



DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

news release

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

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U.S. TO SEND MUSKOXEN TO CHINA

A pair of Alaskan muskoxen named "Koyuk" and "Tanana" will be going to the People's Republic of China in March, thanks largely to a concerned citizen and a generous corporation.

The Interior Department's Fish and Wildlife Service is the U.S. agency coordinating the transfer of the muskoxen, a gift provided by Alaska on behalf of the United States to the People's Republic of China. "I am pleased that the Service is taking an active role in the presentation of this gift," said Interior Secretary Don Hodel. "It reaffirms our commitment to international cooperation in wildlife conservation."

The muskoxen will be presented to the Beijing Zoo to continue a commitment made in 1972 when former President Richard M. Nixon "opened" U.S. relations with mainland China. At that time, the two nations made symbolic gifts: the United States received Hsing-Hsing and Ling-Ling, two giant pandas from China, and sent to China two muskoxen. While the pandas have thrived in the National Zoo in Washington, DC, the two muskoxen eventually succumbed to age and infirmity.

"The present transfer of muskoxen has come about through efforts within official channels and through some very fortunate coincidence," according to Fish and Wildlife Service Deputy Director Steve Robinson. "Through our International Affairs staff we knew that China was interested in receiving muskoxen, and thanks to our close cooperation with the State of Alaska we were able to locate an excellent source of healthy animals. But, of course, the transfer really became feasible when WorldCorp stepped forward to help us fulfill a need brought to our attention by a concerned citizen."

That citizen aware of the plight of the U.S. gift and determined to keep her Nation's commitment is Helen Miller of Moultrie, Georgia. She began a one-person letter-writing campaign to the National Zoo, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the Secretary of the Interior, and the White House to enlist aid in replacing the deceased muskoxen.

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Mrs. Miller found a favorable audience in Washington and a willing corporate co-sponsor in WorldCorp, a global air transport company with extensive experience in shipping wild and domestic animals around the world.

"We were delighted to provide this assistance as a goodwill gesture to the people of China and the United States," said Charles Pollard, General Counsel of WorldCorp. "Through our subsidiary, World Airways, we have been in the 'Noah's Ark' role before and we are happy to be there again."

"I just felt it was a matter of national honor and self-respect to replace the muskoxen," Mrs. Miller noted. "Millions of American citizens have had an opportunity to see the pandas, China's gift to us. I felt it was high time we return the favor and let the Chinese people enjoy the gift of our muskoxen as our Nation had intended."

The muskoxen--a 3-1/2-year-old female named "Tanana" and 2-1/2-year-old male named "Koyuk"--will depart from Fairbanks March 21 on a World Airways DC 10 for the 12-hour journey to China. Accompanying the animals will be Dr. Robert White, professor of biology at the University of Alaska at Fairbanks and Director of the University's muskox research facility. "The animals we selected are young and strong. 'Koyuk' and 'Tanana' should provide the people of China great enjoyment for many years to come," according to White. Muskoxen normally live up to 20 years in the wild. Adult males can reach weights of 600 pounds, females 450. Though creatures of the Arctic north, they do not do well in areas of heavy snowfall. Since they are adapted for browsing and grazing, muskoxen rely on wind-blown, snow-free areas for feeding.

"Koyuk" and "Tanana" were made available to be an official gift of the United States by the Alaska Board of Game which administers muskoxen and other native wildlife species within Alaska. The gift to China further underscores U.S./Chinese wildlife cooperative efforts made possible by the November 1986 protocol between the Interior Department's U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the Ministry of Forestry, People's Republic of China. This spring, Chinese research teams will be in the United States pursuing field studies on American alligators and migratory birds.

"Koyuk" and "Tanana" will be held in a 30-day quarantine before being put on public display at the Beijing Zoo. Prior to their first public appearance in China, "Tanana" could possibly bear her first calf. Tests will soon confirm whether she is pregnant. Muskox calves weigh about 19 pounds at birth and grow rapidly during their first year, frequently attaining weights of 150 pounds or more by age one.

The muskoxen will be presented to the Beijing Zoo and the people of China by an official U.S. delegation during a ceremony at the zoo in early May.

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Note to Editors: Black and white photo of Koyuk and Tanana available; call 202/343-5611.

Note to Television Stations: Companion electronic news release scheduled for satellite transmission 2:05 to 2:35 p.m. EST, Monday, March 21, 1988.

Coordinates: Westar IV, Transponder 6 direct; audio 6.2-6.8.

