

3 tigers very ill at Chinese zoo where 11 starved

BEIJING – Zookeepers are scrambling to save three seriously ill Siberian tigers at a cash-strapped zoo in northeast China where 11 of the big cats starved to death recently.

The three tigers were shedding fur, had lost their appetites and were listless, the official Xinhua News Agency reported late Monday.

Eleven of the 30 Siberian tigers at the Shenyang Forest Wild Animal Zoo starved to death in the past three months, having been fed nothing but chicken bones as the facility ran into financial trouble, according to reports last week, although a zoo manager said unspecified diseases killed the animals.

After news broke of the mass tiger deaths last week, the local government pledged 7 million yuan (\$1.03 million) to help save the remaining animals.

Since then, staff have cleaned and installed heating in the cold, damp tiger cages, given the animals nutritional supplements and started feeding them 6 pounds (2.5 kilograms) of beef and two hens per day, Xinhua said.

Siberian tigers are one of the world's rarest species, with an estimated 300 left in the wild, 50 in China. But more than 5,000 are held captive on farms and wildlife parks across China.

Several other protected animal species have also died at the zoo this year, including a red-crowned crane, four stump-tailed macaques, a rhesus monkey and a brown bear, Xinhua said over the weekend.

<http://malaysia.news.yahoo.com/ap/20100316/tap-as-china-tigers-bb10fb8.html>