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Feline Conservation Federation



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The newly updated FCF web site is available at www.felineconservation.org



Feline Conservation Federation



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does not necessarily represent the point of view of the organization. FCF's Statement of Intent is contained in our bylaws, a copy of which can be requested from the Secretary. Reproduction of the material in this magazine may not be made without the written permission of the original copyright owners and/or copyright owner FCF. We encourage all members to contribute articles. Articles concerning exotic felines are preferred and gladly accepted. Articles involving other related subjects will also be considered. Letters and responses to articles may be included in the Readers Write column. Submission deadline for the next issue is the tenth of odd numbered months. Please submit all photos and articles to the Editor. Persons interested in joining FCF should contact the Term Director in Charge of Member Services.

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Saying Goodbye is Never Easy

Mike Preston III

Just like most of us, it all started at a young age; an unexplainable obsession for animals. That is the only way I can explain my father's love for his cats. They were more than pets, more than a hobby; they were like children, and the desire to care for these magnificent animals became part of who he was, and what he passed to me. This journey started about fifteen years ago, with a bengal cat. Transforming over time into a nonprofit rescue for exotic felines.

As I think back over the past decade and a half, it seems like an obvious evolution that most exotic cat owners go through. You start with one cat, and then two, before you know it, there are cages and runs being built in the backyard. Weekends are spent looking for land to build a utopian setting for these animals that have taken over your heart. This is what happened to my father and it was his baby, a Western Cougar named Dakota. When she came into our lives, everything changed, not only did I start understanding why he went to all of the trouble for these animals, but also I began to join him. Building cages, cleaning meat, and pampering this little fur ball, to give her the life she deserved. Over the next several years a special bond was formed, hours of time spent together; gave them an understanding and trust of each other that is hard for most people outside of the animal world to comprehend. But it is actually quite simple; the cats love you back.

As time went by we began to build out, and care for a wide verity of cats. Among them were bobcats, servals, cougars, and jungle cats. For years the cats had a stable home with a loving caregiver, and then it all changed. In 2002 my father was diagnosed with cancer. At first everyone thought it was just a bump in the road, you get it treated, recover and go on with your life. But quickly it became obvious that not only did we need to find help for my father, but also for the cats he cared for. For over a year with my fathers help, I took care of the cats so they could still be a part of his life. However in



Mike and Cody at home in Florida in happier times

mid April 2004, it was time to find new permanent homes for the cats including Dakota, so my dad could concentrate on fighting his cancer. Thankfully some dear friends of my father, Lynn and Bart Culver, agreed to help, and take in the cats.

So early on a Friday morning my father and I loaded the cats into cages, packed up a van, and began our thirty-hour trip to Arkansas. For those of you who have never had the pleasure of traveling cross-country with large animals, let me try and explain. You expend a great deal of energy trying to keep everything safe, keep a timely schedule, and lessen stress on everyone involved, especially the cats. Add in the fact that you are taking one of your best friends to their new home, it all adds up to quite and exhausting and emotional experience.

Upon arriving at the Culvers, what they had done to prepare, and where they had planned to keep the servals and Dakota, was more than my father and I could have ever hoped for. Huge runs with trees, homes to climb into and grass under their feet. It is a regular paradise if you are a cat. After a few days it was time to take my father home, and say goodbye to the cats. In all of the memories I have of my dad, I do not ever remember anything being so hard for him. He was leaving behind a part of his life, a large part that had taken years to build, and a friend.

In the next few months we often talked about when we would go and visit Cody again, however in this time my father just got worse, and it soon became obvious that he had said his goodbye the last time we were there. All of the energy he had left was now in trying to fight what had ravished his body; and terribly he lost his fight on December 22nd 2004.

I know my dad wanted desperately to see Dakota one more time, and unfortunately it never happened. My father loved his cats, working with them, watching them grow, and the feeling these majestic creatures gave him. For that I will always be thankful, they made his life fuller and brought a smile to his face. And to the people that helped him over the years I thank you for everything, you all have a special place in my and my hearts forever.



Mike Preston with Dakota at the Culvers

Midwestern Mountain Lions—The Return of a Legend

Cougars have increasingly been in the news over the past few years as these elusive long-tailed cats are seemingly showing up everywhere. Well, if not everywhere then in many areas east of the Rocky Mountains and other western North American strongholds where the species is considered a common, albeit infrequently observed native felid. In fact there have been several road- or railroad-killed cougars documented in Iowa, Illinois, Missouri, and Oklahoma. Several cats have also been captured on film via “camera traps”—infrared- or motion-sensitive cameras used by hunters, researchers, and general nature enthusiasts to document local wildlife—in Arkansas, Minnesota, and Nebraska. Across the board, these are states and regions where pumas have been absent for upwards of 100 years or more!

Almost invariably, these photogenic felines and other wayward pumas, none of which have shown any evidence of prior captivity, prove to be young males. It is thus easy to explain these unusual occurrences as a function of dispersal and the deeply rooted drive of such young animals to wander from their natal range and seek out a territory, and potential conspecific mates, of their own. The advent of radio telemetry technology over recent decades is allowing predator researchers for the first time to clearly comprehend the mind-boggling distances some of these individuals, having separated from their mothers and siblings, can roam.

For instance, western biologists are presently tracking a young male lynx that was released in Colorado as part of a formal restoration effort and has now traveled over 800 miles northward, through Yellowstone National Park, and on into Montana. By all indications, this cat is headed for Canada, where he was originally live-trapped for the Colorado project. Moving in the opposite direction, a gray wolf from the Yellowstone Ecosystem was discovered in Colorado about a year or two ago. At about the same time a radio-tagged Wisconsin wolf, not surprisingly a male, ended up dead in Indiana. A few wolverines monitored in the northern Rockies have also demonstrated some incredible long-distance forays. Similarly, a young male cougar, tagged as part of an ongoing study in the Black Hills of South Dakota, traveled over 600 miles southward before meeting his demise in a collision with a diesel locomotive this past year. This episode represents the single greatest dispersal distance ever recorded for the species.



cougar caught on motion sensitive wildlife camera by Arkansas landowner in 2004

Confounding the dispersal theory used to explain puma presence in areas where the species has not been seen for years, however, is the hot-off-the-press documentation of a female puma in Manitoba. This cat’s death comes literally on the heels of the shooting of a male puma there earlier in the fall. These are the first definitively documented pumas in Manitoba in almost 30 years. Although not officially or unanimously recognized by the scientific community, the existence of a small resident puma population has been suspected in this midwestern Canadian province for several decades. This is based on a long history of reliable sightings as well as the documentation of a third puma—again a young male—shot and killed near the farming community of Stead in 1975.

Female cougars, as is true for many predators, rarely make the long dispersals that males do. Of course, with wildlife, especially the highly adaptable cougar, it seems nearly anything is possible. It only takes two to plant a population’s seed, so if this female shows evidence of breeding or birthing—coupled with no outward signs of prior captivity—then it will be a tantalizing to speculate on the implications. For instance, was this female originally a disperser from say, the Black Hills or Alberta? Or was she born in the Manitoban wilds? What ever happened to her kittens? Did she mate with the male who was also killed recently, or is there another male roaming the Manitoban woodlands too? Are there other cougars around? How many and how have they managed to avoid formal detection?

It is noteworthy that now as far east in Canada as Quebec and New Brunswick, DNA from samples collected from strategically placed hair snares has recently been confirmed as puma. Similar confirmations are apparently pending from Ontario as well. If these cases are indeed bonafide, and there is no reason to suspect otherwise, then it will necessarily beg the question, where are these cats coming from and why haven’t they been officially confirmed, alive or dead, before? Do these widespread cougar confirmations merely represent the sporadic presence of dispersers or transients—western cats that have wandered eastward and keep wandering and wandering—or are there in fact actually undiscovered, unconfirmed puma populations in these vast and relatively untrammled Provinces? In all likelihood, the truth probably lies somewhere between these two possibilities. In any case, whether a function of recolonization or reemergence of a cryptic, long-hidden population, those interested in the natural world and our native cats are witnessing an exciting phenomenon as the cougar inexorably makes its presence known east of its traditional Rocky Mountain redoubts.

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Embittered Sanctuary Operator's Syndrome

By Jessi Clark-White

I have noticed a trend in the exotic feline community that I've dubbed the "Embittered Sanctuary Operator's Syndrome." This is a condition wherein people who started as private owners get involved in rescue or sanctuary work, and eventually end up condemning private ownership of exotic cats.

Even the notorious Tippi Hedren, who now runs a large sanctuary and campaigns viciously against the right to own exotic cats, started out as a private owner. The founder of Wildlife on Easy Street, now known as the anti-ownership Big Cat Rescue, started out to buy a bobcat as a pet from a fur farm and ended up purchasing the farm's entire stock of bobcats to save their lives. If one woman hadn't decided she wanted a pet bobcat, those 56 cats would have died.

These stories are so common that I would venture to say that if we didn't have private owners, we wouldn't even have most of the sanctuaries that operate today. The animal-rightists would probably counter that without private owners, we wouldn't need those sanctuaries. But as Conservator's Center Inc.'s Mindy Stinner says, "most of our rescues and placement animals come from USDA facilities;" zoos and breeders.

So what causes sanctuary operators to abandon their own roots and ally themselves with those who want to see pet ownership eliminated? Have they "seen the light," as they would like to think, or have they fallen victim to a form of voluntary brainwashing?

In some cases, a sanctuary may decry private ownership because it's socially and financially popular. FCF placement director Tracy Wilson says, "I know for a fact that many sanctuaries house animals that were not abused or neglected, but the sanctuaries claim a story of abuse about the animal in order to get donations from the public who feel sorry for the animal that was supposedly abused." A sob story about an abused lion cub tends to pull in a lot more donations than that of a beloved bobcat whose owner passed away.

There are other reasons that some sanctuaries hold themselves above private owners. As Tim Stark of Wildlife In Need points out, "sanctuary personnel tend to become more and more self righteous depending on how long they've been doing it, and how large of an operation they're working with." The very people who condemn private owners as being on an ego trip often boast their own, far greater, sense of delusional self-importance.

Stark's comment brings to mind my earliest experience with a big cat handler. He was exhibiting two adorable tiger cubs at the county fair, and I wanted to meet them in the worst way.

While I understand the legitimate reasons he may have had for preventing contact with the cubs, the arrogance of the way the handler refused my request provided a bitter taste of the holier than thou, "handling a big cat is rocket science" crowd. Living with these animals is challenging, and while it can be tempting to feel that one is part of an elite few, human beings have walked on the moon, invented the computer, and learned how to do laser brain surgery. I think a reasonable number of us are also capable of handling cats!

However, I feel that the biggest contributing factor to the "Embittered Sanctuary Operator's Syndrome" is the constant exposure to the dark side of man's treatment of animals. When faced with heart-wrenching situations, it's natural to cry out for a way to end them once and for all; to take some action that will miraculously cause the suffering to simply go away. The animal rights party line claims that these problems would disappear if people couldn't own exotic pets, and those under the extreme stress of trying to fix a problem with no solution are more likely to abandon critical thinking for a band-aid for the soul.

As I learned volunteering at a domestic animal shelter, animal welfare work inevitably brings one into contact with the worst of owners and the saddest of situations. I'll never forget the man who walked in and announced that he wanted to buy all of our Rottweilers, revealing to me that he planned to house each one of them in an old car and breed them to sell as guard dogs! There was the man who, when informed that there was no room in the shelter, withdrew a gun to shoot the dog he wanted to get rid of. One dog had spent all of his life on a chain. A cat arrived bleeding from all four feet because its paw pads had been burned off.

I lost count of the number of tiny kittens brought in by people who had found them dying in cardboard boxes, burlap sacks, or simply lying in the woods. Sick kittens, injured kittens, starving kittens, hypothermic kittens, abused kittens, you name it. We were reduced to housing them in endless crates stacked one on top of the other in our medical room. Every available cage would be filled to capacity and then we'd get another litter. One day I called potential foster homes for three hours, begging

volunteers to come get kittens and care for them at home until they were old enough to be adopted out or until we had room at the shelter. I was fostering a nursing mother and her sick kittens at home. Staff members arrived at work each day carrying crates containing kittens that they had bottle-fed through the night.

There were the clueless people, too. One of the most memorable incidents occurred on a warm summer day, when the police dropped off a rather damp dog. It turns out that the animal escaped when the woman took her convertible through a drive-in car wash with the top down!

continued on page 16

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AMERICAN ZOO AND AQUARIUM ASSOCIATION



AMERICAN ZOO AND AQUARIUM ASSOCIATION

Mission Impossible.....the Missouri 8

Donna Verba

Baby..Hillary..Bill..Precious..Nabacha..Big Boy..Chelesa..Di

Little did I know back in the beginning of August last year what I got myself into when I agreed to find homes for eight adult cougars. Lynn Culver had been contacted by the owner and told that his wife had died and now he was selling his home and couldn't take these cats with him and he needed to place them in six weeks. Lynn asked me to take on the project. I accepted the challenge and climbed aboard the roller coaster ride. First you are running smooth then the bottom drops out and your stomach turns upside down. Six weeks turned into six long months, but finally the last cougar has a new home.

How do you find homes for eight cougars? A cat this big is not for everybody. First things first - get the information on the cats, and



then post it to the Internet lists out there. That was the easy part. From there things escalated beyond my expectations. E-mail after e-mail, I had a separate folder just for

the cougars so I could keep up with all of them. Each inquiry or promise built hope, but for a multitude of reasons many of the homes did not materialize.

I received e-mail from the wolf lists. A non-feline person offered help; a good man. As it turned out this is exactly what he was, Sam Goodman, how appropriate. Sam posted to his wolf lists and I received more leads on places for these eight cougars. Sam stepped up and offered to transport any of these cougars, for only the cost of fuel. I warned him of what he might be getting himself into and he was still willing to help.

