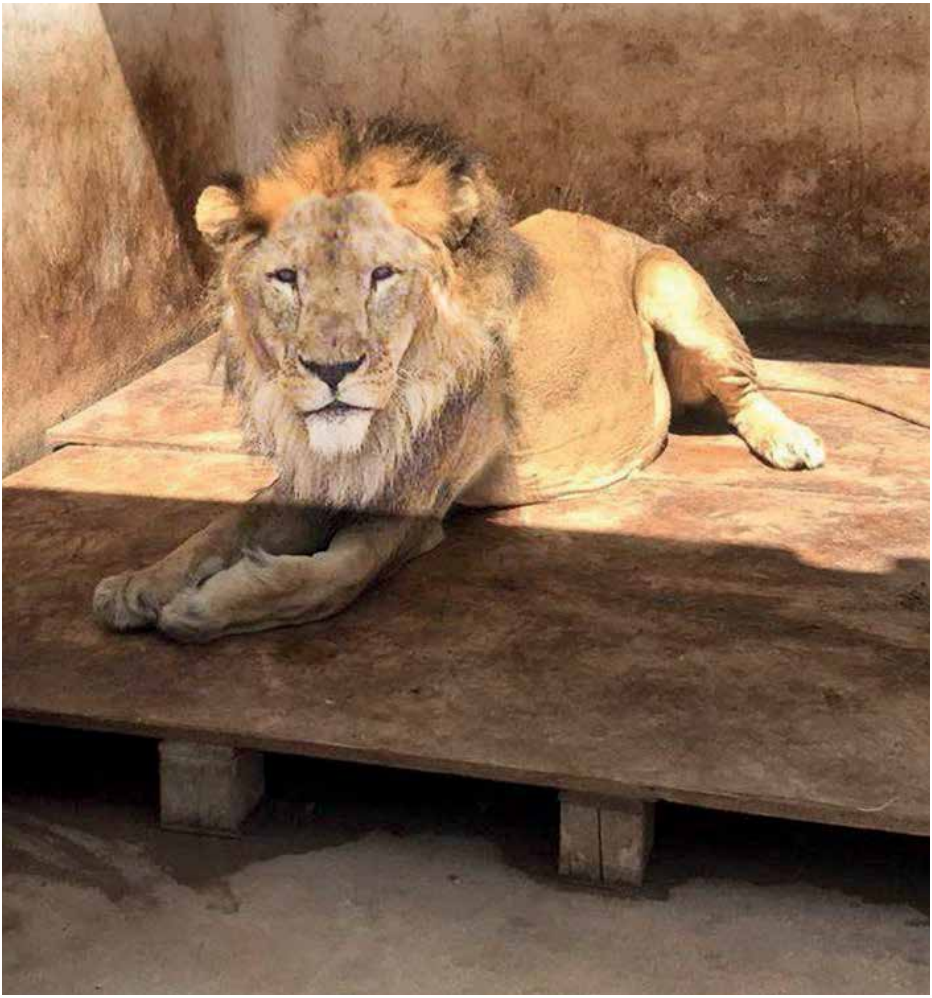
impact report:
alleviating the suffering at Yemen zoos



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Spring 2021

“The act of alleviating suffering is an act of mercy. It is a fundamental reflection of the essence of compassion.”

— Azzedine Downes, ifaw President

zoo intervention - Yemen

We’re proud to share this exclusive update with you on a recent project in Yemen! We would like to provide a greater insight into the recent improvements made at two Yemeni zoos who unfortunately were in a position of being unable to feed and care for their animals properly.

In late 2020, we told you about two zoos in Yemen that were struggling to provide enough food for the animals that resided there. Due to an ongoing civil conflict, economic crises, and the COVID-19 pandemic, the Sanaa and Taiz zoos found themselves in a troubling financial situation. These zoos — home to lions, cheetahs, wolves, and incredibly rare Arabian leopards — were left without the adequate funds to care for their animals. Beautiful, wild animals who are usually a sight to behold were left hungry and severely emaciated. The circumstances were extremely dire as eleven lions had already been lost to starvation.

The Yemeni zoos reached out to us and we could not in good conscience allow the problem to persist without doing everything we could to alleviate the suffering of these animals.

We collaborated with a local partner and coordinated a rescue effort to help the zoos and all the animals who call it home. Through the quick thinking of all involved and generosity of our supporters, IFAW is now supporting the animals with a grant to provide ongoing food, veterinary supplements and care for the animals in both zoos.

Thanks to you, we have been able to take several steps forward in making sure these animals receive the proper care and nutrition they require. We are incredibly optimistic about the continued progress these animals will make in 2021!

A lion and lioness sitting under the sun at the zoo in Yemen.

now down to the details

46
Number of lions now receiving better food and care

2
Number of Yemeni zoos IFAW is currently supporting through grants and partnership

5
Number of years the Taiz Zoo had been without electricity until you helped us restore power

34
Number of incredibly rare Arabian leopards being cared for with shelter, food, and veterinary services

48*
Number of animals whose overall health has improved

* All animals receive a health score between 1 (emaciated) and 3 (healthy weight). The 48 animals targeted in this intervention had an improved health score.

Map of the geographical location and surrounding areas of the two zoos.

A “before” picture of a lion drinking water during the assessment stage carried out by IFAW.

