa and Gaby, and brother Miguel.

Conservation group WWF describes white tigers as "a genetic anomaly," with none known to exist in the wild. There are several dozen in captivity.

White tigers are Bengal tigers whose parents carry a recessive gene, according to the nonprofit Wildcat Sanctuary in Minnesota, which helps and studies felines. They are not albinos or a separate species.

Some parks and zoos inbreed white tigers, as the rarity draws more visitors, though this is often at the cost of malformations and other genetic problems, according to the sanctuary website.



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The WWF says about 3,900 tigers remain in the wild, "but much more work is needed to protect this species if we are to secure its future in the wild."

"In some areas, including much of Southeast Asia, tigers are still in crisis and declining in number," the WWF website says.

Cordero said the cubs were displaying typical "aggressive" behavior, mimicking their mother as they mock-attack one another.

At the zoo, Fiona receives 10 kilograms (22 pounds) of meat per day, while the cubs, already weighing in at between eight and 11 kilograms each, get two kilograms of meat each.

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