

AFP

21 June 2011

Malaysia rescues big cats from 'filthy zoo'

KUALA LUMPUR — Malaysian wildlife officials rescued 32 tigers and a number of lions, along with other animals, from what they called on Tuesday a dirty and cramped private zoo.

Zaaba Zainol Abidin, deputy director general of the wildlife and national parks department, said the animals, including 32 hybrid Siberian-Bengal tigers, were kept at the Saleng Zoo in southern Johor state in filthy conditions.

"The design is bad. The water wasn't being changed, and it's so dirty. Even the droppings they didn't clean," he told AFP.

The rescued animals are being transferred to a public zoo in Malacca and a wetland reserve in central Selangor state over several days, he said.

He put the number of lions at eight or nine, and said crocodiles, bears and a black panther were also rescued after wildlife authorities refused to renew the zoo's permits to keep the mostly endangered animals.

Zaaba said that the zoo had abused its permit in the past by purchasing an endangered tapir, a large forest-dwelling herbivorous mammal, from locals.

Saleng zookeeper J. Sivapriyan said he opposed the seizure of the animals, adding that the enclosure for the animals was being enlarged.

"I take care of the tigers, which are like my children," he told AFP. "I don't abuse the animals." Malaysia has pledged to better protect animals from abuse and illegal trade.

A new wildlife law, which came into effect late last year, also aims to tighten control on zoos and circuses.

Last year, Malaysia jailed Anson Wong, a rogue wildlife trader described as one of the world's most-wanted wildlife traffickers, for five years.