



Discover Experience Conserve

PRESS RELEASE

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An Island Premiere at the Isle of Wight Zoo

'Casper' the white lion marks the Wight as his new territory

In January the Isle of Wight Zoo made history when a rare white lion arrived and laid his first tracks down on Island ground. Travelling from his home at West Midlands Safari Park, three and a half year old Casper was secretly transported across the Solent by Red Funnel.

IW Zoo CEO Charlotte Corney said: "For a while it was touch and go whether he would be able to travel on the scheduled day, which coincided with the heavy snow. Fortunately the motorways were clear and the journey went smoothly."

During the closed winter season, the big cat team have been quietly settling Casper into one of the zoo's naturalistic enclosures. He has been enjoying the chance to climb onto the high rock and survey his new territory. For the time being his feline company is in the form of sibling tigers, Diamond and Aysha, living in a nearby enclosure but by Easter the zoo hope to bring Casper a belated Valentine gift in the form of a female white lion.

White lions are not albinos, but carry a combination of genes that cause them to release less pigment than a normal tawny lion. When he was born Casper would have been snow white, as he has matured he has adopted a pale sandy colour. Another striking difference from the normal coloured lions is that they have glacial green or icy blue eyes.

The Isle of Wight Zoo is now one of only three wildlife centres in the UK where white lions can be seen. There are literally a tiny handful of these unusual animals existing worldwide both in human care and in African reserves where breeding and re-introduction programmes are in operation.

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Media enquiries: Sonia Mitchell, Marketing Supervisor, Isle of Wight Zoo marketing@isleofwightzoo.com

01983 403883 <http://www.isleofwightzoo.com>

Notes to editors:

Visitors to the Zoo can take advantage of the Free Bus Travel on offer from Isle of Wight Zoo and Southern Vectis; simply buy your zoo ticket from the driver and your travel costs will be included making your return bus travel absolutely free from anywhere on the Island.

Isle of Wight Zoo aims to promote the survival of endangered species through first class educational and recreational experiences, exemplary animal management, conservation and research. The Zoo is best known for its work with exotic cats. As a centre for surplus or rescued big cats, all have come to the Zoo at different stages of their lives and from a variety of backgrounds. The Zoo strives to encourage the social development and natural behaviour of each cat in their care. Every species of big cat residing at the Zoo is currently under considerable threat in its natural habitat. Isle of Wight Zoo is currently home to 12 tigers, 4 lions and 2 jaguars.