

# JET THAT FLEW IN CHEETAHS HAD EARNED ITS STRIPES

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The Terra Avia Boeing 747-400 that flew in the eight African cheetahs from Windhoek, Namibia to Gwalior on Saturday was on a special mission, but the aircraft itself had been the flagship of another conservation campaign much earlier.

The jet's striking paint scheme — the image of a tiger — was planned in 2015 when the aircraft was with the Russian carrier, Transaero Airlines, now defunct. The plane, first owned by Singapore Airlines in 2001, was acquired by an American bank in 2012. It was later leased to Transaero.

As a part of the project, known as the 'Striped Flight', the visual was to run across parts of the fuselage, with the nose to sport the head of one of the world's largest big cats, the endangered Russian Amur tiger.

## Putin's tiger project

In an email to *The Hindu*, Andrey Shorshin, Press-Secretary of the Amur Tiger Center, said the special livery, "Caring for Tigers together", was unveiled on June 22, 2015, at Moscow's Vnukovo airport. The scheme, which was a joint project by the Tiger Center and Transaero, had the goal of highlighting the need to conserve endangered species. In a survey conducted in 2015, the number of Amur tigers in the wild in Russia had been found to have stabilised between 510 to 540 individuals. Mr. Shorshin added that conservation of the Amur tiger was a key theme foregrounded by Russian President Vladimir Putin at the Tiger Summit in 2010.

Under the campaign, Transaero planned an extensive social media programme under the tag "Wildlife". Documentaries produced by the Amur Tiger Center were also screened for passengers on the 'Striped Flight'.

In another email, Anton Tretiakov, CEO, Aquiline International Corporation Limited — one of the partners in the cheetah translocation project to India — said Aquiline International, which provides charter services and leasing of long-haul freighters, had been contacted by Action Aviation to undertake the India flight.

## Modifying the jet

He said that after Transaero had folded up, the jumbo jet had been stored in Spain from 2015 to early 2022. It was moved to Sharjah for a complete maintenance check. The jetliner was then flown to Fujairah to remove the seats and made ready for the 'cheetah mission'.

On the preparations for the flight, the official said there were 13 veterinarians. The team began their work for the flight two weeks before their departure to Namibia. He said that as there were certain temperature and pressure limits required for the safe airfreighting of the wild animals from Namibia to India, the Boeing 747 was considered the best option for the operation.

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