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Rare Tigress 'Poisoned' to Death at Russian Wildlife Center

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The rare Amur tiger was poisoned at a wildlife rehabilitation center in the far-eastern Khabarovsk region.

In a dramatic setback to Russian conservation efforts for the rare Amur tiger, an adult female is believed to have been poisoned to death at a wildlife rehabilitation center in the far-eastern Khabarovsk region, the center said in a statement, citing its director.

"It was a plant-based poison that breaks up into fragments upon entering the stomach. No matter how bizarre and sad this may sound, my opinion is unambiguous: the tigress was poisoned on purpose," director Eduard Kruglov said in the statement, posted on the Utyos center's website Friday.

Only a few hundred Amur tigers are estimated to roam their natural habitat in the mountains of Siberia and the Far East. The Utyos tigress died a month before she was scheduled to be released back into the wild.

An autopsy revealed that many of the tigress's organs were "dark-colored," a sign of poisoning, the statement said, and the director believes that the toxicant was mixed

into the animal's food.

"I'm not going to say who specifically could have done this, but I'm sure that there's a certain group interested in this sort of thing," he said. "This is the first such case in 20 years, and I hope nothing like this happens again."

The animal, known as Tigress 15, was captured by wildlife experts from the Natural Resources Ministry in December and sent to the center to be treated for an array of ailments.

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