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Born Free launches appeal to rehome King the lion cub to South African sanctuary

King was kept illegally as an exotic pet in a Paris apartment

International wildlife charity, Born Free, has launched an urgent appeal to rehome King – a tiny lion cub with a mighty name - to its big cat sanctuary at Shamwari Private Game Reserve, in the Eastern Cape of South Africa.

King made international headlines in October 2017 when he was found half-starved and cowering in a dirty cage in an abandoned apartment in Paris. Just a few months old and kept illegally as an exotic pet, he had been beaten and kicked by his owner who then posted videos of the abuse on social media. King was rescued by French animal rescue charities Fondation 30 Million d'Amis and Refuge de l'Arche and given a temporary home at Natuurhulpcentrum rescue centre, in Belgium.

Born Free Co-Founder and Trustee, Virginia McKenna OBE, said: *“Have we learned nothing over the years? How can we not understand that keeping wild animals in cages is not just cruel, but shameful? Lions are known as kings of the jungle. This little king, sadly, will never wear his crown, but at least we can give him love and respect and a natural environment to roam and rest in. That is the least he deserves, and I hope people will help us write a happy ending to this story.”*

Born Free plans to transport King from Belgium to South Africa where he will be given a permanent home at their long-established big cat sanctuary at Shamwari. The sanctuary is already home to 16 lions and leopards rescued from appalling captive conditions. King will be given lifetime care in a spacious, safe and natural environment, surrounded by the beautiful sights and sounds of Africa.

King's new life at Born Free's big cat sanctuary will be a world away from the Paris apartment in which he was discovered. Shockingly, an increasing number of wild animals are kept as pets worldwide. Born Free opposes the keeping of wild animals as pets because they have complex social, physical and behavioural needs and are, therefore, particularly susceptible to welfare problems when kept as pets.

Keeping wild animals as pets is not just an international problem. Latest research by Born Free has revealed more than 292 dangerous wild cats – including at least nine lions – are being kept privately, and legally, in Great Britain under the Dangerous Wild Animals Act 1976.

Born Free's Head of Animal Welfare & Captivity, Dr Chris Draper, said: *"Whether wild-caught or captive-bred, wild animals retain their wild instincts and their often complex social, behaviour and environmental needs: needs that are impossible to meet in a domestic environment. It is high time that we stop viewing exotic wild animals simply as objects to own, and start considering their welfare - and the risks they may sometimes pose to us. It should be abundantly clear that the never-ending demand for increasingly exotic and dangerous wild animals in the pet trade needs to stop."*

To donate to this important cause, visit www.bornfree.org.uk/saveking, call 01403 240170 or text KING to 70755 to donate £10.

For further information on:

King's story: www.bornfree.org.uk

Short video on King: www.bornfree.org.uk

The exotic pet trade: www.bornfree.org.uk

Shamwari Private Game Reserve: <https://www.shamwari.com/activities/born-free-big-cat-sanctuaries/>

Natuurhulpcentrum rescue centre: <http://www.natuurhulpcentrum.be/index.php/home>

Fondation 30 Million d'Amis: <http://www.30millionsdamis.fr/>

Refuge de l'Arche: <https://www.refuge-arche.org/>

Ends

Image: © R Strubbe

Notes to Editors:

About Born Free

Born Free's mission is to ensure that all wild animals, whether living in captivity or in the wild, are treated with compassion and respect and are able to live their lives according to their needs. Born Free opposes the exploitation of wild animals in captivity and campaigns to keep wildlife in the wild.

Born Free promotes Compassionate Conservation to enhance the survival of threatened species in the wild and protect natural habitats while respecting the needs of and safeguarding the welfare of individual animals. Born Free seeks to have a positive impact on animals in the wild and protect their ecosystems in perpetuity, for their own intrinsic value and for the critical roles they play within the natural world. For more information about Born Free please visit: www.bornfree.org.uk

FOR NEWS AND MEDIA ENQUIRIES, PLEASE CONTACT OUR PR AGENCY:

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