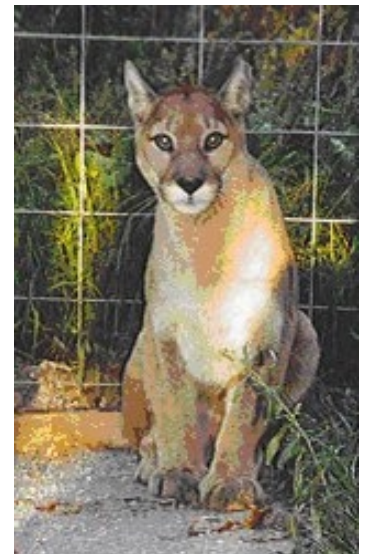


When you get involved in a placement like this, you get emotionally involved. Since founding Walk on the Wild Side Sanctuary, we have provided refuge for lynx and bobcat. Over the years I have boarded some of Lynn's cougar offspring, and fed and cared for her cats when she and Bart went on vacation. I know what is involved in caging and caring for cougars and I

felt it was time for me to give one of these needy cats a home. My husband was not thrilled with this idea, he said, "I don't want anything here big enough to eat me." Yeah right, like that was going to stop me.

Michael began construction on a new cage and asked, "What are we building this cage for?"

"In case we need an extra cage in the future", I answered. Mind you now, this cage was constructed with cattle panels and we have small cats. Bless his heart, he didn't make the connection. I gave him a break when I left the end of August to go on my once-in-a-lifetime vacation to the Ecuadorian jungle. When I returned, every thing was full speed ahead.



Plans were already in place for the first two cougars to be delivered here. I broke the news to my husband the night before they arrived. Gave him something to sleep on. He took it rather well, all things considered. There are now three of the

Missouri eight here, and guess what? My husband is the one spoiling them. He comes home from work and his first stop is to visit and pet the girls. All this from a man that said, "No way are you taking them."



I made a promise to keep the names of the people who gave the cats a home to myself.

Four cats went to new homes first, and then two came to us. Sam was instrumental in the delivery. All you had to do was



ask and he was willing to go. The last two cougars still needed homes. Finally I received e-mail from someone willing to take Big Boy. He was picked up in early January. That left Baby, and the owner had found a home for her, at least that's what we thought. But when Sam arrived here a few weeks ago he said Baby was still at the property. The people who committed to give Baby a home backed out at the last minute. Here we go again. . . .

It saddened me to think of her up on the mountain alone, her only human contact was dinnertime. Once spoiled and pampered, now she spent her days by herself, something I know she could not understand. One more call for help was launched into cyberspace. Within 10 minutes I received e-mail from an angel of mercy. A caring, loving person offered little Baby a wonderful new home where she will be loved and spoiled like she deserves. Six months after it all began, it is now over, all the adult cougars are in new homes and Baby is temporarily here with us while her new owners make preparations.

These are the lucky ones who have found good homes. Too many end up in facilities so large they never spend time with the cats or know the personality of the animals. My girls here are so loving and so sweet, they have adjusted well in a short period of time. These Missouri eight are truly the lucky ones.

I thank everyone who came forward to help. To those lucky people who gave refuge to one of these exceptional cougars, you have been blessed and so have they, for having you. To Sam Goodman the Good Samaritan from the wolf list, you are truly a good man, my thanks to you for all you have done.

Sam has offered his service to anyone in need of his help in moving animals, all he asks is to pay his fuel costs. He loves to travel and is willing to go on short notice, if you need him e-mail me at; walkonthewildside@earthlink.net I will forward your message to him, then he can go from there and work things out with you.

Donna Verba
Walk on the Wildside
<http://walkonthewildside.org/>



If you see this person with his Wolf-Samoyed cross you can ask for help. This is a Good Man, Sam Goodman & Sol.



If you see this person, run as fast as you can and don't look back, just run and keep running. Don't turn around or stop, or you may hear these words, I want you to do. . . . don't listen run, I gave 6 months, to a, 'could you do me a favor and take care of this?' RUN, RUN like hell.

FCF Extends Special Thanks to Mazuri Animal Feeds for their continuing support of the FCF Exotic Feline Husbandry Course.

Mazuri has graciously granted funds to underwrite the cost of 250 student textbooks.

The FCF Basic Husbandry course has been taught in SD, CA, AR, FL, OH, IN, NC, KS, NV, OR, TX and our next class is scheduled for April 9, 2005 in Columbus, Ohio.



Just in time for spring!
Butternut Farms Wildcat Sanctuary is hosting the next FCF Wild Feline Husbandry Course on April 9, at Lane Aviation at the Columbus International Airport.

The next day students are invited to tour Butternut Farms Wildcat Sanctuary in Johnstown, OH. Flyer is included in this magazine. Be sure to register early, as there is a lot of interest in this class.

Blast from the Past. . .

Long Island Ocelot Club Newsletter
Volume 33 Number 5 September/October 1983

The cover honored artists Balbo, Starns, Morgan, Shulte and Paramore that have illustrated for the club newsletter over the years. Inside J.H. Greve D.V.M., reported two case histories on Lynxacarus mites, and Susan Mathews, B.S., animal behavior consultant, wrote Dealing with feline aggression through the use of a psychoactive drug. Below is a tribute to Mitzi ocelot written by the Kesslers, original LIOC "Old Timers" joining in 1957.

End Of An Era

Body presented is that of a female ocelot in good nutritional condition. Both kidneys are small and two times the length of the second lumbar vertebrae.

The right kidney has several multifocal pinpoint hard white nodules. The bladder and uterus appear grossly normal. The right adrenal gland is small and hard and gritty in consistency. The liver is small.

The chest cavity is filled with 500 ML of sero-sanguinous fluid. Specific gravity = 1.026, sediment reveals red blood cells, white blood cells and chains of rod-shaped bacilli. The lungs are collapsed and have multifocal pinpoint hard nodules. The heart appears small, but otherwise normal.

There is some exostosis present in both scapulo-humeral joints with some abrasion of articular cartilage. This is compatible with degenerative joint disease/arthritis.

In the absence of histopathology and culture it is impossible to identify the organism in the pleural fluid or the type of nodules in the lungs and kidneys.

Ellen Shapiro, DVH

With these few paragraphs we close the door on twenty years.

Mitzi was born in some far-off jungle and came to us in August of 1963 at the age of about 14 months. Her name was Mitzi and we thought her the loveliest creature on four feet. She died August 14th, 1983 at the age of 21 years.

Although you know it is quite inevitable that you will someday have to give up your unique companion, it is nevertheless no easier when it happens. We were extremely fortunate to have her for the length of time we did. She remained until the last a free spirit, unfettered with any demands from her human companions, her needs were few and we honored them with some few exceptions such as claw trimming. I can still smile and remember "My Polish Ocelot". How many humans does it take to trim an ocelot's claws???

She was not as aloof as the preceding may imply. She had her own quarters in our large barn. In the stall next to her resided a horse and the rest of the barn contained an assortment of cows and bulls. This seemed perfect for her as she could go up into her "tree" and watch the rest of the animals. She also was quite cozy in winter and most importantly obtained the humidity necessary to keep her in good health. At feeding time she would play enthusiastically with a celery stalk or chicken wing (after a tummy scratch or a few noshes on a human arm or leg). She did not want the freedom of the house but preferred HER quarters where she felt safe and secure from intruders. We were welcome always if we did not stay too long. I feel that the lack of stress attributed greatly to her remarkable longevity.

Her diet consisted mostly of at least a pound of chicken daily along with adequate greens. Her favorite seemed to be celery stalks, followed by green onion tops and lettuce. Grass, freshly picked was also relished.

In spite of the fact that other animals surrounded her, she never had any fleas or internal parasites. I used no additives to

her food feeling the calcium to phosphorus balance was fairly well balance with chicken.

Her only health problem was a chronic cystitis that we fought for about two years before we moved to the farm. It was a difficult time, as I had to take her to the Small Animal Clinic at Cornell University for culture and sensitivity tests of her urine. In order to accomplish this she had to be put down to obtain a sterile sample from her bladder. We went through all the antibiotics from A to Z and the bugs just kept mutating. When she would spray, her urine would be bloody. Eventually I came to the conclusion that nothing would help and took her off all the medication. She eventually cleared up on her own when she was put into the barn with its high humidity. It seems that in the winters indoors the animal's system is "stressed" and bugs flourish.

The gradual decline that led to her death took almost a year. She was crotchety a lot of the time due to the arthritis in her shoulders and walked quite gingerly. She maintained a good intake of food until about a month or so before she died, then taking about half her normal amount. She had no attention from the vet for the last ten years of her life as it was not necessary and I had no desire to stress her with boosters as isolated as she was.

In discussing her condition with the vet that did the autopsy; she admitted the values she used were those she would use for a domestic cat. Mitzi was about 25 pounds and Dr. Shapiro is not acquainted with normal values for an exotic, so she may be somewhat in error in feeling that the kidneys and liver were on the small side. There is simply no this type of information available to the local veterinarians. The plueral fluids were sent to Cornell University for complete analysis but as of today the results have not come in.

Peg and Jack Kessler

Rehabilitation of Wild Florida Panthers (*Puma concolor coryi*) at the White Oak Conservation Center

Karen Zeigler

The Florida panther once ranged throughout much of the southeastern US, but today only 80-100 panthers remain in national and state parks and in nearby private lands in southwest Florida, making them among the most endangered animals in the world. In 1967, the Florida panther was listed as an endangered species and in 1982 became the Florida state mammal (1). White Oak is a valuable partner with the Florida Wildlife Commission and the US Fish & Wildlife Service in Florida panther recovery. Our involvement began in 1986 when we offered our facility to maintain permanently injured panthers or for any rehabilitation needs. White Oak is the only facility in the country that rehabilitates this species to be released back into the wild.

hitraspecific aggression and vehicle collisions are the leading causes of death or injury among free ranging panthers, which can leave dependent kittens without a mother, or cause a serious injury requiring treatment. Orphaned, sick or injured panthers are brought to White Oak for treatment and/or rehabilitation. Their stay has ranged from 52 days to 14 months, with an average stay of seven months. Being the only facility to do panther rehabilitation, we are presented with the cats for rehabilitation but no protocol to follow.

So with some common sense and past experiences ... we developed a solid management protocol for rehabilitating panthers.

We have found there are four very important requirements to ensure the panthers get the best chance at a successful rehabilitation. The panthers must have large, naturalistic enclosures, minimal human contact; no established routines and access to as many natural food items as possible, including live prey, which is essential for orphaned panther kittens since they lack the hunting skills they would have learned from their mother. We have several naturalistic enclosures ranging from one to ten acres that we use for rehabilitating panthers. Human contact is kept to a minimum during their entire stay, and care is taken that no routines are established. The road to the enclosures is closed to all traffic and all maintenance in the area is discontinued. Food is delivered to the enclosure at various intervals, days, times, and locations.

We leave a working radiotelemetry collar on these cats during their entire stay at White Oak as a precaution since they are housed in large heavily wooded enclosures that have the risk of a tree falling on the fence allowing

continued on page 13

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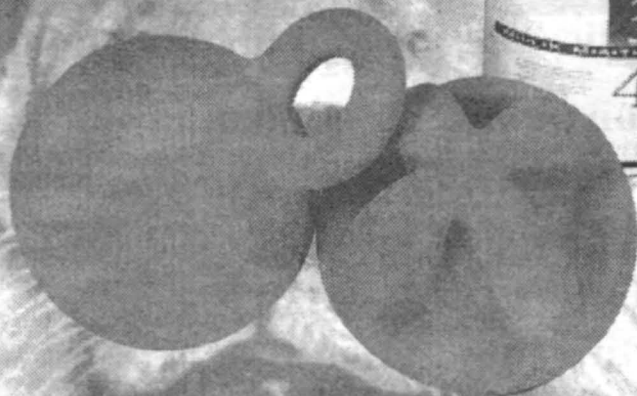
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Florida Panthers at White Oak, *continued from page 11*

possible escape. Putting collars on such young cats, which is not done in the wild, presents us with an additional challenge. If the collar is put on too loose there is a risk of them getting a paw stuck in the collar while trying to remove it. The young cats grow quickly and often require the collar to be enlarged at least once, to as many as three times, during their stay, so we must be able to monitor these panthers closely, which can be difficult with secretive cats in such large enclosures.

Methods for monitoring these cats and their collars include the use of video equipment and/or a camtrak camera. A CamTrakker camera is a weather-resistant, fully automatic camera with an infrared heat-in-motion detector. When something that moves and gives off heat passes by, a silent electronic switch engages the camera to take a photograph. While both of these methods enable us to monitor the cat's condition, neither has been reliable for determining if the collar is too tight. Occasionally it is necessary to station a keeper in a blind to wait for the panther to come into view. Since we avoid any routine with regards to feeding, this can be a long wait. Sometimes we must rely on previous panther growth data to make an educated guess on when to change the collar.

While we are careful not to establish routines, we still have to be able to capture the panthers for collar changes, and for their pre-release health exam. To facilitate this, the panthers have continuous access to a building/corral that is attached to their enclosure. During their entire stay they are randomly fed inside this corral in order to keep them habituated to entering this area.

We increase the frequency of corral feedings as the capture date approaches. Each corral is set up with a guillotine drop door for easy capture. A food item is tied to the back of the corral and once the panther pulls on the food item the door drops quickly and captures the panther.

Criteria for release back to the wild depends on the reason the cat has required rehabilitation. If orphaned, they must be at least one year of age to have achieved a level of maturity sufficient for independent survival, and they must have had the opportunity to kill live prey. A sick or injured adult can be returned just as soon as their condition improves. Each animal is immobilized for a final health exam, fitted with a new radio collar and then taken the same day to the location of their original capture, and released. Newly released panthers are monitored very closely for the first several weeks to make sure they have adjusted to life in the wild. To date, we have rehabilitated and released eight Florida panthers back into the wild since 1987.

