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Lion cub King starts new life in African home

Born Free successfully rehomes King at South African sanctuary

International wildlife charity, Born Free, is delighted to announce that King – a tiny cub with a mighty name – is starting a new life in his ancestral home of Africa.

King is a one-year-old lion cub who was rescued from an apartment in Paris last summer where he was being kept illegally as an 'exotic pet' in appalling conditions. Following a successful appeal launched in April, Born Free will now provide King with lifetime care at its Big Cat Rescue Centre at Shamwari Private Game Reserve, in the Eastern Cape of South Africa.

King started his journey from Natuurhulpcentrum rescue centre, Belgium, on Thursday 5th July. From Belgium, he travelled under the care of Born Free's expert team to London Heathrow airport for a flight to Africa, courtesy of Kenya Airways. After a short internal flight, King touched down in Port Elizabeth, South Africa, before travelling the short distance by road to Shamwari and to his new home at Born Free's Jean Byrd Centre.

Virginia McKenna OBE, Born Free's Co-Founder and Trustee, said: *"I am sure there will be a lot of smiling faces today! So many people responded to our appeal to bring young King to Shamwari, and now he has arrived! Thanks to everyone whose hearts were touched by his story, he now takes his first steps on African soil, and can begin his happy new life. May it be a long and peaceful one."*

Shamwari has been home to Born Free's two Big Cat Rescue Centres for more than 20 years.

Comments Group General Manager, Joe Cloete, said: "To be able to welcome King to his new home is incredibly heart-warming for us, especially so during our refurbishment process, of not only some of the lodges, but the Born Free Centre itself. Conserving a vanishing way of life and educating guests on the importance of living in harmony with nature and wildlife is what we strive for at Shamwari Private Game Reserve."

Born Free's Corporate Partner, Kenya Airways, flew King to Africa. Katrina Hanson, Kenya Airways' Area Cargo Manager, said: *"We were delighted to assist in King's amazing relocation to Born Free's Big Cat Rescue Centre at Shamwari in South Africa. We have worked with Born Free for many years carrying rescued lions from Europe to Africa so they can enjoy being a lion. These relocations have been a great success and we do all we can to make it as stress free as possible for the lions. Kenya Airways' cargo facilities at Heathrow and across our network are fantastic for animal welfare from the smallest and domestic, to the mightiest of beasts! We were delighted to have King on board."*

Swissport provided crucial logistics support for King's journey. A Swissport spokesperson added: *"The Swissport team are proud to have been a part of King's journey to Born Free's big cat sanctuary. With the help of Kenya Airways and our dedicated staff, we hope he had a smooth journey and will enjoy his new surroundings."*

The sad story of King before he was rescued highlights the plight of millions of captive wild animals around the world that are kept as exotic pets. Born Free opposes the keeping of wild animals as pets. Wild animals, whether they have been taken from the wild or bred in captivity, have extremely complex social, physical and behavioural needs and are, therefore, particularly susceptible to suffer when kept as pets.

Dr Chris Draper, Born Free's Head of Animal Welfare & Captivity, added: *"It is staggering that, in 2018, lion cubs are still finding their way into the pet trade in Europe. We are concerned that King's case is the tip of the iceberg, and that a great many wild animals are being kept illegally as pets across Europe and elsewhere. This situation needs to be addressed urgently, and we hope that by introducing the world to King – his plight, his rescue and his rehoming to lifetime care – Born Free can draw attention to this important issue."*

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

Support Born Free's petition to restrict the trade in, and private keeping of, dangerous wild animals in Great Britain: <https://petition.parliament.uk/petitions/221050>

-ENDS-

Image: © Claire Radloff/Shamwari Private Game Reserve

Please see Born Free's website www.bornfree.org.uk for further information on:

King Appeal: <https://www.bornfree.org.uk/king>

King's story: <https://www.bornfree.org.uk/king>

Short video on King: <https://www.bornfree.org.uk/>

Exotic pets: <https://www.bornfree.org.uk/exotic-pet-trade>

Shamwari Private Game Reserve: <https://www.bornfree.org.uk/shamwari-big-cat-rescue-sanctuary> and <https://www.shamwari.com/>

NHC: <http://www.natuurhulpcentrum.be/index.php/home>

Image: © Born Free/Shamwari

For more images: <https://www.flickr.com/photos/132476364@N06/albums/72157693208769331>

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

About Shamwari Game Reserve

For over 25 years, Shamwari Private Game Reserve has been a pioneer in nature conservation and hospitality, setting the benchmark of superior service, luxury accommodation, multi-generational travel and malaria-free Big 5 safaris in the Eastern Cape of South Africa. Shamwari is renowned worldwide, as leaders in conserving a vanishing way of life and home of the Born Free Centres, Animal Rehabilitation Centre and the Dr Ian Player Rhino Awareness Centre, which highlights the plight of many of Africa's vulnerable species. www.shamwari.com

About Kenya Airways

Kenya Airways, member of the Sky Team Alliance, is a leading African airline flying to 51 destinations worldwide, 42 of which are in Africa and carries over three million passengers annually. It continues to modernise its fleet with its 32 aircrafts being some of the youngest in Africa. This includes its flagship B787 Dreamliner aircrafts. The on-board service is renowned and the lie-flat business class seat on the wide-body aircraft is consistently voted among the world's top 10.

Kenya Airways take pride for being in the forefront of connecting Africa to the World and the World to Africa through its hub at the new ultra-modern Terminal 1A at the Jomo Kenyatta International Airport in Nairobi. Kenya Airways celebrated 40 years of operations in January 2017 and was named Africa Leading Airline 2017 by the World Travel Awards. For more information, please visit www.kenya-airways.com or call our 24HR Contact Center +254 20 327 4747, Twitter: @KenyaAirways, Facebook: KenyaAirways, Instagram: OfficialKenyaAirways

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