

After Hippo, Lions, Wolves Stalk Flooded Tbilisi, Russia Offers to Assist

By [The Moscow Times](#)

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A serviceman stands near a hippopotamus at a flooded street in Tbilisi, Georgia, Jun. 14.

Russia's Emergency Situations Ministry has offered to fly equipment and rescue workers to Tbilisi to help the storm-battered Georgian capital deal with devastating flooding that has left 12 people dead, and that led a slew of wild animals to escape the zoo and prowl the city streets, the RIA Novosti news agency reported.

See the photo gallery: [Deadly Zoo Animals Roam Georgian Capital After Floods Kill 10 People](#)

"[Minister of Emergency Situations] Vladimir Puchkov has sent an official communication to the Georgian Minister of Internal Affairs, in which he expressed his condolences over the lives that were lost as a result of the disaster, and offered assistance in the aftermath of the floods," RIA Novosti cited the ministry's press service as saying.

Puchkov has reportedly offered two specially equipped Ilyushin Il-76 jets and more than 100

experienced rescue workers.

Tigers, lions, bears, wolves and a hippo were among more than 30 animals that escaped from a Georgian zoo and onto the streets of the capital Tbilisi on Sunday during floods that killed at least 12 people.

Residents were advised to stay indoors until the animals could be captured. Reuters photographs showed a marksman shooting tranquilizer darts at a hippopotamus walking past shops on a mud-soaked street.

Local news agencies later reported more than half the animals had been returned to the zoo. Some were killed by police, including a rare breed of white lion cub and six wolves roaming the grounds of a nearby children's hospital.

Three zoo workers died, including a woman who was trying to save lions and tigers. Several weeks ago she had lost her arm when a tiger attacked her, according to the reports.

Heavy rains turned the Vere river that flows through Tbilisi into a torrent that washed away buildings, roads and cars.

At least 24 people were still missing and 37 were taken to hospital with injuries, Interior Minister Vakhtang Gomelauri told an emergency government meeting. Monday was declared a day of national mourning.

Ties between Moscow and Tbilisi have long been fraught. In 2008, Russia and Georgia fought a five-day war over the break-away regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia.

(MT, Reuters)

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