Reprinted from the 2004 Felid TAG summary reports
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We Goofed! The FCF editor would like to apologize for a mistake in the November/December 2004 issue. The photo on page 38 is not Rick Thomas. A photo of Dirk Arthur and his big cats was accidentally substituted.

'To A Cat'

*Mirrors are not more wrapt in silences nor the
arriving dawn more secretive;
you, in the moonlight, are that panther figure
which we can only spy at from a distance.
By the mysterious functioning of some divine
decree, we seek you out in vain;
remoter than the Ganges or the sunset, yours is
the solitude, yours is the secret.
Your back allows the tentative caress my hand
extends. And you have condescended, since that
forever, now oblivion, to take love from a flatter-
ing human hand.
You live in other time, lord of your realm - a
world as closed and separate as dream.*

~Jorge Luis Borges (1899-1986)

snip from biography
[http://www.themodernword.com/borges/
borges_biography.html](http://www.themodernword.com/borges/borges_biography.html)

"Young Georgie was also fond of the zoo,
and spent countless hours gazing at the
animals, particularly the tigers, his favor-
ites. As he would later remark toward the
end of his life: I used to stop for a long time



of the tigers cage to see him pacing back and forth. I liked his natural beauty, his black stripes and his golden stripes. And now that I am blind, one single color remains for me, and it is precisely the color of the tiger, the color yellow. In fact, a common punishment meted out to the young Georgie was to deny him trips to see his beloved tigers."

Turn Up the Heat at the 34th Annual FCF Convention in Miami! July 27-30

The 2005 extravaganza is shaping up to be another do-not-miss event with plenty of fun and information to be shared with your feline loving friends. Our special guest this year will be Dr. Bhagavan (Doc) Antle, director of The Institute of Greatly Endangered and Rare Species (T.I.G.E.R.S. www.tigers-animal-actors.com). Doc is one of the world's most renowned animal trainers with well over 200 motion picture and television credits, including Ace Ventura, the Tonight Show, and King of the Jungle. He will have several of his animals for us to meet and enjoy.

Our base camp this year will be the Hilton Doubletree Grand hotel located in the heart of beautiful downtown Miami, overlooking Biscayne Bay. This spectacular setting provides a fitness room, pool, jogging track, fishing, playground, basketball court, tennis courts, 5 in house restaurants, day care, and more!

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The Hilton Doubletree is just blocks from I-95, 6.5 miles to Miami's International Airport, and 26 miles to Fort Lauderdale Int'l Airport. The FCF Convention room rate special is \$79 double occupancy. We have again secured special permission to allow our members to bring their cats with them to the hotel to join those Doc will be bringing. A damage deposit will be required for those keeping cats in their room. To make reservations, call 1-800-853-0270 (make reservation for the Doubletree Grand Hotel, Biscayne Bay) or 305-523-3321. Ask for the FCF special rate at either phone number.

***Start making plans now so you won't miss
this fun in the sun event.***

We can use a few FCF volunteers to help operate the hospitality suite and registration tables. If this sounds like you, please contact Bobby Bean.

Embittered Sanctuary Operator's Syndrome, *cont. from page 6*

This is the domestic equivalent to what many sanctuary operators see, and frankly if those were extent of my experiences with animal welfare, I'd probably hate pet owners by now too. But through all that there was a saving grace that most sanctuary operators never get the opportunity to experience.

Throughout my time at the shelter, the heartwarming moments and the wonderful people far outweighed the bad. Those kittens stacked in the medical room were cared for by loving volunteers until each and every one of them found a good home. Some families arrived at the shelter intending to adopt one cat, only to fall in love with the tough little mother cat who'd been raising her litter on the streets and end up going home with her and a couple of her kittens. Others would open their hearts to the shy little black kitten hiding in the corner of the cage, knowing he might otherwise be one of the last to find a home.

The cat with the burned paw pads made a full recovery and went to live in a wonderful new home. The dog who'd lived on a chain was introduced to other dogs and the joys of racing through the sand dunes in the humane society's huge outdoor exercise areas. He lived happily at the shelter until just the right person walked through the door and took him home. We saw people open their homes to elderly animals, animals needing expensive surgery or ongoing medication, shy animals, and aggressive animals.

The operators of many exotic feline sanctuaries fall victim to a skewed perspective. The typical sanctuary takes in animals for life, and sees only the parade of heartbreak. Without the reward of successful adoptions and the joy of seeing the animals you've rescued living in wonderful homes, without meeting the fine people who adopt and cherish them, how could one fail to become bitter?

Servals.org placement coordinator Sara Comstock sees this process beginning in her life. "Slowly, I see myself as countless others do, sway towards opposing "private ownership," not in hopes of banning private ownership, but in hopes of forbidding any new owners taking possession and at a later date, wanting to get rid of the animal. It breaks my heart to learn of an exotic in need of a home, because the "newness" of owning an exotic has diminished, or their exotic laws have changed to banning or regulations, or the exotic can not produce offspring, or the exotic gets too old or becomes ill."

"Their hearts start in the right place, rescuing unwanted and neglected exotic animals, says Comstock. "However, after a time, the sanctuary owner/operator soon realizes that what they have done is found an easy way out for the exotic owner to "get rid" of their animals."

So what can be done to prevent this process? It all comes down to maintaining perspective and not letting emotion cloud critical thinking. Wilson has avoided becoming embittered by maintaining contact with responsible private owners. "I find that most owners are interested in ongoing education to learn how to properly care for their cats and provide the very best life for their cats that they can. I also know more spoiled rotten exotic cats than cats in bad situations, and it's a good feeling to know there are so many happy cats out there in good homes."

Everyone needs to stop and realize that neglect, abuse, and getting rid of

pets for unjustifiable reasons are not merely exotic animal issues; they're problems that face those involved in domestic animals every day. As a matter of fact, these aren't even animal issues; we behave just as appallingly towards our own species. There is absolutely no reason to believe that these problems are any more prevalent in exotic animals. Put any pet in the hands of the human population and a percentage of people will treat that pet badly. It has nothing to do with these animals being "harder to handle." There are horses, bulls, and large aggressive dogs out there that are every bit as dangerous and difficult to care for as an exotic feline.

We torture, rape, and murder our own children. Much as one might hate to admit it, we won't see the end of animal abuse, violence, or war until we learn a great deal more about human nature and how to moderate our own behavior. Until that time, those of us who have a calling to make a difference where we can should focus our efforts where they will help the most; on helping the animals in need that we come into contact with. Devoting resources to ending pet ownership is like trying to stop a hurricane by blowing it away with a fan; utterly pointless and ineffective, helpless to alter the forces that caused the storm to form in the first place.

It's a powerful impulse is to find someone or something to blame. But rarely are things so simple that such a scapegoat can be accurately identified. Let's look at one potential culprit; the breeder. We all know that some breeders are irresponsible and only out to make money. Once again, I want to emphasize that this is not merely an exotic animal problem; we have domestic breeders to thank for such profiteering innovations as puppy mills and pet shops. But let's try to argue that if all breeders were somehow forced in some way to become "responsible," these problems would melt away. Unfortunately, this supposition falls apart when one looks to the domestic animal shelter model.

In good shelters, potential owners are carefully screened and interviewed by caring, smart people with the animal's best interests in mind, and adoptions are declined if they feel the new home is not appropriate. However, I have seen and been part of situations where animals were adopted out to what seemed like the perfect owner, yet we found out days, months, or years later that the animal was gotten rid of, neglected, or abused by that perfect family. THE INDIVIDUAL OWNER who does these things is at fault, fair and square; not the breeder, not the shelter, not the pet owning population, but the *individual*.

For those who are still convinced that outlawing pet ownership is the answer, let's look at the actual impact such laws would have on sanctuary operators and on animal welfare. What do you honestly think will happen if private ownership of exotics is truly banned?

Answers from the TV Animal Experts

LARRY KING with JACK HANNA 12/24/04

KING: What makes a zoo great?

HANNA: What makes a zoo great. A great zoo is educational, whether it's Columbus, San Diego, whatever — L.A., whatever zoo it might be.

KING: Are there still an anti-zoo movements, people against them?

HANNA: There are those. But I think problem is they really don't understand the value of what we do in zoological parks. Ninety-nine percent of our animals come from other zoos, they don't come from the wild, no. 1. No. 2, the educational value of most people, 99.9 percent of people would never be able to go where I've been to film, so we have to teach people about these animals in the wild. And what better way to do it than on LARRY KING LIVE and shows to show you a living creature, that they're ambassadors to their cousin in the wild. They're there to teach.

LARRY KING with STEVE IRWIN 11/25/05

KING: How do you react to those who say, the Siegfried's and Roys, the Steve Irwins, the Jack Hannas, zoo keepers you're all really unfair. That's not the way animals live. You don't put them on a stage. You don't put them in a cage. Animals belong where they belong.

IRWIN: What a great question.

KING: That's why I asked it.

IRWIN: Mate, I think the world is made up of a lot of people with different views and different chemistry. Thank goodness for that. It makes it the wonderful world we've got and if they have that opinion and want to voice that opinion, that is their God given right and I applaud them for that. However, I don't agree with that. I believe that the time has come where if we don't get animals into people's hearts, they're going to go extinct. We're running out of time right now, Larry, right now as we stand here. Ninety percent of our fish are being lost, our great apes are being caught up in the bush meat industry. Their habitat's being destroyed, They're caught in a war. They've got AIDS. It's a like they are dying. Our animals are dying at such a great rate and if you can't get wilds into people's hearts, then we haven't got a hope in heck of saving them because people don't want to save something they don't know.

KING: So you have to introduce them to them?

IRWIN: Yeah, mate. I've taken it one step further. At Australia Zoo, you can actually pet the koala. It has to be contact, now. I believe in full contact, not necessarily big cats and crocs. But things that relate to people really well, like koalas, kangaroos, pat them, kiss them, hug them, smell them because if we don't, mate, we're going to lose them all. Koalas are going to go extinct, so many species here in mainland North America are going to go extinct, everywhere in the world. Extinction is the big E word mate.

Sanctuaries will learn the true meaning of the word "flooded." Comstock says, "It is becoming more common to see owners trying to find new homes for their exotics because a new law banning or regulating ownership is enforced or passed." When people can no longer legally possess their pets, the only places for them to go are the very sanctuaries that are pleading with legislators to pass ban laws because they are overrun with unwanted cats!

As to the welfare of those displaced cats, Stark has found that some sanctuaries are no better than the private owners they criticize. He says "I've seen sanctuaries for animals, both exotic and domestic, that were disgusting." Wilson notes that "Ban laws will also make it difficult for new sanctuaries to get started." Talk about shooting yourself in the foot.

After all, bans don't work! That's right; forbidding private ownership does *not* end neglect or abuse. The most infamous abuse case in recent history was the discovery of dozens of dead and decaying tiger cubs along with tigers and leopards in various state of neglect at the California facility Tiger Rescue. The operators allegedly failed to acquire required permits and violated animal cruelty laws. If atrocities like this can occur in a state so heavily regulated that one cannot legally own even a ferret, what is the justification for barring responsible exotic pet ownership?

Sanctuary operator Donna Verba remains firmly convinced that responsible ownership should be allowed, noting, "Neglect or abuse is not responsible ownership; this is the product of ignorant, unedu" As Stinner aptly observes, "Abuse and neglect are illegal even for domestics. More laws on top when they are usually already breaking some don't mean they will suddenly begin to comply."

Next issue, the second half of this article will put forth some suggestions on how the exotic feline community could improve the rescue and placement process, easing the burden on sanctuaries.



PETA wants fur to fly over two loose tigers in North Carolina

Marcus Cook

As I am sure we are most aware of, just in the last month there were two young tigers found roaming loose in North Carolina just outside of Charlotte. Animal control officials for the county received several 911 calls from passing motorists that had seen the two youngsters roaming around a busy street. Upon arrival, officials, with the help of about 50 plus curious civilians started a quick search of the cats, and within a very short time located and took custody of the animals with much ease, and no problems.

Of course, the very next day rendered a complete barrage of AR statements ranging from “look at what someone abandoned”, “this is why exotics should not be kept in NC”, all the way to calls of folks “how do I adopt them!” It is no secret that the “powers” at the NC Zoo have been trying to pass a ban bill in that state for sometime now. And of course, within 24 hours of the young cats being taken by animal control, guess what,...? Yep you guessed it,...the NC Zoo starts using them as a “crusade situation” to re-fuel their campaign.

Well, darn the luck, our company just happened to have two, (2) full tiger exhibits in that state which were conducting an education tour over a 22-day period. It did not take long for the media to contact us and get our version of the situation, and we happily cooperated with them. And I am sure that those AR powers up there still have a hit-man out after us!...<a joke,...grin, grin>

During that whole week we were interviewed by a ton of local and international radio and television media that broadcasted to over 117 networks nation wide, including Japan. Our message was very simple, after seeing first hand what was happening there, the care of the cats, and most importantly the public’s perception, since I knew the AR and NC Zoo would use this situation to their liking. To make a long story short, the state of NC and its “people” really do not want a ban, nor are they as “torqued up” as the AR folks would want us to believe. Heck, the animal control officer themselves wanted to adopt the cats, and were quoted saying the “only reason he does not do so is because of the feeding cost”. Now remember, this is coming from a person(s) that actually enforce and regulate animal welfare and such in that county.

