

Rescued South America circus lions explore new home Africa

Reuters | May 2, 2016, 10:33 PM IST

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Former circus lions plays after being released into an enclosure at Emoya Big Cat Sanctuary in Vaalwater, South Africa. (AP photo)

VAALWATER (South Africa): Lions rescued from circuses in Colombia and Peru and airlifted to South Africa scratched their manes on trees and explored their new territory in the African bush after being released into a sanctuary north of Johannesburg on Sunday.

One of the 33 lions, a male known as Zeus, let out a mighty roar before stepping out of his

cage into an enclosure where he will spend the coming months being monitored by a vet.

The lions arrived at the Emoya Big Cat Sanctuary shortly after dawn on Sunday to end a two-day journey from South America.

The lions were freed after the use of wild animals in circuses was outlawed in Peru and Colombia.

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It will be impossible for the lions to survive in the wild as they were bred in captivity and their circus owners mutilated many by breaking their teeth and removing their claws. Because they cannot hunt they will be fed game meat and will have water in their enclosures.

"They are remarkably calm after such a long journey," Tim Phillips, the co-founder of Animal Defenders International which led the rescue of the lions told Associated Press. "It was a dream come true watching them step of those cages into their new homes in the African bush."

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