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Park Lets 12 Lions Freeze To Death

SAPPORO—Twelve of the 31 lions at a safari park in Tomakomai, southern Hokkaido, died last winter due to the cold weather, it was learned Thursday.

Temperatures in the Tomakomai region last winter dropped to as low as 14.7 degrees below zero C. But it was found that the quarters where the lions were kept were not heated.

The lions were kept at the "Mini Lion Safari" operated by Hokkaido Wild Animal Park Co.

When the safari was opened in April 1979, there were some 600 animals, including five lions. The company increased the number of lions last April.

The safari had been closed since last November because of a decrease in visitors due to the cold weather. While the safari was closed, the lions had been kept in cages.

Authorities of the Hokkaido prefectural government are now conducting an investigation.

They said the 12 lions died of pneumonia caused by the cold weather and old age between January and March. All 12 were more than 10 years of age. Lions usually live to an average age of 15 or 16.

While the park is opened to the public, the lions roam freely in the park area and visitors are taken around the park in buses.