This was an unfortunate situation, no doubt. However, with what I was espoused to, first hand, and in talking with several that were involved in this process, I truly do not believe that these animals were abandoned,...not for one second. I have been blessed to have been handling big cats for around 18 years, and those were some of the best cared for cats I have seen, their collars were still on them, and they were completely leash trained,...and I mean completely. Those of my fellow tiger owners, know just how much work goes into making a big cat completely comfortable with a leash and collar. Well,...these were almost perfect. Someone cared for these little guys a bunch and spent a ton of time with them. The main problem was getting the immediate care and diet for the cats seen too. The diet the officers were attempting to feed, (hot dog



Marcus & associate & white tiger cub on TV

winnies, etc.) is not the way to go with these guys, plus the fact they were incorrectly sexed, and their weight projections were off by 30%. We were there, and with two fully capable big cat transport and support units, offered to assist in anyway we could, up to and including taking the animals. Well, needless to say once the NC Zoo got word of that, all of a sudden the animals got moved to the zoo within 24 hours, along with the announcement that they would be there “temporarily” for about 60 days, then go to a private “sanctuary” in NC. Gee, I wonder what the rush was? <grin>.

THE BASICS: I found that the NC “powers” that are wanting a ban, are going to have a much tougher time than they think, due to a lack of support and reasoning I was able to detect from the public. When the AR people started their PR crap about the same ol stuff,..i.e. “Look how dangerous these animals are”,.....the most dangerous event of this entire situation was that it was a miracle that no one from all the public that was “assisting” in the capture was injured with all the vehicle traffic,...agghhh,..what a mess that was. Not to mention all of the dozens of people, including the media that handled the animals at the shelter, and even the authorities themselves wanted to adopt the animals if not for the expense. And not a single person was injured, and that was a ton of public contact for these cats. And of course, Ms. Amy Rhodes from PETA released a press release offering a \$2500 reward for anyone who would come forth and identify the owners. Gee,..what a great move you idiot! That’s just what we need, to scare private owners, who truly want to do the right thing in the care for an animal that they “may” have gotten in over their head with,...instead of reaching out to them and saying,..”hey,...we are here to help you,...don’t be afraid to ask for the help”

Those animals were in great appearance, and attitude, and someone really was caring for them,..and I believe that it was just a case of an unfortunate escape. I did think it was interesting to see that Ms. Rhodes, from PETA who used to refer to herself as the self-titled “Animals in Entertain-

continued on page 19

Midwest Exotic Feline Educational Society (MEFES)

Insure survival and maintain gene pool of the exotic feline in captivity. Promote responsible private ownership of exotic felines.

Who is this group? What do they do? Why?

As the newly elected president of MEFES and a member for the past 3+ years let me tell you my answers to the questions mentioned above. I too had asked those same questions when I heard this acronym MEFES.

In 1998, a few Indiana residences established MEFES to support responsible private ownership of the exotic cats here in the Midwest. MEFES is actually a branch of the Feline Conservation Federation (FCF), a non-profit non-commercial organization with international membership. MEFES became a branch of FCF in August 1998.

The annual membership dues of \$20 go to cover the expenses of the quarterly newsletters and meetings. Any person is welcome to join MEFES, to support the cause of insuring survival and maintaining gene pool of the exotic feline in captivity by promoting responsible private ownership of exotic felines. You don't have to own an exotic feline to be a member, although many of our members do have exotics.

We meet quarterly to promote networking for folks of common interest and cause. Many strong and lasting friendships have developed over the years within MEFES. Our meeting agendas include topics such as educational and enrichment opportunities, medical and health concerns, and legal issues. Open discussion and swapping of information plays a vital role during the meetings. Sometimes we have called the troops together, in addition to the quarterly times, for a "work day" to help out a fellow member in need with habitat, maintenance, or construction. This quarterly meeting is also a perfect forum for guest speakers. Our April meeting will include a presentation from an Inspector with the USDA. The meeting schedule this year will be April 16 in Lyons Indiana, July 16 location TBD, and October 15 location TBD. The gathering begins at 12:30 p.m. each of these dates.

Prior to the meeting being called to order, we have a pitch-in style lunch. Usually, the host provides the meat dish and the members bring the side dishes and/or beverages. The fellowship is wonderful. The ideal locations to house our meetings are animal facilities or someplace where our exotic cats are welcome. It is not uncommon to see someone bottle feeding baby kitties during the meeting. Some folks will bring their beloved cats with them and set the travel kennel up in the meeting room. Behind the scenes tours are exciting too. Don't forget to always have copies of your permits when transporting your animals. The meeting agendas/details and map are sent prior to each meeting.

This year, I would like to get a web page to house much of this information and establish an email address to ease our MEFES member communications. As determined in our January 15 meeting a few weeks ago, our timeline is expected to go live prior to beginning of second quarter.

I am proud to serve with and represent this fine group of "Midwest" people who strive to better the life of our exotic feline friends while enhancing our own daily lives in return. If you would like more information, please feel free to contact me at photle1@comcast.net. If I don't have the answer, I'm sure I can connect you with someone who does. We have a vast resource of information within the group.

Sincerely,

Pam Hotle
MEFES President

24 Jan 2005

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Two Loose Tigers in NC,

continued from page 18

ment Specialist", now referring to herself as "Animals in Entertainment Supervisor". When I called to ask what the difference was, and why the change,...I got hung up on,... go figure.

I don't believe that NC will see a ban anytime soon, but we SHOULD NOT LET OUR GUARD DOWN,..and we should stay on top of the issues in that state, and be ready should the "ban monster" shows its ugly, and very untruthful head again. Keep up the good fight!

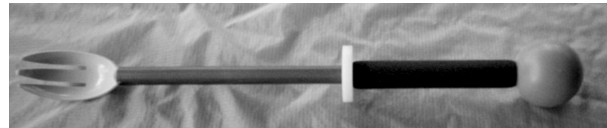
Judy Jezl

Helping Aya

Attending the FCF Conference is always a treat. I get to meet you and discuss with you, and learn about your cats. I always have fun going to you conferences and this time was no different. I was able to start creating new products for exotic cats this year. Animal Capture Equipment, Inc. (ACE) has added so many for other species that were on the list and are now getting to the list you created for me on the 2003 conference in Ohio. This was our first conference with you, and where I truly began to respect you, your conservation efforts and your animals.

We were able to start carrying Telinject, and Pneu Dart products. We can now get stainless steel mesh for cages, this is a custom request product and not listed in the catalog. We were able to help out a few of your members with capture blankets. We're looking for better materials to make them last longer. George Stowers and a few others commented on wanting them after seeing the quilt I made and donated to your auction in the 2003 conference. It enables you to hold your smaller cats and keep them calm while administering medications. They seemed very happy with them and have worked well.

Another thing we did this year was to work with Stephanie Libianski at the Houston Zoo on several large carnivore projects. Her first request was for feeding devices with



targets that would help the keepers interact and train with their cats without getting keeper hands into feeding mouths. We placed guards before the grip so the cats couldn't pull the keeper hands into the cage. This proved fun to do; we created a meat stick, a spork stick and a slotted scoop. The targets help with the behavior training while giving them positive reinforcement with the food. The training has been really beneficial. The jury is still out on which one the keepers like the best. I don't think Martha, the cougar in the pictures had a preference either.

The second request just drew me in and I'm determined to see it through to the right answer. They have a snow leopard, Aya, that bit off part of her tongue. They are not sure how it happened since it happened in the night and no evidence was left except a little blood on the floor. She seemed to figure out eating without a problem. Just goes to show how resilient she is. The lack of tongue makes it hard for her to groom herself.



I met her the day after she was tranquilized, they had just cleaned her teeth, groomed her, and other tests they needed to do. Twice a year they have to tranquilize her to groom her — which is very bad for her liver, as you already know. Even getting out of the effects of the

drugs, she was just sweet. Stephanie wanted to know if there was something we could do to keep them from having to put her under so frequently. I took on this challenge immediately.

That day on the way back to the shop I had stopped for the parts, and created a brush on a stick that could fit between the bars of her cage. I delivered it the next day. This wasn't a very successful design. It seems that human brushes, even for longer hair is no match for the long, thick fur of a snow leopard. It caught up in her fur and broke. Back to the drawing board. I discussed the requirements with some groomers, I'm sure that they have run into something similar... not exactly like the one the zoo is facing. With their help, I found a dematting tool that would fit within the specifications of the cage holes. I put this onto a stick and delivered it.

I found another brush. This one didn't break, but it still is not getting into the fur like it needs to. I continued to look for a

better brush. I found someone who makes industrial brushes with bristles that just might work. I explained to him about Aya. Sometimes people are just great, he volunteered to make a brush within the specifications of the cage for nothing just to see if it would work. When I told Stephanie, she was a little surprised at the cost, really happy and relieved, I think, to know I wasn't just giving up on these two attempts. As soon as I get his part of the brush, I'll get it over to the zoo to test it, hopefully before this issue gets published. Once this works we will be offering some rub brushes to put inside cage that should be very effective in getting into the fur. I am determined to see this project through. My goal is to keep the zoo from having to tranquilize Aya.

I'm still working on your request Pat and Harold—I haven't forgotten you. It's just not as easy of a request to do correctly. I'm always open to any request for products that are needed no matter how small or large. I will diligently work on it. We build to make a living, but invent to make a better world for you and your animals.

News from Playa de Oro

Dear FCF,

The January FCF tour to Playa de Oro was a small one, but many FCF members not able to go along participated by contributing to what I believe is still the only reserve in the world which focuses specifically on the protection of the smaller species of neo-tropical felids (ocelots, margays, oncillas, and jaguarundi).

FCF Director Tracy Wilson sent along \$1000, funds raised from those of you who bought a raffle ticket at last year's convention. This will be used primarily to care for our ambassador ocelot Little Chief and to further the reserve's rescue and release efforts.

FCF member Grace Lush, who has visited the reserve four times, sent along prenatal vitamins and other useful materials for the village clinic, plus some very pricey medicine for one of the reserve's former guides, unable to work now because he is suffering from a severe case of forest yaws.

FCF members Carl and Gail Maier sent along \$3000 to buy materials and employ local carpenters to build solid chicken coops throughout the village. This is critically important, because like coyotes and other predators in North America, ocelots and margays like nothing better than a fat tasty chicken. The people of Playa de Oro have no grocery stores; they are entirely dependant upon what they find in the forest, in the river, or raise themselves. They do not have enough surplus food that they can afford to lose chickens to wildcats. As long as the chickens are easy to get at, wildcats will creep in at night and take what they can, thus creating a conflict between the reserve's human and wildcat population. Up until now, village chicken coops have been built of thin bamboo and light wire—not much of an obstacle for a hungry ocelot! Now, thanks to the Maiers, the community has the resources to build cat-proof chicken coops. Once the chickens are inaccessible to predators, the cats will

no longer prowl the village at night, where they themselves will be at risk of retaliation from irate chicken owners who have suffered repeated loses.

On this trip as on others there were the unforgettable experiences of a watching village children do traditional dances, a hike to a waterfall and lagoon deep in the jungle, gold panning and riding the current in pristine Rio Santiago, and a boat trip further upriver to see a fascinating geological formation called "La Cathedral", carved out by the river over thousands of years. On one hike, the group spotted a rare Cebus monkey, as well as a sloth (which the locals call "perezoso" or "lazy one"). As always, butterflies and tropical birds—especially hummingbirds—were everywhere. Then there was the midnight "hunt," in which everyone participated, to find and relocate a particularly loud frog who had established himself right outside the lodge—his incessant croak sort of the rainforest equivalent of a barking dog under your bedroom window.

On a night just one off full moon, the pre-dawn huffing of a wild ocelot woke us all. In the morning, our resident ocelot Little Chief was very agitated, probably feeling that his silent macho presence had single-handedly fended off the intruder. Little Chief is in excellent physical condition, and although he is not well-behaved enough to roam freely when there are guests at the lodge, when only the staff is there he is let out of his enclosure to prowl the surrounding forest. Given his age (about 14 months), we suppose he is looking for a mate. If he finds one, perhaps she will persuade him to forsake the reliable feedings at the lodge in favor of a self-sufficient life with her in the wild. Or perhaps not. Maybe he will merely contribute some of his genes to the local pool, and keep returning to his indulgent caretakers at the lodge. Either way, he can roam this protected forest at will, without fear of human hunters.

The next FCF tour to the reserve will be on April 1, and as always, the reserve's director extends an invitation to all of you to visit and personally see the exotic cat conservation project you are supporting.

Rosa Jordan

Arena Sale

**Two complete arenas
1 Round 1 Octagon**

Round Arena:

21 panels, 1 door panel for humans 1 panel with Guillotine for cat loading

Each panel is 4' by 12' with drop pins for hinges. It also comes with a mantrap for safety! EXTREMELY heavy made. Also has 8 heavy duty plant hangers for large baskets. It is 12' tall, 32' across and 84' around. \$3,500.00



Octagon Arena:

16 panels total, NO pins or clamps design, an instant 40 foot containment yard

8- 16' by 8' foot sidewalls 8- 4'4" by 16' foot cantilever panels

One panel has two slide side loading doors for cats, one panel has human loading door Plus a mantrap \$4,500.00

Picture is of prototype arena that used clamps and pins, New design has no pins or clamps but is the same shape and design as the prototype pictured.

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YES, VIRGINIA, THERE ARE COUGARS IN THE EAST

Chris Bolgiano

BIO: Chris Bolgiano is the author of *Mountain Lion: An Unnatural History of Pumas and People*. Her forthcoming (and her fourth) book is a collection of eastern cougar source materials entitled, *The Eastern Cougar Anthology: History, Mystery, and Science of Eastern North America's Great Cat, From the Time of Columbus to the Present*. She is also vice president of the Eastern Cougar Foundation, a nonprofit dedicated to recovery of wild cougars in the East (www.easterncougar.org)

It used to be that wildlife officials simply laughed at the possibility of wild cougars living east of the Mississippi. Drunkenness, delusion, deceit – these were the explanations offered (sometimes quite rudely) by the wildlife establishment for the persistent sightings of eastern cougars. Throughout the twentieth century, cougars in remote places continued to be reported. In fact, during the second half of the century the number of sightings increased so dramatically that they became a phenomenon in themselves.