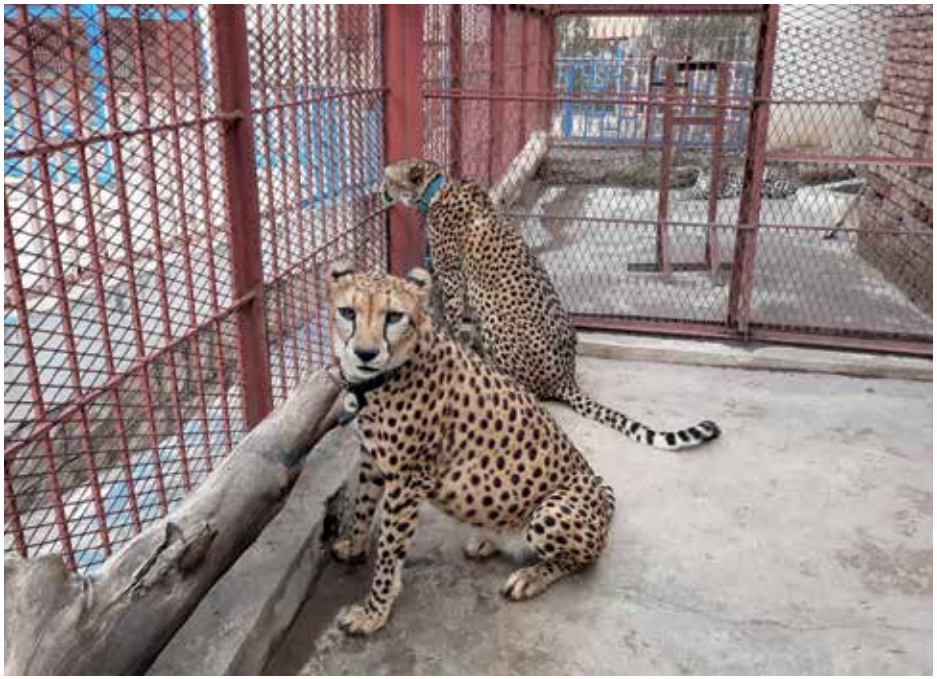
Tired and emaciated lion at the zoo in Yemen during the first stages of support provided by IFAW.

a complicated problem

The case of hungry and malnourished lions and cheetahs seems like it would have a simple solution: Provide them with food. However, it wasn’t so simple because this situation was affected and worsened by multiple stressors. The Yemeni government, who run the zoos, was trying to quell violence within the country and needed to redirect funding meant for the zoos. This left the zookeepers at a loss for how they should provide for the animals.

The government will not allow the animals to be moved out of the country, making our partnership with the zoos and their keepers even more critical. One of the first barriers we had to face was that in Yemen basic resources (food and medical supplies) are lacking and hard to find. Additionally, we had to form a relatively new trusting relationship with the zoos. Establishing trust is a slow process, but as the end goal was the same for everyone involved, it quickly became a strong partnership between the two factions.

Through dedicated work and continued efforts by both sides, we managed to forge a partnership strong enough to overcome political, financial, economic, and societal challenges.



The two adult cheetahs were confiscated by the concerned authorities from a smuggler on the Yemeni-Saudi border and taken to the Sanaa Zoo.

a question of ethics

We traditionally believe that wild animals should remain in their natural habitats and have historically supported the work and projects that perpetuate this belief. However, there were so many hungry animals suffering that it would be unthinkable to not step in if there was a way we could help.

Our fundamental belief is that every single individual animal matters. Their life is important and is worth saving. Though our opinion on zoos and the services they provide may differ from some, it does not deter us from taking action and lending support when one is in need. At the end of the day, it makes no difference if the animal is in the wild, at a zoo, in a sanctuary, or privately owned. We believe that help should and must be provided for those animals who need it most.

We called upon you, as one of our most dedicated supporters, to partner with us by making a gift to support the rehabilitation of those animals most in need, by providing veterinary attention, the feeding of each animal, and their ongoing care. Thank you for answering that call! Cheers to more partnerships and more animals saved!

forward progress

Since the awarding of the grant and the subsequent intervention, significant improvement has been made. At the Sanaa zoo, 32 lions and 2 cheetahs received two large batches of meat. This provided enough for them to be fed multiple times a week for over a month.

At the Taiz zoo, the services required were more complicated and more extensive. In addition to the food provision, the enclosure required restoration and environmental adaptation for the sake of enrichment. Also, some of the 34 Arabian leopards and 14 lions that were being helped were in need of veterinary care, which they promptly received.

This led to all targeted animals (lions + Arabian leopards), who started with the health score of 1 (emaciated), improving to a score of 3 which signifies a healthy weight. There are only two animals who are not currently scoring a 3 and that is due to complications relating to old age. However, even with this added obstacle, we've still seen their health improve greatly to a score of 2.

A final update we can share on this project is that we received enough donations to not only extend the grant duration to continue supporting the carnivores in Taiz zoo, but also working to include another zoo (Ibb zoo) in Yemen to support the animals there.

An improved lioness at the zoo in Yemen after receiving food and medical supplements, which were provided by IFAW.

Lioness in the zoo in Yemen, which IFAW is currently supporting by providing food and medical resources for the animals. IFAW partnered with a local organization and the two aforementioned zoos to provide the best possible care to the 82 animals in need.

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