

# Society Pages

TLC FOR A SIBERIAN TIGER

## A Two-Year-Old in Trouble

THIS SICK, young tigress (right) was rescued on November 26 in a small town bordering China in the Russian Far East by Inspection Tiger and WCS capture specialist Nikolai Reebin. They brought her to Terney, the town that is our base for joint Russian/WCS efforts to save Siberia's remaining tigers.

She arrived in a stuporous state, barely able to walk. Together with Yevgeny Slabi, the head veterinarian for Terney Raion (county), we examined her and could find no evidence of trauma. We've concluded that she most likely has a viral disease, or has been poisoned.

Because each tiger's life is important when so few are left, we have been spending most of our waking hours trying to save her. WCS Western States Veterinary Coordinator Kathy Quigley and Veterinarian Doug Armstrong at the Omaha Zoo give us daily advice.

The tiger would not eat or drink, so we began an IV drip. IV treatments twice a day take three to four hours each. Yevgeny and Nikolai (above, right) administer the IV, while I hold her head. When the cat tries to raise herself up, I talk to her and stroke her cheeks, the place where tigers often rub and lick each other, until she drifts back to sleep.



JOHN GOODRICH; NIKOLAI REEBIN (BELOW)

As I write this, we have been treating her for more than two weeks, and each day she shows slight signs of improvement. Her hearing is quite good and her eyes respond to light.

After about a week, she began to display emotion, putting her ears back, and even growling when annoyed. But she never acts aggressively toward us. This was a turning point for me. Until then, we were treating a comatose cat, but now we are developing a relationship with the tiger, and I will be deeply sad if we cannot save her.

A few days ago, she showed signs of dreaming, which may indicate increased cerebral activity. She is also becoming more vocal. Recently, we've been able to feed her ground meat by gently prying open her mouth and slipping in a spoonful (left, the author feeding her). She eats eagerly in this way, but still will take nothing on her own.

We have sent blood samples for analysis to two laboratories, and four Russian veterinarians have examined her, yet we are still stumped as to what is causing her illness. Some viral diseases are difficult to detect, while others, like rabies, can be tested for only after an animal's death (just in case, we are all being treated for rabies). If she does have a virus, it is critical that we learn what it is, so we can develop a plan to protect the tiger population in this area.

It's very possible she will not fully recover, in which case she could become an important part of our captive-breeding program. If she dies, we hope to learn something about the diseases or poisons that affect wild tigers.

Still, we continue to treat her on the thin hope that, someday, we will be able to release her back into the taiga of the Russian Far East.

*John Goodrich*