Why do people want to believe they've seen the rarest and arguably the most dangerous animal in the woods? Surely there is an element of thrill seeking, in a culture addicted to the fastest, biggest, and fiercest, whether in machines, mountains, or animals. For many people, cougars are the most magnificent embodiment of wild, uncontrolled nature. But even where populations of cougars are known to exist, sightings are notoriously inaccurate and therefore not accepted by scientists. "There's never any field evidence," was the official response to all sightings — until the 1990s, when the situation changed dramatically.

Confirmed field evidence began to accumulate, and at an astonishing rate. Documentation in the form of DNA and other analyses conducted by highly regarded biologists can now be found in peer-reviewed scientific journals, reputable newspaper articles, and governmental agency file memos and reports. This continuing trend may be due to increasing numbers of cougars throughout the East, increasing numbers of people living in rural areas, increasingly sophisticated DNA and other technology, or increasing interest by the press in reporting alleged encounters – or all of the above. To avoid looking completely incompetent, state and federal agency biologists have had to acknowledge that there are a few cougars out there. To deal with this development, they have shifted the argument to a question of origins. The official line now is that the cats being documented couldn't possibly be remnant natives and must all be FERCs (feral escaped or released captives) from subspecies other than that designated as the endangered eastern cougar.

No one has proven – or is likely to be able to prove — that remnant native cougars did not survive in the deep woods of the Northeast or the Southern Appalachians, the most likely refuges. A second possible source of cougars in the East is migrants from the west (coyotes moved eastward decades ago and are now breeding in every eastern state), and from Florida (Florida panthers are the only officially acknowledged population of cougars in the East, and several radio collared males have been tracked moving north). *continued on page 25*



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Letter from the President

Greetings Fellow Members

I want to thank the membership for your support in electing me to be your President for the next two years. You also have given me a great group of Officers and Directors to work with. I feel FCF has a great team for the next two years.

I want to say a special “Thank You” to our past President, George Stowers for all he has accomplished for FCF. George was the author of the FCF Husbandry Course and part of the Committee that developed the FCF Model Regulations, both great accomplishments. George was instrumental in opening up the door to the AZA Felid Tag group by being the first FCF officer to attend a couple of their annual AZA Felid Tag meetings. Ever since that time, FCF has sent representatives to the annual meetings.

I’m very appreciative of the work done by the FCF Board of Directors the past two years while I was Vice President. They expanded the offering of the Husbandry Course, field conservation work like the Playa de Oro Rainforest Reserve in Ecuador, and created the FCF Exotic Feline Facility Accreditation program.

It was the FCF members themselves that gave the majority of the money that the reserve took in this past two years. Tracy Wilson, currently a Life Director and our past Conservation/Education Director, deserves a big “Thank You” for all her hard dedicated work as project leader for the Playa de Oro project, managing the offering of the Husbandry Course and her work on the Accreditation

Committee. I want to see FCF continue and even expand our field conservation work and the offering of the Husbandry Course.

As for the new FCF Exotic Feline Facility Accreditation program, I encourage all FCF members – pet owners to exhibitors to apply for this high standard FCF Exotic Feline Facility Accreditation. FCF Exotic Feline Facility Accreditation provides a “Seal of Approval” that the owner meets or exceeds the high standards and is qualified to provide a safe and productive environment for exotic cats.

One of the things I will do as your President is trying very hard to put out sparks before they turn into flames. I want us all to enjoy working together with as little as possible conflicts among us supporters of exotic feline ownership. We must work in harmony with other non-FCF exotic cat groups and individuals who also support private ownership of exotic cats. We need to respect others and work together.

I plan to smooth over some of the pain among a few of our members who took it a little hard over the change of the name of LIOC to FCF. Some of our hardest working most dedicated long time members did not support the name change and I can understand their long association with the name LIOC.

Under today’s climate, we needed a name like Feline Conservation Federation that more truly represented who we were and the immediate recognition to what FCF represents when

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anybody said Feline Conservation Federation. When I or any of the other FCF Directors and members go out in the community, like attending the AZA Felid Tag annual meeting or USDA Big Cat symposiums, we do not get this confused look when we stated we were representatives of FCF. The name Feline Conservation Federation is easily recognizable to who we are. I also feel the name FCF is a good tool to increase our membership. Sadly, a couple of years before the name change, our membership was declining. But since the name change, we have had 10% to 15% yearly increase in memberships.

In the area of Right of Private ownership, first and foremost our members have to recognize that we are under serious attacks from animal activists. This rapacious group, who by the way are a small minority in the general population, see that today's political situation in Washington and in local governments as a great opportunity to roll back decades of progress in the exotic cat husbandry knowledge among the private sector. This small group knows that now is their best chance to "Pry Open The Doors" and take our rights away from us. But the majority of America does not support this type of unfair assault, as most Americans believe in basic rights.

We private owners deserve better. Now is the time for us to work very hard to be proactive instead of reactive. I would like to see a coalition of other exotic cat and animal organizations, pet food companies, veterinarians, veterinarian suppliers, hoof stock owners, domestic cat organizations, National Rifle Association, and many others to work together as a coalition to fight for private ownership rights.

I will be asking our Directors to pursue this effort and I'm confident the Directors will take on the project and will be asking for help from the general membership. Like to see one of our members become the project chairman and form a committee to organize this coalition.

Please feel free to get involved and volunteer to work with FCF activities, as time will allow you to do so. When I joined LIOC, now FCF back in the mid 90's, never in my wildest dreams would I ever think I would run for an FCF office and even be elected. Please consider running for an office, serve on a committee, volunteer to help with a field conservation project like the FCF supported "Playa de Oro Rainforest Reserve, serve as an Husbandry Course instructor assistant, or any other FCF function.

Volunteer examples of non Board members are: Deborah Rabinsky taking on the lead for the newest project FCF is developing of developing a conservation-coloring book of Native American Cats and the Accreditation committee headed up by Kevin Chambers before he was just elected as FCF Vice President. I'm so happy with FCF members like Deborah and Kevin who volunteered to be the leaders on FCF projects. Due to the many FCF duties on their plate, the FCF Officers and Directors need volunteers like Deborah and Kevin.

Consider joining other FCF members and friends at this years FCF annual National Convention to be held in Miami the last week of July. We have a great learning experience and fun networking with other FCF members who have a common interest in the wildcat preservation.

Please submit any cat related articles you have to the FCF Editor. The newsletter is only as good as the membership make it.

Robert Turner

Eastern Cougars, *continued from page 23*

A third source is FERCs. DNA testing has proven that a few recently documented wild eastern cougars have South American genes, testifying to the pet trade. Adult cougars, engineered by nature to continually roam hundreds of square miles and kill their own food, do not adapt well to pet status and some owners have very likely released their hard-to-manage pets.

All cougars can interbreed, and any cougar capable of living free in the wild is capable of filling the eastern cougar niche. But by calling into question the genetic heritage of cougars living wild in the East, wildlife officials are attempting to sidestep the Endangered Species Act, which lists only the Florida panther (*Puma concolor coryi*) and the eastern cougar (*Puma concolor cougar*). Never mind the intent of the Act to preserve rare life forms, or the scientific impossibility of defining unique eastern cougar genes, or the common practice of substituting subspecies from elsewhere in many official wildlife projects (including the Florida Panther Program) when the original genome is extinct or debilitated from inbreeding.

It's not so surprising that even with unarguable field evidence, wildlife officials refuse to change their policy of denial. Clearly, something other than a reasonable demand for scientific validation is at work here. Political support for state wildlife agencies comes in large measure from deer hunters, who generally perceive deer-eating cougars as direct competitors, despite decades of scientific evidence from western studies that contradicts this belief. Plus, deer numbers in much of the East are so high as to cause serious agricultural, motor vehicle, and disease problems.

The fact that cougars can kill people (very, very rarely) and livestock (very occasionally) also make agencies reluctant to tackle the issue. However, western states have developed considerable expertise in either avoiding or mitigating these problems, so eastern wildlife agencies have abundant resources to tap.

Living with a top predator is perhaps the greatest challenge to humankind. The question about eastern cougars is no longer whether they are there, but how we as a society will respond to their presence.

April Tour to Playa de Oro Promises a Photographic Adventure!

Feline Conservation Federation's next tour to the Playa de Oro Reserva de Tigrillos in Ecuador's Choco (coastal) rainforest, will be April 1-10, 2005. Visit the reserve's website at: <http://www.touchthejungle.org>

As you know, FCF is working in partnership with the local people to preserve this important habitat for South America's smaller wildcat species (the ocelot, margay, oncilla, and jaguarundi). This is your chance to find out what is so very special about this amazing tropical rainforest, as well as to pass through remarkably different landscapes and cultures in route to and from Ecuador's beautiful capital city, Quito, and the Choco rainforest.

Ecuador is one of the most biodiverse and culturally rich countries on earth. Its capital is in the high Andes, surrounded by snow-capped volcanoes. From Quito, our tours travel through stunning mountain scenery to Otavalo, home to South America's friendliest and most artistic tribe, there to spend an afternoon in the world-famous Otavalo artisans' market. Next morning we travel by mini-bus down the western slope of the Andes into the Choco rainforest. Where the road ends, we transfer to a dugout boat for a trip up the the swift Rio Santiago to the Afro-Ecuadorian village of Playa de Oro. Then beyond, into the heart of Playa de Oro's rainforest reserve. During our week-long stay in the reserve's jungle lodge, we will follow trails through the rainforest, boat and swim the river, dance with the locals to Afro-Latino rhythms, eat great meals incorporating traditional foods such as plantains, and sleep to the sounds of the jungle.

Join us in April, on our adventures to the Playa de Oro Reserva Tigrillos for an adventure of a lifetime!

The April tour features professional photographer Terri Nash as your guide. Terri has been documenting her adventures with a camera since the early 1980s. Terri's passion for travel and exploration have led her to photograph in 34 different countries producing a collection of images which highlight some of the worlds most intriguing wildlife, landscapes, peoples, and cultures. Some of her subjects include the red ochre plains of the wild Australian outback, the Mountain Gorillas of central Africa, the Maasai people of the Serengeti plains, ancient ruins of Egypt and Greece, the colorful Otavalan Indians of Ecuador, and that part of the rich Choco rainforest, where the Playa de Oro reserve is located.

While outdoor photography has now become Terri's specialty in the field; she has built up her portfolio and knowledge over the years by photographing everything from Olympic sporting events, to portraits and weddings, landscapes, architecture, fine art, food, special events and a vast array of outdoor adventure activities. Her images have appeared in magazines, posters, brochures, trade shows, and in numerous promotional publications. Terri also produces synchronized multi-projector slide shows featuring her images and adventures. She is currently working on a series of photo folders featuring the wilds of western Canada. While in Playa de Oro, she will be doing maintenance and testing on FCF's "photo

photo folders featuring the wilds of western Canada. While in Playa de Oro, she will be doing maintenance and testing on FCF's "photo traps", set up to capture pictures of cats in the wild.

FCF members who have visited Playa de Oro have been generous in sharing their wildlife care knowledge with the reserve's staff. Their main focus is the wild felines that have been rescued and brought to the reserve for release. A young ocelot named Little Chief, orphaned at infancy, resides at the lodge and considers himself part of the staff. Don't miss your chance to meet this little ambassador before he matures into an adult and wanders back into the wild.

The cost for this nine-day adventure is \$700, excluding your airfare to Quito, Ecuador. This price includes two nights at a charming bed & breakfast in Quito, an afternoon at the Otavalo artisan's market and that night in an Otavalo B&B, followed by six nights at the Playa de Oro Reserve Lodge with meals, jungle guides, river trips, a visit to the village, and a children's dance performance all included. Private transportation between Quito, Otavalo, Playa de Oro, and back to Quito is also included.

Your fee supports the Playa de Oro Reserve by bringing income to their village and providing them with work, and also assists with feline conservation projects being conducted at the reserve. In exchange, you will see, taste, smell, and hear ancient rainforest as you have never imagined while being safely guided by local men through the jungle, coming to know the local people and experiencing their river and ancestral forest as they do.

Space is limited on each tour, so please sign up as soon as possible by sending in a deposit to reserve your space. Your \$350 deposit is nonrefundable. If you cancel for any reason, this deposit will not be refunded. If FCF has to cancel the trip for any reason, your entire deposit will be refunded. You are required to have a passport to travel to Ecuador.

Mail payment to the following address, with a note for what trip date you plan to attend. Include your full name, phone number, mailing address, and email address where you can be contacted.

Feline Conservation Federation
3310 Remington Drive
Indianapolis, IN 46227-8126

We can also accept Paypal Payments if necessary for an additional fee.

Please contact me by email at terri@touchthejungle.org or phone 501-368-0399 for more detailed info if you are interested in traveling to the reserve. Independent travel to the reserve is also available at any time, as are private tours for your own group.
<http://www.touchthejungle.org>

The Last Pet Cougar

A "Purrfect Feline"

Amy Rasmussen

Stories about Cougars being sweet, loving pets are not common in public press. Although many Cougar owners are delighted to tell such stories; unfortunately, their stories are ignored because of the sensational stories that surface when Cougars and people meet unexpectedly—many times with tragic although hyperbolized consequences. My story provides some balance to those stories that characterize Cougars as dangerous, wild animal that can never be trusted. As any devoted Cougar owner knows, there is no stronger bond in the human-cat world than the relationship between a loving cougar and its owner. I have one of those stories. And the star of my story is a small, 70-pound cougar called Dawn.

Dawn came to me by accident. She was an unplanned mating between a female Florida panther and a male North American cougar. My friend had rescued the female panther from one of those owners that has created a horrible image for private owners across this county. Notwithstanding the good intentions of my friend to rescue the panther, she was not able to keep her male North American cougar from doing what nature has programmed him to do. Dawn was an unintended consequence.

