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Putin Gifts Lions, Ducks and Bears to North Korean Zoo

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President Vladimir Putin gifted more than 70 animals from the Moscow Zoo to North Korea, Russia's Natural Resources Ministry said Wednesday, marking the fourth such exchange between the two countries so far this year.

The animals, which included two brown bears, two yaks, five white cockatoos, 25 pheasants, and 40 mandarin ducks, were transferred to Pyongyang's Central Zoo, according to the ministry.

"Animals have historically played an important role in international relations, serving as symbols of support, kindness and care," Natural Resources Minister Alexander Kozlov said during a visit to Pyongyang this week.

Video shared by state media showed an African lion being transported in a crate by plane, with Kozlov discussing the animal's transfer with North Korean officials at the Pyongyang Zoo.

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In April, the Moscow Zoo donated over 40 animals, including eagles, pythons, parrots and fruit bats, to North Korea.

Another shipment in August included 24 Orlov Trotters, a breed of purebred horses admired by North Korean leader Kim Jong Un for their distinctive white coats. Western media suggested the horses may have been used as partial payment for North Korean artillery shells.

Kim, in his turn, gifted Putin a pair of Pungsan hunting dogs during a visit in June that saw the two leaders sign a defense agreement. Experts have compared these exchanges to China's zoo diplomacy, which uses animal gifts to bolster international relations.

The deepening ties between Russia and North Korea have raised concerns as the two nations strengthen military cooperation following the full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022.

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