

## **Shiro Gives into Instinct**

It is not often you see a lion go feral. The mammals that live in cities and stand up right have had no need to hunt for their food for millions of years. But at the zoo, some visitors got to see something rare indeed. Recreational hunting is one thing, but the devouring that happened there would never be forgotten.

It was a hot summer day thanks to the sun beaming down its light to the anthros below. Since most cannot handle such heat, the local zoo had lowered their prices to encourage visitors to come. Shiro was not like most animals. He was a lion; a species well suited to the heat and sun. To him, the weather was just right. While the other guests were sitting in the shade and taking frequent breaks, the White Lion was perfectly able to enjoy all the zoo had to offer. He was able to see all sorts of exotic animals from all over the world. Unlike the mammals on the walkways that walked on two legs, the beasts in the enclosures still walked on all fours.

Well, most of them did...

After seeing the monitor lizards from Asia, Shiro was making his way to the aviary. The walk-in cage was full of birds from Africa (according to the sign above the entrance door). Although they stood on two legs like he did, these birds were still wild animals that operated on instinct. As he walked in squawks and shrieks filled his ears. Love birds with their colorful plumages flew overhead, squawking to find where their kin were. Herons of red and purple hues stood by the edge of the pond that made the center of the aviary while various waterfowl swam in the water. A pathway swirled left around the small body of water where it reached the exit on the other side. As the path parallels the left side of the aviary, there were two separate enclosures for a fish eagle and a Bateleur.

As Shiro walked down the path, he started feeling...different. The squawks of birds made his stomach growl. The more he heard and saw them, the less he saw zoo exhibits and more of the buffet. No one else was in the aviary. Visitors instead refresh themselves at a café and sit in the shade than see birds. And it seemed like Shiro was about to have a bit of a refresher himself. Before he even knew it himself, his eyes were locked onto a brownish duck as it waddled onto land to eat out of a food bowl.

Shiro got onto both his hands and feet to get ready to pounce. In his mind, he was thinking of how he shouldn't. But that thought was eroded by the need for food once he heard a quack. In a flash he jumped over a short wooden guardrail and pounced on the unsuspecting duck. Shiro held the duck in his paws as it quacked loudly, almost like it was begging to be let go. His claws sunk into the feathers, but did not hurt the feathers underneath. The birds around them kept their distance, but one can only go so far in a cage. In a quick flurry of feathers, he shoved the poor duck into his grinning maw. The waterfowl fit perfectly inside. With a heavy GULP Shiro was able to send the bird off to his esophagus where it made a bulge under his mane that slowly sank until it disappeared past his chest. Shiro licked his chops and looked over his shoulder to see another duck, colored slighter than the one slipping into his stomach right now. It might be a female, and it might even be the mate of the first duck. These thoughts did not pass Shiro's mind as he rushed over on all fours to catch her in his mouth. She went straight past his teeth and in a single gulp went straight down his throat.

The female duck was trapped in a dark warm tube that pulsed her along the way. She was covered in slime, she could feel it seeping into her feathers. Her ears were filled with the sound of the muscles in front of her parting and the large lion's breath whizzing by her. After a few gulps, she would start to hear the heart beating just beyond her sight. Technically, everything was past her sight since there was no light to see anything. The esophagus paused for a moment; she felt an opening in front of her. With one strong push, she was shoved into the stomach where she found her mate already struggling. They quacked together as they flapped their wings and kicked trying to find a way out. From inside the stomach a simple gurgle was deafening; overpowering their own quacks. Everything was moving, nothing stayed still for even a moment. Everything was wet, and every surface touched made them more wet. Suddenly, a new sound started. Squelching and murmurs, all accompanied by vibrations occurred above them. Or...what they think is above them, at least.

After a solid minute, a heron head poked into the stomach; almost spearing the male duck.

Outside Shiro's stomach, the white lion slurped up a pair of long legs like noodles. The scales made them easy to get down. By now, the aviary was in a ruckus of squawks and shrieks as the birds put as much distance between them and the lion. But it didn't stop Shiro from continuing his feast. With hungry eyes, he spots the other heron flying onto a branch on a nearby tree. He was dead set on catching it and ran up to the tree, knocking a duck out of the way. Shiro stops right before he hits the tree and looks up at the heron. The long-necked bird looks down at him, almost concerned as to what the lion could do. Shiro lifts his front paws off the ground and stands upright, realizing he could reach the long-necked bird if he jumped from there. Before the heron could fly to a higher branch, he jumps up and grabs them by the leg. His weight, aided by gravity, pulls the heron down. A surprised squawk escaped the beak of the bird.

Once on the ground, Shiro held the bird up, getting an eyeful of his new prey. One paw holding both legs, and the other holding the wings down. Shiro guides the legs into his open maw and immediately sends the legs down his throat. With one paw free he holds the head of the beak shut and starts to shove the whole bird down his gullet. Although he gaged a few times, it only took him a minute to leave only the spear-like beak of the heron sticking out of his mouth. Putting his arms to his sides, he sends the bird off with a quick SLURP and a heavy GULP. The skinny bird hardly even registered in his neck.

Once it landed in Shiro's stomach, the bulge of birds was much more noticeable now. His leonine stomach was able to expand to hold more meat, even struggling meat. And struggle the birds; every kick and peck to faintly be seen through his flesh and fur.

His hunger might have been satisfied enough to knock him out of his instinct induced hunt, but the sound of a new bird highlighted his hunger.

“SKREEE!”

Shiro looks behind him and sees the separate enclosures for the eagles. The Duck he kicked out of his way not too long ago slid right in front of the eagles' pin and they must have reacted with a call. A call that alerted a hungry lion to them. Shiro on two legs stalks slowly over to the viewing spot. Nonchalantly, he picks up the duck in a paw and throws it down his gullet, hardly needing to gulp. With a free paw, he uses his claw to slash open the mesh separating the fish eagle from the rest of the aviary.

The large bird raises his head feathers in alert and poofs up their feathers to look bigger. The bird of prey would hold its ground. As Shiro opened the hole wider so he could fit through. He reaches a clawed hand out to swipe at the eagle before he could get all the way in. He barely reaches the raptor; which reaches its head out to try to bite Shiro. It misses too. Shiro pulls himself in and flops onto the ground, dirtying his bulging white belly fur. Getting up, he wipes some of the dirt off; looking back up, he finds the eagle has not moved.

About 10 minutes later...

The aviary fell silent. Any of the remaining birds inside didn't wish to speak up, less the lion found room for seconds. It did not take long for the stomach to start gurgling to break that silence. Growls, groans, and the occasional squawk that was able to reach through to the outside. Shiro struggled to reach the door, and decided it might have just been for the best to lay in the aviary to digest.

The silence, ironically drew more suspicion from the zookeepers than their louder squawks. Someone was over quickly to check it out. They were quite surprised to see one of their lion patrons with a belly full of birds. Although they were angry at first; however, they quickly remembered something important: it was just natural for cats to eat birds. It was not much of a conversation to convince the zookeepers to let the eaten birds stay where they were. After all, at this stage of digestion, it would be more money getting them healthy than to just get new ones.

And so, if you ever want to see those birds again, you will have to see Shiro. Well...at least until he works them off his frame.