My friend called me and asked for help. I already had my own small menagerie of cats (a tiger, Canadian Lynx, Caracal, and a few Servals). I did not really want to expand with more cats, but after a couple days of urging from my friend, I relented.



I met Dawn when she was 10 days old. Her eyes were still closed, but I immediately fell in love and I knew she was going to be beautiful. I took Dawn

home. She lived in my house and slept with me for the next two years. She melted my heart every day. She sucked on my finger, put her arm over me in bed and cuddled—boy did she cuddle, and purr the loudest and longest purr of any of my cats. She was housebroken, sweet, and domesticated. She did not start to attack the upholstery until she was about two and half years old. At that time, I had no choice; I had to give her more time outdoors. Although she now spends almost all of her time outdoors, we are still able to have an occasional sleepover. And although her sleeping arrangements have changed, she is still the sweetest and most loving creature with the most beautiful greenish amber distinctive eyes and most impish, inquisitive look of all of God's creatures. I obviously love my Cougar, and I think you would too if you had a chance to meet her.



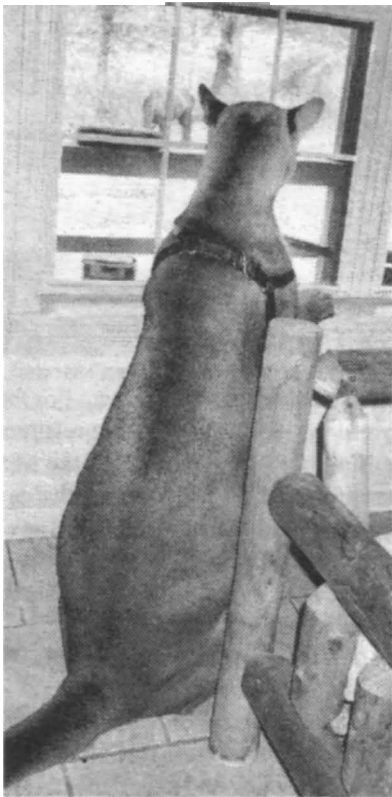
The bond between cats and people is hard to explain. For those abnormal people in the world that don't covet such a relationship it is impossible to explain. For those normal people in the world that treasure their relationship with cats, I have to say that a bond with a Cougar is the ultimate. It is not macho...it is an intimacy on a similar but different plane with human relationships. My relationship with Dawn does not surpass the human type of love between a woman and her husband...her children...her own mother or father, but it is comparable providing richness and fullness. I do not want to get mushy and gushy, but I think it is useful for people to know that Cougars can bond with people and provide that same magic of intimacy and devotion that other pet lovers know and experience. I would like to suggest that a bond with a Cougar is better than the bond with domesticated animals—after all I did live with a mutt for 17 years that was my best friend and almost a sibling—but my relationship with Dawn is even stronger. Such relationships are hard to explain, but I can unequivocally say that raising a Cougar is my most rewarding experience in a life rich with animal relationships.



continued on page 30

FCF Feline Facility Accreditation Program gains discount from EIB

Finding insurance coverage for the exotic cat owner these days can be a trying and exasperating experience. All too often, people are finding their insurance company unwilling to carry them simply for the fact that they own exotic animals. Locating a company that will accept them is like searching for a needle in a haystack. Some new laws are even requiring exotic animal owners to have a specified



amount of liability coverage as a prerequisite for ownership. This means that a growing number of animal owners, both domestic and exotic, are looking high and low to find homeowner's and liability coverage for performing animals, working animals, and pets. There are only a few companies that recognize and understand this need, yet you have to have insurance in order to protect yourself should an event occur and also provide compliance with regional regulations regarding ownership of animals.

Can you give five minutes to FCF?

In this Jan/Feb issue is a membership profile questionnaire. Donna Verba is getting the FCF database caught up and these vital statistics help FCF better represent our members.

We need current e-mail contact info so that we can contact our members needing legislative alerts and updates. We need current feline species inventory. This information is important to know, especially when being interviewed by the press, or speaking before legislative committee members. The more cats held by FCF members, the bigger voice we have for you. You may have answered a member profile in the past year, but please help us again. We are attempting to get the most up-to-the-minute database this spring.

So won't you please help Donna and fill out the enclosed form and mail it back quickly? A big thank-you to all the FCF members who are helping us help you!

Programs such as the FCF Wild Feline Facility Accreditation are a wonderful way of helping exotic cat owners, whether they are a pet owner, breeder, sanctuary, educator, or public zoo, obtain insurance and at the best possible prices. This verified certification of your high standards of facility construction and husbandry shows that you are doing your utmost best to do things responsibly. Proving this also shows that you are lessening your risk of an incident, which an insurer would have to pay for. Showing less risk equates to better insurance rates.

The FCF is proud to announce the following statement from Evolution Insurance Brokers:

Evolution Insurance Brokers applauds the FCF upon their implementation of an accreditation program. It certifies to us that an owner is providing the safest and most responsible care possible. As an insurance broker, those are important facts we look for in order to provide coverage. Evolution Insurance Brokers is offering a 10% discount to applicants with proof of FCF accreditation.

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EXOTICS ARE NOT JUST EXOTICS, THEY ARE FAMILY

Barbara Kirshner

Saying goodbye to a member of the Foundation's family makes writing this piece bittersweet. It is an opportunity for me to talk about the important work we do, in light of the inevitable loss of our beloved cougar, Kira. The Foundation started in 1994, when my son, Barry, made the noble decision to reciprocate the help he had been given by our local community. Barry suffered from dyslexia. He barely slipped through the school system struggling with his inability to read. A professor from a local college took him under her wing and taught him to read. Although he was a successful helicopter businessman and pilot, his true passions lie in working with exotic animals. He felt that if could bring his knowledge and experience to the others, we might have a chance to protect not only local, but also global wildlife from extinction. He was able to formulate a plan to bring environmental education to children in the community with his cougar and varied reptiles. His plan had only just started when he was tragically killed in an auto accident. At the time, I was in charge of a large research facility working with exotics in Canada. I uprooted, sold all my possessions, and moved to Butte County to continue what had been my son's dream. I knew this venture would be a labor of love in memory of my son, but I couldn't anticipate the many lives, both human and animal, we would affect. Even after 54 years of experience working with exotic animals and currently as the executive director and resident lead trainer of the Barry R. Kirshner Wildlife Foundation, I learn something new everyday from my volunteers and the animals. I am fortunate to be able to use my educational knowledge and experience daily to realize his dream.

The cougar emblem honoring Barry's first exotic animal, Tigger, remains our logo. It is with pride that I place Kira, our current resident cougar, in the same honorable position. Kira came to us from facility that was closing down. They were having difficulty placing her because she was a geriatric animal. At the time, the facility's owner estimated that she was 15 or 16 years old. Upon further investigation, it was discovered that she was closer to 20 years of age! We took her in because we knew she would require specialized care and we were in the unique position to be able to provide it for her. That was almost 6 years ago.

Currently, Kira is representative of approximately 72% of our animals. With medical conditions ranging from blindness to metabolic bone disease, our animals would not make it in the wild and were at risk of being put down because of the extensive care each one would need. We take in these animals because of their medical needs not in spite of them. This commitment to care requires an assessment of the animal upon arrival then an individualized premium health care protocol including exercise, nutrition, environment, enrichment, socialization and mental stimulation formulated specifically for that animal. Upon her arrival, we knew from physical observation that something was wrong with Kira, but we couldn't pinpoint what it was. With a blood workup and tests done on

site, we determined that she was in the beginning stages of kidney failure, had a tremendous amount of joint problems, as well as gum deterioration and cataracts. Knowing these ailments dictated her role to be a resident animal ambassador for her species. Another aspect of our evaluation includes determining the way to utilize the animal. Whether it is as an onsite ambassador for their species, a member of our mobile education unit or as a training animal for the volunteers, all the animals play a role in the Foundation. These all-inclusive evaluations need to be reviewed often to ensure no modifications are needed. As Kira's physical condition changed and her age advanced, her protocol needed to be reviewed. By observing her activity level, hydration, and food intake, we agreed that some adjustments would be necessary. Currently, she receives enrichment every 20 minutes of the hour as well as a feeding every 2 hours in smaller amounts to keep her content and comfortable.



In order to maintain this type of round the clock care, the Foundation's volunteers give of themselves. A critical piece in the puzzle of the Foundation, we all work together as a team. Each volunteer has their own gift and something to offer to the success of the foundation. No one person is more important than any other instead we are all links in a chain, connected together and stronger because of it. We all have to be willing to work as a unit putting individual needs after the needs of the animals. Our devoted volunteers don't get paid for what they do and yet they give freely of their time while taking pride in the work they do by keeping the animals warm, content, well fed and hydrated, and ensuring their enclosures are clean.

continued on page 30

The Last Pet Cougar, *continued from page 27*

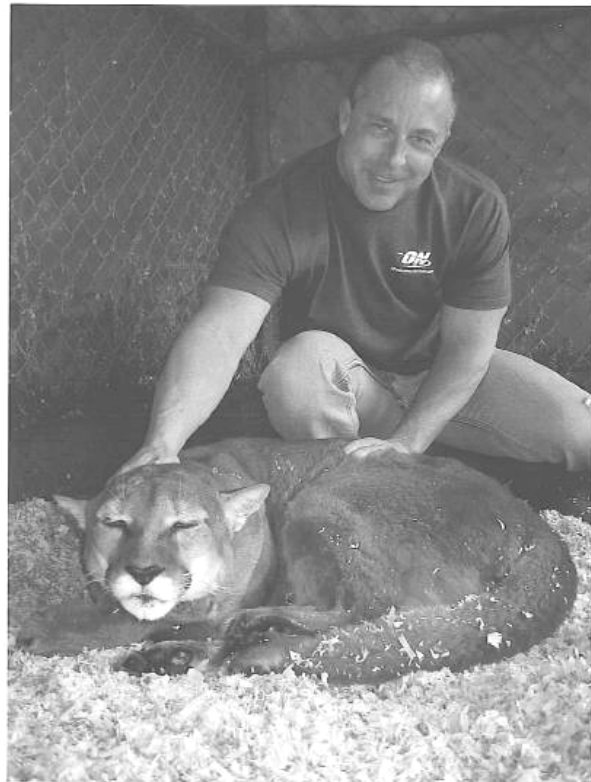
It's getting more and more impossible to legally own and raise a Cougar kitten. I fear that at the rate ban laws are being passed, in the not too distant future experiencing the love of a pet cougar will be nothing more than a 'once upon a time' . . . fairytale story. But if you happen to qualify for a state or federal permit, you must also possess the luxury of time and financial resources necessary to devote to the Cougar's care and upbringing. Not everyone is cut out to be a Cougar owner, one only has to visit some of the exotic cat sanctuaries and see how many pet cougars have been discarded to know that many people find the responsibility overwhelming. And I am not saying that all Cougars are the perfect pets. But I can positively say that I know at least one of them has become a love of my life. I believe that Cougars can be one of the most loving and tame of all the wild cats—and—I have heard other Cougar owners say this also. I have been told that the same can be said for Cheetahs, but that will have to be a story told by someone else that may also be able to describe the genetic similarities between Cougars and Cheetahs—they have many similar features.

Maybe a follow-on story could also put the number of Cougar attacks on humans in perspective and provide a factual input to the feeding frenzy of the media to sensationalize animal attacks—both cats and dogs—on people. I am not qualified, nor do I have the desire to comment on the complex interplay between man's Neanderthal instincts (e.g., sense of fear and drive to survive), new societal pressures to titillate the news' media with a "gawkish" fascination with horror, and man's insensitivity to an increasingly stressed environment. Maybe that's why I treasure my special bond with Dawn—it is a simple relationship between a woman and one of God's special creatures . . . providing a wonder and a special emotion that defies all the confusion in this increasingly complicated world. Cougars, as pets, are not for everyone. They are not pets for my grandchildren or a "photo-op" for an occasional visitor, but in my world with proper caging and a healthy appreciation for the hidden danger that is always there with a wild animal, I have one of God's most "Purrfect Pets."

Exotics are Family, *continued from page 29*

Scheduling depends on the needs of the animals and the volunteers step up to the plate. With Kira's change in care, it is not uncommon for a volunteer to show up at 1130pm to help with giving her intravenous fluids and another to be here at 4am to hand feed her. She like so many of our animals are doing well because of our volunteer's commitment. Our volunteer team spends many hours working side by side, so we discuss our individual dreams, hopes and expectations. Many volunteers have their own personal challenges and my hope is that the time spent giving of themselves at the Foundation will help them to recognize their individual skills and use them in a way that is beneficial. The volunteers vary from students working on an internship to individuals with a passion for animals. We all recognize that we do what we do because of the love and respect we have for the animals not because there will be a reward of financial success. In this business, money is only a tool to follow through on the commitment to giving the animals everything they need and deserve not as a way to elevate your personal financial status.

These expenditures that maintain the well being of our animals and guarantee a high quality of life while assuring their participation in our environmental education programs constitute the day to day operations of the Foundation. Our mission statement encompasses the interweaving of education, conservation and research. Through our programs, the public is educated about the world's wildlife and the many animals that are in danger of extinction. This environmental message coupled with learning how to be a responsible owner of exotic and companion animals is the basis of our



education programs. Our facility is the only one to offer our comprehensive education programs in 9 languages and 8 levels of education. Seeing the beauty of our animals first hand, along with interactive programs we provide, are the catalyst for stimulating young minds to become a part of the conservation solution by creating a sense of personal responsibility and stewardship while inspiring them to do one thing in their lifetime to make a difference for the world's animals.



