



UK-BORN CHEETAH BROTHERS ARRIVE SAFELY ON AFRICAN SOIL

Captive bred cheetah brothers land in Cape Town, South Africa after their flight across two continents to be rewilded

Paarl, South Africa - February 2020: In a world first, Saba and Nairo, the two 2.5 year-old captive bred cheetah brothers from Howletts Wild Animal Park in the UK, arrived safely at Ashia's Cheetah Centre in Paarl, South Africa on Friday 7th February 2020 for the start of their rewilding journey.

On Thursday afternoon, February 6th, the brothers were safely and calmly crated for the 6,000 mile flight to the southern tip of Africa. In the meantime, preparations for their arrival were well underway at Ashia's Cheetah Centre to ensure that the crates could be loaded directly into the cats' spacious natural-looking camp. "Many cheetah have done a similar long journey in the past, as did the ancestors of these two cats some generations ago, with one small difference: the starting point was somewhere in Africa and at the end of their journey in Europe there wasn't a free life waiting for them, but a captive life in a zoo. Ashia is immensely proud of Damian and Victoria Aspinall for leading this project and for going through all the paperwork and financial burden to give Saba and Nairo the chance to walk on the wild side of their homeland. We are relieved that these two magnificent cats have arrived safely and will give them the best (hands-off) care possible during their transition and preparation period while at Ashia", says Chantal Rischard, Founder of Ashia.

Although the flight's departure and subsequent arrival were delayed by an hour, the journey was otherwise uneventful and The Aspinall Foundation Chairman Damian Aspinall and his wife, Victoria, were on board to escort the brothers to their new home. On the ground at Cape Town International Airport, all parties represented were eagerly awaiting their arrival late Friday morning at the Swissport cargo services terminal. On hand was Dr Willem Burger, founder of Ever Co (former AWCF), the designated veterinarian who will be assessing and monitoring the cheetahs through their translocation. Once the paperwork was finalised and with the state vet's stamp of approval, the precious cargo was offloaded and eventually palletted to finally be uploaded onto the transportation truck for the short 60 minute drive to Ashia.



Check at cargo centre



Moving into Ashia camp



Nairo exploring new surroundings at Ashia



Saba & Nairo feeding on fresh Springbok



The brothers left the crates and entered their spacious new camp easily and calmly. Clearly very relaxed, by 6pm they had devoured most of their fresh springbok meal, part of the venison-only natural diet in preparation for their release into the wild. Saba devoured his immediately, with Nairo following suit at a slightly slower pace (and refusing to share when Saba attempted to join him). During the course of the weekend, both brothers took the opportunity of making themselves at home in their new environment, with Nairo on the mount enjoying the views and Saba actively exploring the camp. "The Aspinall Foundation's animal team already started with Ashia's pre-wilding protocol during the boys' last weeks at Howletts and we are confident that they will be ready in a matter of weeks to take their next rewilding step at Mount Camdeboo", says Rischard.

The final step of their rewilding journey is the translocation to Mount Camdeboo Private Game Reserve a 14,000 hectare property in the Great Karoo. "It's an absolute privilege and honour to be part of the rewilding of Saba & Nairo and I can't wait to see them running free on Mount Camdeboo! It is essential for the conservation of wildlife and our environment that these pioneering projects take place. There are so many benefits on all fronts, increasing the genetic diversity of this species will mean that they have a greater chance of survival indefinitely. This is also a call to all zoos globally that it is indeed possible to rewild certain animals and that they can have an important role to play in the greater mission of conservation. There are still many milestones ahead and we look forward to celebrating each one!", says Iain Buchanan, owner of Mount Camdeboo.



Mount Camdeboo



Says Damian Aspinall, The Aspinall Foundation Chairman, "Thanks to an incredible and dedicated team of experts, we have accomplished a world-first: two cheetah born and raised in the UK have taken their first steps on African soil. Very soon, Saba and Nairo will be rewilded and their genes will support the wild population. This is true conservation in action and clearly demonstrates that projects like this are not only possible, but vital.

I am incredibly proud to see Saba and Nairo enjoying their ancestral homeland and starting their journey towards a life lived wild and free, as all animals should."

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