

Police Return Seized Leopard to Owner After Feline Hunger Strike

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The  **Moscow Times**

An endangered leopard that was seized earlier this month after having been found living in the basement of a Moscow apartment building will be returned to its owner after staging something of a hunger strike, it emerged Wednesday.

After being confiscated, the rare feline was taken to an animal refuge just outside of the capital. Having grown accustomed to being fed exclusively by the hand of its owner, the large cat refused to eat the food provided by the shelter.

Police were advised by wildlife experts that the leopard would have a better shot at survival if it were returned to its caretaker, who could provide the necessary sustenance.

The reunion was conditioned upon the owner's vow to keep the cat in a special enclosure, and to keep that enclosure outside of Moscow city limits.

The owner may have won this round, but more obstacles hover on the horizon. The authorities have launched a criminal case into the illegal acquisition and trafficking of the

leopard, whose species is listed in Russia's "Red Book" of near-extinct animals. The culprit faces up to five years in prison and a million-ruble (\$27,900) fine.

This is not the summer's first instance of inappropriate animal housing in Moscow. A piglet that was marketed as a "pocket pig" before blossoming into a massive, 120-kilogram sow was abandoned by its owners in Moscow's popular Izmailovo Park, Komsomolskaya Pravda reported in July.

Nyusha the Vietnamese potbelly was abandoned in the park when her owners, who had received her as a gift "mini-pig," moved away. Locals tried to house Nyusha in the apartment building's stairwell, but the overfed swine found herself ill-equipped to climb the stairs and too heavy to ride the elevator, the report said.

She was eventually taken away to a pet shelter, though not before gorging on a last meal at the apartment complex of bread, apples and cucumbers provided by the building's residents. It took five porters to move her.

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