

Cheetah dies at Edinburgh Zoo just months after arrival

The first cheetah at Edinburgh Zoo for almost a quarter of a century has died, just two months after she arrived.

Cleo, a five-year-old Northeast African cheetah, arrived at the Royal Zoological Society of Scotland (RZSS) attraction from Fota Wildlife Park near Cork in Ireland on August 1 with plans to breed the animals.

The world's fastest land animal was introduced to visitors on August 4 – and was featured on the side of Lothian buses as the RZSS promoted the “exciting” new attraction.

Cleo was removed from public view “for medical reasons” on August 28 but returned “after a brief hiatus” and Zoo chiefs said it was “great to see her thriving and engaging with visitors once again”.

Her death on 1 October is thought to be related to liver failure.

David Field, Chief Executive of RZSS, said: “In spite of the best efforts of our veterinary team and specialist animal carers, I’m sorry to say that Cleo passed away last night, following a short illness.

“We are still trying to establish what the cause of death is but we believe it is related to liver failure. We will know more after a post-mortem examination.

“Cleo wasn’t here at Edinburgh Zoo for long but in that time she made an amazing impression on all of the staff, vets, and visitors who met her. She will be sadly missed.”

The majestic big cat arrived at Edinburgh in a fanfare as the first of her kind at the attraction since 2000.

She spent time getting used to her new surroundings before finally going on public view on August 4 to the delight of visitors.

Plans were being made to add a male later this year, with hopes of the first cubs next year.

The RZSS redesigned a large enclosure, previously home to red river hogs, where Cleo and her future mate would be able to enjoy open space, tree trunks for climbing and platforms to survey their surroundings. There were also spaces for cubs if breeding plans were successful.

Animal lovers expressed their concerns and sent well-wishes after Cleo was removed from view for medical reasons after less than a month.

The cheetah enclosure was closed while vets kept “a close eye” on the big cat. Zoo officials said the animal had been put “on some new medication” but were unable to give any further details.

Cleo seemed to make a full recovery and appeared to be “thriving and engaging with visitors once again” after a brief hiatus. However, officials were still waiting for the results of tests when she died.

Fans of Cleo who had seen her during her short life in Edinburgh expressed their sadness on social media.

One posted on Facebook: “That’s so sad. I saw her a couple of weeks ago on a very wet horrible day and she was keeping cosy in her hut. Such a shame. Thinking of everyone.”

Another added: "I'm so devastated to read this. Cleo was such a beautiful cat and for the short time she was at the zoo we loved seeing her."

The Northeast African cheetah (*Acinonyx jubatus soemmeringii*) – one of four subspecies – is considered vulnerable to extinction by the International Union of Conservation of Nature (IUCN).

In the wild, they are threatened by poaching, illegal wildlife trade, hunting, habitat loss, but enjoy a lack of prey.



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Cleo the 5yr old Cheetah is the latest addition to Edinburgh Zoo Picture Alan Simpson