The Moscow Times
30 YEARS
INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

Yanukovich Ostriches' Celebrity Status Causing Them Stress

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June 24, 2015



The resident ostriches at former Ukrainian leader Viktor Yanukovich's mansion are suffering from the celebrity status that befell them after their owner fled to Russia.

The birds are so "stressed out" by the flow of onlookers that their reproduction rates have shrunk, a news report said.

The birds — which were discovered at Viktor Yanukovych's residence, Mezhyhirya, after political protesters toppled his government last year — are still being fed twice a day and have their enclosures cleaned, animal-care technician Anatoliy Smikhula told Ukraine's TSN.ua news portal.

It's the same lifestyle they are used to having — except for a flow of visitors who are causing so much stress that the birds' reproduction rates have declined, Smikhula was quoted as saying.

The ostriches were discovered at the mansion outside Kiev along with other signs of luxury, including a golden loaf of bread weighing 2 kg, when political protesters swarmed to the residence after Yanukovich fled to Russia.

The birds have since gained a bit of a celebrity status and emerged as symbols of Yanukovych's extravagant lifestyle as well as props in scores of cartoons lampooning the former president.

In an interview with the BBC this week, Yanukovych said he "supported" animals, and saw nothing wrong with enjoying a private zoo: "What am I supposed to do, go around with my eyes closed?" he said.

Smikhula said Yanukovych visited his ostriches a couple of times a month during the six years the animal technician worked at the private zoo, TSN reported. But technicians never witnessed the ex-president's actual interactions with his pets, Smikhula said.

"When he arrived, they prudently hid us away. Herded us into houses, so we couldn't see anything," Smikhula said, TSN reported.

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