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Yorkshire Wildlife Park launches campaign to save 14 Lions

Yorkshire Wildlife Park, Branton, Doncaster has launched a campaign to save 14 lions from Oradea Zoo, Romania. The Park was approached by the organisation SOS Zoo who were looking rehome the lions on welfare grounds. The fundraising target is £150,000. The project includes building a lion house and creating reserves within 10 acres for the big cats, who otherwise face a death sentence or worse, as it is illegal to euthanase healthy animals in Romania, they could spend the rest of their lives in dreadful conditions. The Park has linked with big cat charity Wildlife Heritage Foundation and set up a website www.lionrescue.co.uk for regular updates on the project and where people can donate directly to the project.

We are also looking for corporate partners who can help with the project, either through donation, materials or expertise. For significant donations and help, benefit packages will be available, looked at on a case by case basis, which could involve on site recognition and signage, recognition and links on the website, recognition at the Press launch of both the arrival of the lions at the Park and the official launch of the Lions at the Park next year. Ticket, adoption and VIP tours can all be part of the benefits package.

John Minion, Animal Director, visited the Park in July at the invitation of the zoo director Dhiana Ghender and was both shocked and moved by the experience and pledged to help the lions. " They are such magnificent animals and despite the heat and the poor facilities, their spirit was still very evident. One lioness even came over to greet us. Some of them had health problems that veterinary care, good diet, exercise and appropriate housing will help greatly. There is a wide range of ages from 18 month old cubs to Johnny Senior, who is 27 years old – a whole generation of lions. The staff at Oradea really love their animals and desperately want the best for them – we really want to help them."

Yorkshire Wildlife Park hopes that the target will be reached in time to bring the lions to the UK before the winter snows hit Romania which will make travel difficult. A fundraising campaign has been backed by a national newspaper, funds will be raised on site and the Park is also looking for corporate sponsors for the rescue.

The Park's Chief Executive, Cheryl Williams said " This is a huge project for the Park. We desperately want to help the lions and it is potentially the biggest big cat rescue from one location another ever. It will be very high profile for Yorkshire and especially Doncaster so we hope that people will really support this and help make a difference".

Yorkshire Wildlife Park opened on 4th April 2009 and is on a 286 acre site of which the wildlife park is currently 45 acres. It has a variety of animals including Painted Hunting Dogs, the most endangered carnivore in Africa, three species of lemur in the woodland walkthrough Lemur Woods, and has recently received four Addax Antelope from Edinburgh Zoo which are part of the European breeding programme. There is more information on www.yorkshirewildlifepark.com .

For more information on the lion project and photographs from Oradea Zoo please see www.lionrescue.co.uk

**Yorkshire Wildlife Park, Brockholes Lane, Branton, Doncaster,
South Yorkshire DN3 3 NH Tel. 01302 535057
info@yorkshirewildlifepark.co.uk
Reg. no. 6531168**