Our conservation efforts include providing protection, shelter, premium health care and quality of life to non-releasable captive-bred exotic and companion animals that represent a range of endangered or protected species. Our facility is set up like a hospital with an emergency phone tree that enables us to evacuate the premises with all the animals in a period of 5 hours. We have the ability to do procedures like blood work and urinalysis on-site which provides an unparalleled experience for our volunteers going on into the animal medicine field. The procedures we are not yet equipped to do on-site such as surgeries offer us the opportunity to partner with the generous veterinarians and qualified individuals in our area who are available 24 hours a day when we need them. Many of them have only worked with companion animals or livestock so it is an opportunity for them to broaden their base of knowledge as well. When working with exotics it is important to have many options in your approach to their care as no two animals or two situations are alike. After majoring in animal science, minoring in nutrition and trying thousands of alternatives of care, I have in my bag of tricks a mish mash of natural methods and products, as well as eastern and western medicine. With Kira's failing kidneys, we knew we couldn't tranquilize her for any procedures we would perform on her. The addition of Sleepytime Tea to her water took the edge off and made it possible for us to evaluate her.

Other tried and true methods include using Scope for ants, our good old friend bleach for a multitude of uses, rye/wheat grass to assist with enzymatic assimilation, Echinacea/goldenseal/comfrey mixture to combat winter colds, healing clays, and vinegar in their water to conduct food breakdown. These non-invasive methods contribute to our research projects in helping to find alternative ways of dealing with the issues that exotics face. Behaviorally, our Foundation's trainers rely on positive reinforcement training. This type of training takes commitment and adherence to a schedule. Working with and caring for the animals are made that much easier because of this type of training practice. All of the above methods have been used with Kira making her life easier and more rewarding while contributing to extending her time with us.

We recognize that ours is an exceptional situation with a volunteer staff willing to give their all to attend to the activities critical to the animals well being. They acknowledge that the animals and safety come first and foremost. Not a day goes by that I am not grateful to be exactly where I am. If I had to take a vacation, I would choose to stay here. In fact, in 11 years, I have only left for a 24-hour period of time and everyone pitched in to take care of the place. Every day and every cat is a new experience, a new opportunity. I know that love is not enough to have the discipline and commitment it takes to care for these animals. It is about setting realistic goals and being committed to responsible ownership so you don't take on more than you can handle and sacrifice quality of care. Through our experiences on the continuum of life with hospice care for Kira and the anticipated birth and development of our new baby cougar due in the spring, we are fortunate to witness daily the hope for the future of animals around the world.

Barry R. Kirshner Wildlife Foundation
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(530) 345-1700 www.kirshner.org



2005 Legislative Updates – Classic cases of David vs. Goliath

The “just say no” approach of year’s past has lost its effectiveness. FCF has developed the model for state regulations and is actively promoting this approach in the states where we have been asked by members for this help. Only regulations can insure that ‘those who do it right will have the right to do it.’

FCF has mailed legislative action packages to members in states where they are promoting the model regulations and is working closely to educate legislators and Commissioners about the conservation value of privately held gene pools and the FCF approved permit system that protects animals and communities. FCF has sent representatives to voice our position at public hearings.

FCF has increased funding for educational materials; the printing and mailing of packages and the travel expenses to represent FCF at hearings. Any member who wishes to support these FCF efforts through financial donations to help FCF bring awareness to governing bodies about FCF, the conservation work our members do and the Model for State Regulations that FCF has developed, please mail donations to our treasurer at FCF, 3310 Remington Drive, Indianapolis, IN 46227 and note that they are for ‘Project Educate Legislators’

OREGON – by Lynn Culver Senate Bill 661 – the Committee on Environment and Land Use introduced this legislation. Requiring a personal possession permit for all species of wild feline, bears, wolves, primates, and crocodiles. The personal possession permit would be issued by the County Animal Control Agency, and these agencies would administer and enforce these regulations. Applications require descriptions, locations and re-capture plans. Each county would be required to develop caging regulations. Exhibiting of these species is prohibited. This bill terminates State Department of Agriculture’s regulation of exotic animals. Sanctuaries, vets, circuses and accredited educational institutions are completely exempted from any regulations.

KANSAS by Lynn Culver – Tom Harvey, myself and Jim Fouts of Tanganyika Wildlife Park met with attorney Steve Schwarm, of Polsinelli, Shalton, Welte, Suelthaus prior to the January 20 Kansas Commissioners Meeting.

Since the October public hearing, non-human primates have been dropped from the ban. The Simian Society members have been calling commissioners, their wives, legislators, the Governor and retained legal council to represent the SSA’s interests.

This Public Hearing did not have a sanctuary crowd present this time; instead it was packed with AZA zoo personnel to support the proposed definition of ‘zoo’ that was unveiled by P & W.

Attorney Steve Schwarm represented Tanganyika Zoo, Safari Park, FCF and UZA. He concentrated upon the newly proposed definition of ‘zoo’, which required private zoos to be AZA accredited, noting this requirement delegated oversight authority to a private trade association entity and forced private zoos to join.

I spoke next explaining what the CWSA will change and the need for USDA licensed facilities to exist in the state for the

CWSA to work as intended. With Kansas adopting only a strict ‘no commercial activity’ definition of sanctuary and not exempting Class C exhibitor sanctuaries, they are essentially eliminating the realistic potential for most sanctuaries to exist.

The next few speakers were AZA representatives who opposed private zoos and private breeding programs and private education programs. It is interesting to note that Kansas has fourteen municipally owned zoos, seven of which are AZA accredited and 4 privately owned zoos, one of those being AZA accredited. The seven municipal zoos not AZA, do not have to be AZA accredited – only private zoos must be.

Representatives of the Simian Society stood up and thanked the Department for removing their species from the ban, but let them know they were well aware of the divide-and-conquer methods and they did not want to see non-human primates targeted later. Then they presented the Department with 500-signed petitions against any ban of big cats or primates.

Tom Harvey spoke of the 16 years he had devoted to building his zoo. He informed them that he does countless school education programs reaching thousands of children a year. He stated this regulation would prevent him from replacing his exhibit animals, many of which are approaching 16 years of age. At one point he told them they were ‘putting him out of business’ and they answered - ‘yes, we are’.

FCF member Matt Baker acknowledged that some facilities in the state are sub-standard, but stressed repeatedly that most owners do a great job of husbandry. He asked for regulation, endorsing the FCF model, and urged Commissioners to reject this ban.

FCF member Irene Satterfield used her software skills to reformat and clarify the FCF model regulations and distributed handouts, making an emotional plea for them to adopt the FCF model.

It was humiliating to see how condescending the chair of the Commissioner’s was to our appeal for regulation. However, a newly elected State Representative who has been appointed to the Parks and Wildlife Legislative Committee and was in attendance for her first P & W Meeting picked up the attitude of P & W. Representative Mah approached FCF members Harvey and Baker after the meeting to voice her disagreement with the P & W agenda of ‘putting commercial businesses out of business’.

After the hearing I confronted the AZA Sunset Zoo representative that had berated the conservation value of private collections telling him he should be ashamed of what he is doing - that the AZA has no right to a monopoly on conservation and that he should be encouraging FCF in our efforts to accredit members and encourage responsible ownership. I said he should be mentoring FCF and helping FCF members, not putting roadblocks in our path. I pointed out to him that no large felines from any AZA zoos have ever been returned to the wild and that with increasing global habitat destruction, probably never will. I pointed out that AZA zoos are still dependant upon taking more animals out of the wild. He tried to refute this but when I backed it up with examples of the Namibian cheetahs, the Brazilian ocelots, the various South American jaguars, he had to concede the point. I concluded by reminding him that **all** felines in captivity are here for the same reason - they are **all** Display, Education and Research Populations – sub-species pure or not – to use the AZA acronym, they are **all** just DERPS.

continued on page 34



Mishi calls, “Look at me! I can climb trees!”

“I’m not afraid of heights. I’m just a big overgrown tree squirrel.”



“Help - something doesn’t seem right! How in the heck is a young cougar supposed to get down? Going head first is scary!”



“Oh, now I get it. Back feet first. This is much better!”

Legislation Updates, *continued from page 32*

Attorney Schwarm has been negotiating with Chris Tymason, the K P & W Attorney since the October hearing. Alternative accreditation such as offered by FCF and UZA is being proposed as well as a permit system for private owners. New regulations have not been drafted yet, so there will not be a vote at the April Commissioner's meeting. The earliest any regulations can be voted on is the meeting after April, however, if a new proposal is released, April will be another opportunity for public comments.

A special fund has been set up to allow FCF members to donate financial support for the Kansas project. Send contributions to the FCF treasurer, with a note that the donation is for Kansas attorney expenses.

WASHINGTON by Jeanne Hall - We have been battling a ban bill in Washington for about 5 years. The Animal Protection Institute in California, not local law enforcement or concerned citizens, drafted it. to "stop the private ownership or potentially dangerous animals". Washington BH 1151 and SB 5377 are Animal Rights bills and have nothing to do with the actual interests of either the animals, the public or you - the owner, caretaker, servant and slave of your beloved animals.

I have been perceived as the leader of the opposition because I am there, I communicate, I stand up. I have been in the papers, on television and radio. Generally it is a sound bite of some sort with the rest of the piece devoted to the opposition's views, but sometimes even a little blip can help.

In the last 5 years we have battled this thing to a win three times, but not won the war or gotten our wins into legislation on the floor. Many of you have bills in your state, county and city. If you would like to take a page out of the playbook we are using - read on. All people everywhere are encouraged to speak out. And speak often. From other states and countries too. Folks who agree with each other and those who don't, **WHAT-EVER** your view - **SPEAK UP!!** In letters, calls and in person. Go to hearings and go to the capital or local offices to meet with legislators. Next, speak as yourself. The individual. With only a few hundred members in any of our various groups, it is not very workable to set up an argument as national group FCF against national group API or local group ACEF against local group PAWS. We are way out numbered and out gunned.

You can play on the well understood scrappy individual against the big corporate conglomerate and go in as individual so and so against the giant, unfeeling, uncaring, unknowing, faceless corporate entity. But keep the focus on the individual. **YOU** are a working person taking time off work and you vote. **THEY** are using paid lawyers, representatives, lobbyists and paid campaign managers to send in thousands of letters to your few. The legislators do understand this.

Hearings - First, sign in as a name, title and a group. Just one. If you sign in from the same group, you may be bumped to only one speaker. Address the bill issues. Don't play on the emotions. Pick an issue and address it. If you get a group together, divide the issues among you to address. You may get cut off if you are all saying the same thing. Try to sign up your best speakers to speak first. Of course, if you can enlist the help of a friendly legislator that is excellent!

Encourage everyone to speak out. Put the call out far and wide about a hearing. Get people there and welcome them. Not all need to speak.

One of my most successful actions has been to present each member of a committee with a copy of the Phoenix Small Cat Book (editor's note: LIOC-ESCF members contributed many of the feline stories to help Phoenix educate the public on the bright side and benefits of exotic feline ownership) along with my written statement. I also hand out David Witt's 18-page argument regarding exotic cats and their suitability, danger and health risk. David's statement can be read and downloaded at: <http://www.phoenixexotics.org> under the Sample Legislative Letters section. The Phoenix Book is actually the first in a series on Responsible Ownership and the books are intended as handouts. Or they can be purchased in bulk and used as fundraisers for organizations. The first one covers small cats, up to cougar. The second in the series is on Primates. Phoenix is the publisher so we keep the price down to \$9.95 on Amazon.com. You can buy from Phoenix directly for \$8.00 each or buy more and get a discount., I hand them out everywhere. Each hearing takes at least 15 and using them as handouts when you meet with a legislator can be impressive. Glossy color cover always attracts attention.

MARYLAND by Lynn Culver - HB 339 would have prohibited non-AZA zoos and educators from exhibiting wild felines. It creates a new exemption for 501 c 3 Sanctuaries. Maryland presently has a regulation that prohibits any pet wildlife that cannot be legally vaccinated for rabies. This regulation will expire this year, hence the desire for new legislation. HB 339I has been written by Julie Janovski, the lobbyist for the HSUS. FCF member Richard Hahn has been instrumental in getting the word out to exhibitors and zoos in Maryland for the public hearing. Richard Farantino spoke on behalf of the HSUS at the hearing. Richard reports that an effective presentation given by 10 Maryland zoo owners and USDA Class C educators informed legislators about the harmful impact of this bill. Amendments to HB339 now allow USDA Class C exhibitors, but they must do at least 10 presentations a year. The prohibition of wildlife as pets will include all primates, and wild felines, however, there is a possibility that cats under 30 pounds will be allowed, with county approval.

OREGON by Lynn Culver Senate Bill 661 – the Committee on Environment and Land Use introduced this legislation. Requiring a personal possession permit for all species of wild feline, bears, wolves, primates, and crocodiles. The personal possession permit would be issued by the County Animal Control Agency, and these agencies would administer and enforce these regulations. Applications require descriptions, locations and re-capture plans. Each county would be required to develop caging regulations. Exhibiting of these species is prohibited. This bill terminates State Department of Agriculture's regulation of exotic animals. Sanctuaries, vets, circuses and accredited educational institutions are completely exempted from any regulations.

OHIO by Evelyn Shaw - There is no written proposal for a bill at this time but one is expected this legislative season. Expect an update. If you are an Ohio owner who wants to get involved please feel free to contact Evelyn Shaw at 740-964-9040 or ecvshaw@yahoo.com.

IOWA by Lynn Culver - SB 14, Introduced by Senator Kreiman and referred to Natural Resources Committee. This bill defines all felidae as 'dangerous animals'. It prohibits anyone from owning or breed

ing any species of wild feline. It requires registration, permit fees, caging and micro-chipping and posting signs for all existing owners. It has provisions for the seizure, custody and disposal of any unregistered dangerous felines. It exempts ASA and TAOS sanctuaries from any of the bill's requirements.

