



News Letter – November 2011 Special Issue

Lion Rescue

Tonga Gave Them A Helping Hand... Help Us Give Them A Home!

On 14th November 2011 the owners of Wingham Wildlife Park, Tony and Jackie Binskin along with animal registrar Markus Wilder took a flight to Lyon in order to meet two very special characters. In order to make this meeting we travelled to a big cat and primate sanctuary called Tonga Terre D'accueil, which is run by L'espace Zoologique de Saint-Martin-la-Plaine. This park is a beautiful small zoo located around 45 minutes by car from Lyon, and the work they carry out at their sanctuary is truly inspirational.

We were greeted very warmly by the parks owner Pierre Thivillon and his wife, along with Jean-Christophe Gerard the parks veterinarian, and after some history of how the center began we were finally introduced to the two characters in question. As we walked around the sanctuary we saw Clarence and Brutus, the reason behind the whole trip. They are 2 beautiful 4 year old male lions and we can't wait to bring them to their new home.

As we were shown around the rest of the center however it became apparent just how important it is for other zoos (especially those with more available space and a higher operating budget) to get involved with similar projects. Along with Clarence and Brutus we also met Roar and Cesar who were another 2 male lions but 6 years old.



Clarence & Brutus in a circus cage when they were just cubs.

As with anyone in such a situation we would have taken them all on in a heartbeat however we knew when we arrived, that space and resource restrictions would always mean we could only agree to take on 2 lions as part of this particular project. For the space we have, and after having already received the background information and photos of Clarence and Brutus before going to France we had to make the tough decision between the two pairs, but settling for our original plan. This scenario however truly drove home that Tonga Terre D'accueil are stretched for space with the number of animals coming in and require help such as what we have offered.

We have seen in the past with previous projects such as our Barbary Macaque rescue project that this seems to be a huge problem on mainland Europe. No matter how good the work of rescue centers is there is simply not enough room without the help of zoos for the ever increasing number of animals being taken out of private hands, circuses and laboratories in countries such as France.



Jackie gets to know Brutus.



Tony gets to know Clarence.

We are however very proud that we are able to give Clarence and Brutus, who did not have the best start in life a new life. The history of these two boys is a little bit patchy and from their shared birth date and place of birth we can only assume that they are brothers. On 21/12/2007 they started their lives right where they would stay until being rescued on 03/02/2011... In the circus world. This is where Brutus and Clarence were born, and finally sold at only 41 days old (when they stopped being a small enough attraction to allow people to cuddle them for photos, and before they became too old to start being trained).

After some discussion as to the possible time scales and logistics of the move we were able to make a number of key decisions which we hope to work towards. Work has already begun at Wingham Wildlife Park, with the construction of their enclosure being well under way while we re-vamp an area of the park which is seldom used by our visitors. "we have already moved our rhea in to a new enclosure, and think that this new enclosure will make much more use of the area in a way which will have a more profound impact on captive big cats" tony explained about the location of the new lions within the park.

Tony went on to say "as much as possible we try to make sure that all of our enclosures are built by ourselves, and this one is no exception. In this way we can make sure that the enclosure is built perfectly for the animals in question." The current aim is to have the enclosure finished ready for the New Year, and that if everything goes well we will have them arrive with us in the middle of February 2012.

The current plan is for Tonga Terre D'accueil and Wingham Wildlife Park to shard the transport of the animals, with Tonga Terre D'accueil completing the first 8 hour road journey from Lyon to Calais. Upon their arrival in Dover they are unable to touch down on British soil in a normal vehicle, and this is where we are due to take over, re-loading the animals (who will be travelling in 2 separate travel crates) in to our DEFRA approved quarantine vehicles. The final leg of the journey is a short 30 minute drive from Dover to Wingham.



They really are a beautiful big couple of Lions, and we can't wait to give them a permanent home with us.

As soon as they touch down in the UK they will complete their full quarantine (from transport to 6 month holding) in our care. Their final enclosure will also be their quarantine center to minimize the stress of the move to the UK.

Wingham Wildlife Park is a nonprofit making family affair and as such we are fully self-funded, however such a project is a huge undertaking and we are trying hard to raise the funds required to rescue such majestic animals. "We have been to Africa and seen lions in the wild, and they're beautiful apex predators... true kings of their domain. It is difficult to watch them in spaces such as circuses where they are reduced to quivering in fear and wasting away from hunger" Jackie added on the importance of raising the funds for this project. We do not have a lot of time to raise our funds, in order to help free up space at Tonga Terre D'accueil for future arrivals, and an estimated project cost of around £150,000 seems impossible. We however hope that the public will agree with the importance of this work and will be willing to help us, help these lions.



Facebook Competition

As before we are running a competition on Facebook for a season ticket. All you have to do is like our page: <http://www.facebook.com/#!/WinghamWildlifePark> And when we reach **4000** likes, one of those friends gets picked at random for the prize!

