

# Venezuela zoo welcomes three white lion cubs

November 30 2023

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A Venezuelan zoo this week welcomed the country's first three white lion cubs born in captivity, a boost for the genetically rare animal whose wild population numbers only about a dozen living in their native South Africa.

The cubs were born this week to Camatagua and Sebastian, white lions brought to Venezuela in May last year from the Hodonin zoo in the Czech Republic as part of a breeding program.

"They are the first white lions born in Venezuela. We have three cubs, two males and a female," said Anthony De Benedictis, director of the Las Delicias zoo in Maracay, Venezuela.

The cubs were taken from their mother to be hand raised to improve their chances of survival, said De Benedictis. Lionesses in captivity have been known to kill their offspring.

White lions are not albinos but a genetic rarity unique to a region of South Africa, according to the Global White Lion Protection Trust. The coloration is caused by a recessive gene similar to what causes [blue eyes](#) in humans.

The [trust](#) states on its website there are hundreds of white lions in captivity around the world, but fewer than 13 in the wild in their endemic habitat.

It added white lions are not listed as endangered because they are scientifically not classified as distinct from *Panthera leo*—classified as "vulnerable" by the International Union for Conservation of Nature.



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Taking care of the babies is a 24/7 job. They need to be fed around the clock with milk enriched with a special supplement.

"We are all dedicated to their care," said Leonel Ovalle Moleiro, head of a team of three veterinarians and seven other caregivers tasked with the cubs' well-being.

"We do night shifts, day shifts, we are... monitoring their [weight gain](#), their [food intake](#) and of course the health of the cubs and their mother."

Ovalle Moleiro pointed to one of the male cubs as the "sleepiest" and most reticent to drink.

The female, however, "devours the bottle... is hyperactive, constantly moving," he smiled.

Venezuela now has a total of six white lions.

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Citation: Venezuela zoo welcomes three white lion cubs (2023, November 30) retrieved 28 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2023-11-venezuela-zoo-white-lion-cubs.html>

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