MISSOURI by Lynn Culver - HB 211 is a knock-off copy of the Michigan Senate bill passed in 2000. This bill legislates the private sector big cat gene pool to extinction. Existing owners are grandfathered in with an annual permit fee is \$25.00 per animal. Present owners may not acquire any new large carnivores or breed existing ones and no new owners are allowed. Sanctuaries accredited by the ASA or TAOS, and Zoos accredited by AZA and facilities with a USDI license to breed are exempt from the caging and care requirements.

USDA Class C exhibitors, (including all zoos, nature centers sanctuaries or educational outreach programs) are exempt from the entire bill, but breeding is forbidden. A public hearing was held February 8, and several FCF members attended including JB Anderson, Lynn Culver, Johnnie Brauer, Tom and Tina Chandler, Jessica Ward and others. The bill is in response to a formerly USDA licensed sanctuary, where 80 animals are housed on 3 acres. The USDA has pulled the facility's license for repeated non-compliant items. Concerned citizens petitioned the bill's sponsor Mike Sutherland to enact legislation. His legislative aid located the Michigan bill and copied it for Missouri. The hearing went well, many of the Committee members clearly understood this was an isolated incident. The St. Louis zoo representative who spoke in favor of the bill suggested a few changes to strengthen it – such as forced sterilization of all privately owned felines, on the grounds that cats not bred, develop 'pathologies'. When the opposing side was given time to speak, JB and I made a strong presentation for adoption of the FCF model regulations instead of the PETA-backed extinction bill. Other FCF members were impressive with their dedication and concern for their animals and corrected mis-information presented earlier. Committee members were very receptive to us.

After the hearing JB gave a TV interview and I gave an X-radio interview. JB returned to the capitol and visited with the sponsor, several Committee members and Chair the following day. He has been told that the bill as submitted, will be abandoned and a new bill is being drafted from scratch that will model after the FCF model, requiring permitting all owners for all cat species. This approach will be our best hope for sustainable captive husbandry and personal liberty in Missouri. This new bill will be presented in early March and FCF members need to keep a close watch and attend the next public hearing.

ARKANSAS by Tracy Wilson - FCF directors Lynn Culver, Donna Verba, and Tracy Wilson went before the Arkansas Game and Fish Commissioners on January 26th to request that the current Arkansas captive wildlife regulations be cleaned up and made easier to understand for animal owners. There are currently several issues in the regulations that contradict each other, or are simply not clear what is expected of an animal owner. We pointed out the specific sections of the regulations that needed some clarification. In response to an Arkansas resident who just the previous week had released his 1-year old tiger into a forested area of Arkansas, we asked that caging and perimeter fences for big cats be added to the current regulations to help prevent unprepared owners from obtaining a big cat cub without being prepared to house it as an adult. The Arkansas Game and Fish commission was receptive to our suggestions, and invited us to a working committee on February 14th.

We just learned in late January that an Arkansas House Representative, Bill Pritchard, is planning to introduce a cat ban bill during this

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legislative session. This will be the exact same bill that Representative Jackson tried to introduce unsuccessfully last session. (the bill is written and backed by the Animal Protection Institute) This bill bans ALL species and sizes of wild felines, all feline hybrid breeds, and bears. No breeding, exhibiting, or other commercial uses are allowed. Existing animals must be spayed and neutered, and there is a \$250 annual per animal fee and a \$100,000 per incident liability insurance. The only exemptions are AZA zoos and nonprofit 501(c)3 sanctuaries. It requires caging standards as recommended by the AZA and large notice signs posted on the property that dangerous carnivores are on the premises. To view the bill in its entirety, go to this website link: <http://www.arkleg.state.ar.us/ftp/roots/bills/2003/public/HB2857.pdf>

Lynn, Donna, and myself met with Representative Pritchard about this bill on January 26th to discuss it with him. We informed him we are working with A G & F Commission to adopt regulations.

KENTUCKY by Leann Montgomery -



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This is Harley, laid back on the bed wearing shades, lookin' cool. Harley was Jim and Judy Morrow's first cougar.



The Roper's cougars, Taz and Tela love lounging around the house and getting kisses by their 'mom', Julie..



Cougars are born covered with black spots that fade at about 3 months of age. Susan Carey's kitten is about 6 weeks old and still has blue eyes.

MEFES JANUARY 2005 MEETING MINUTES

Patty Turner

The January 15th meeting was on a cold windy day with just a little snow. The meeting was held at the Putman Inn Restaurant, in Greencastle, IN which offered a delicious food bar.

After everyone had eaten, as outgoing president, Harold Epperson stated he enjoyed accomplishing a few goals during his term, but wanted to do more. He then introduced Pam Hotle as the new president of MEFES.

Pam handed out an agenda copy for everyone and then stated that MEFES mission is to promote responsible private ownership of exotic felines and to insure survival and maintain gene pool of the exotic feline in captivity.

Pam announced that Vice President Pam Holdgrafer had resigned due to her busy work schedule. Peggy Epperson volunteered to fill in. She will act as Vice President until the next meeting, and at that time, it will be voted on.

Treasurer Harold Epperson gave the Treasurers Report. The present balance is \$1,511.33. The balance on 10-16-04 was \$1,362,53 and we had receipts of \$170.00 and expenses of \$21.20.

The annual expense was reported last July. The newsletter is the largest expense. \$88.00 for printing at Kinkos per Pam Holdgrafer will be the standard cost. The next meeting will have a complete update.

The new directory will be made up soon, as well as finances listed.

Pam posed a question concerning the logo. Should we make up items with the imprinted logo to sell? Monte Francis suggested it be put in the newsletter to get a response on how members would like to handle it. Bob Turner said items could also be taken to an embroidery shop after purchasing the disc, and have them done on our own as an option.

Pam mentioned educational opportunities of FCF and MEFES, one should not compete with the other. It was suggested that maybe MEFES should have a small newsletter with FCF having the major newsletter with a page on MEFES. The MEFES small newsletter would announce the meeting and location as well as special items. Bob Turner showed an example of a simple newsletter from another organization. Monte will try to help Pam Pitman who is willing to try it as editor. Kevin Chambers stated that the only thing worse than a small newsletter, is no newsletter.

Pam spoke on the website or homepage chat room. It could be a tool for us to communicate with each other, keep the focus on cats, share a list of exotic vets, etc. Kevin Chambers said it should be monitored to prevent liable. Carey Nodley and Peggy Epperson volunteered to monitor. Harold Epperson said one consideration for the website is ownership. The website has to be in the name of MEFES.

Monte said by the end of February the website should be ready to go. There is a registration fee and he will notify us of the amount.

Harold said the updated membership forms are completed.

Pam said it is mandatory for all MEFES officers to submit something per each newsletter.

Pam would like to have a speaker for the next meeting, such as the USDA inspector who could maybe give us updates, etc.

Vaccinating exotics was brought up. How often should it be done, yearly or less.

It seems to depend on the vet, although the law says every year.

The location for the April meeting was discussed. Jann Bohl-Tonyan from Lyons, Indiana is considering holding the meeting. It would be a place we could bring the cats. The meetings will be listed in the newsletter as known.

For the October meeting, the Indianapolis Zoo was mentioned as a possible location. A behind the scenes tour would be good if possible. Kevin said we would write up something about each meeting in the FCF newsletter. That way, maybe someone who is FCF, but not MEFES might be interested in attending a MEFES meeting.

Harold mentioned legal issues. Ban laws are going state to state. They are heavily funded. We need to become proactive. Give your legislators information to go on, most don't have a clue. Jump before something happens.

Peggy motioned to adjourn and Phil Parker seconded it.

*** Follow-up to meeting***

April 16 meeting will be held at the Community Center in Lyons, Indiana beginning at 12:30 p.m.

Elizabeth Serven, USDA Inspector will be our guest speaker.

Pitch-in style lunch. Jann will provide the main meat dish and members will provide side dishes. We will have access to the gym and kitchen.

Maps and agendas will be sent to members prior to the meeting.

Cats welcome!



We're not mountain lions, we're African lions. Does that count?

A Pledge

By Amanda Whitlock



Jeff, author's young serval

A couple of years ago, before I became a veterinary student, I became enchanted with exotic cats. I would spend hours researching them and staring at pictures of them. I knew one day I would share my life with them. Then, as time went by I completed my undergraduate degree in biology and was accepted to the University of Tennessee College of Veterinary Medicine. During that time I never forgot my dream but it was placed on the back burner while I fulfilled other dreams.

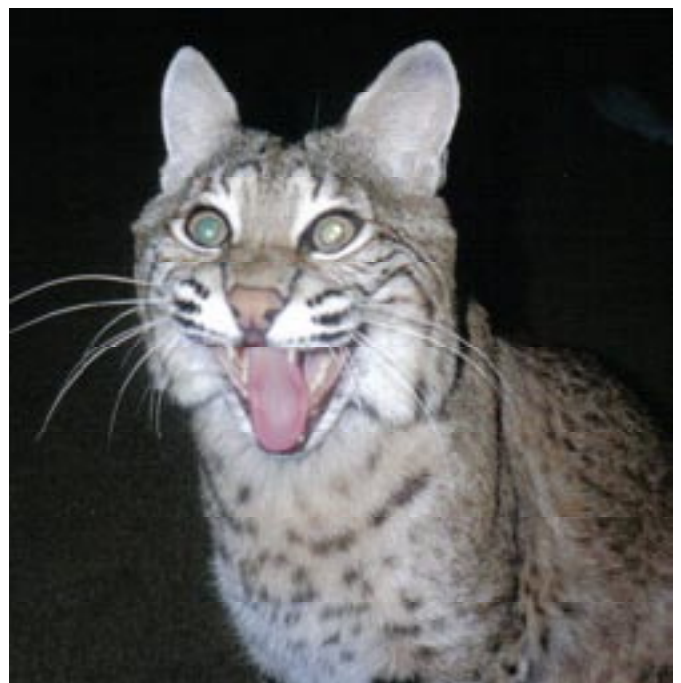
Then, last summer I was finally able to indulge in my first dream. The serval kitten that arrived in my life was a wonderful ball of fur, whose spots lead to his name, Jeffree-for the Toys-R-Us giraffe. He is now almost 9months old. I don't get to see him everyday as I am in TN at school and he in NC with my parents. Yet I enjoy every single moment I get with him and am always begging for pictures and video of him and running home even on weekends with an up coming test to see him. My love for him has opened my eyes and heart and I have decided to dedicate my life to the amazing exotic cats we live with. However, I have run into one problem.

The problem is the negative attitudes of other veterinarians about the ownership of exotic cats or exotics in general. Frequently I search the veterinary databases to find information on the latest care and health issues concerning exotic cats and am

appalled at the anti-ownership rhetoric I find. In fact, I am somewhat ousted at my own school because of my pro-ownership views and my being owned by a serval. By even writing this I take a risk of further ousting, but I think someone in the profession needs to take a stand on the owners side. After all, how can the veterinary profession claim to care for these animals if they spend more time telling owners off than helping them?

Furthermore, there seems to be a double standard held by these veterinarians. For instance, not one of them would comment on my ownership of Connor, my yellow-naped amazon parrot, who has been deprived of flight and confined to 3'x4'x6' cage so that I might spend my life with him. Indeed, they would commend me on being responsible enough to have his wings clipped and on the fact that though he is an amazon parrot I have purchased him a macaw sized cage. Yet, I would get an ear full for Jeffree, who has the run of the house, plus a 500sq foot outdoor enclosure, and all the best foods, and toys and etc that can be provided. I am tired of this double standard, and of the whole bloody mess. Why can't veterinarians accept our choices, and provide us with the help we ask for with a moral lecture? When responsible people own these exotic cats they usually get better care than most dogs or domestic cats.

So now I come to the point of this letter. I pledge to all exotic cats and those people that they own that I will be an advocate for the continued rights of both to share company with one-another. I will never judge a person simply on their desire to share their lives with these amazing creatures. I will learn everything I can on their medical and emotional care, and never stop learning. I will make a difference in the lives of these magnificent cats and their human companions. I pledge to all of you that have had negative experiences with veterinarians that in two years, when I have graduated, you will have at least one person to take up your cause and who is willing to help. And I pledge a little something to Jeffree, I will love you and all your personality quirks and hisses and mischief for the rest of my life because you opened my soul to a whole new life.



Enclosure Construction at Safari Park Zoo



Drain lines are laid and then tons of fill dirt are brought in to raise up the soil level.



Wooden forms are erected in preparation to pour concrete walkways around the perimeter.



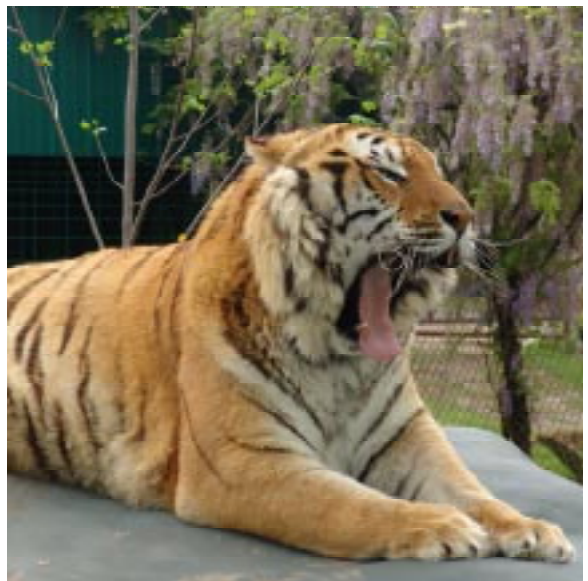
Concrete walkways poured around the perimeter of the enclosure will not cause water to back up inside the habitat because there are underground drain lines that lead rainwater away.



An artificial boulder is fabricated out of rebar and expanded metal lathe, then covered with a mix of Portland cement and vermicu-



Finished boulder is a perfect loafing platform for tigers.



Saber says "Come by and see me , I'm in Caney, Kansas"