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'Putin's Tigress' Doing Well in Russia After Failed Attempt to Flee to China

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The tigress Ilona has been caught on camera.

A female tiger released into the wild by President Vladimir Putin has been caught on camera and is said to be in good condition, dampening fears she could become the third of "Putin's tigers" to cross into China in search of food.

Vyacheslav Kastrikin, director at the Khingansky nature reserve, told the Interfax news agency that Ilona the tigress was snapped by a hidden camera as she wandered around the protected reservation in the far eastern Amur region.

The tigress was intercepted near the Chinese border earlier this month, news site Moskovsky Komsomolets reported, sparking reports she could become the third tiger to jump ship and abandon Russia for China.

"She is in good shape, it is evident that she is not starving," Kastrikin was quoted as saying, adding that the feline even appeared to be "posing" in some of the photographs.

Kastrikin also said Ilona had started exploring the mountainous terrain of her new habitat and that researchers have been following her trail in order to find out more about her hunting patterns. Before she was caught on camera, she caught a wild boar on which she feasted for three days, he said, apparently dispelling reports the tiger might be underfed.

Ilona was one of five abandoned tiger cubs discovered in the Siberian taiga two years ago and reared back to health at a reserve the Jewish Autonomous region.

In May, Ilona — along with two other tigers, Kuzya and Borya — was released back into the wild by Putin. The two other tigers, Ustin and Svetlaya, were released separately.

However, in October it was reported that one of the tigers, Kuzya, who is tagged with a satellite tracking collar, had crossed into China in search of food. Earlier this month he was joined by a second tiger, Ustin, who reportedly followed in Kuzya's footsteps for similar reasons.

The Amur tiger is a highly endangered species, with its total population estimated at about 400, most of them inhabiting the Russian Far East.

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