

8 Facts about private ownership of Big & Exotic Cats

Myth #1: Big Cats, Lions and Tigers are inherently dangerous to the individuals who possess them, to their neighbors, and to the community at large. Across the country, many incidents have been reported where exotic animals held in private hands attacked humans and other animals, and escaped from their enclosure and freely roamed the community.

FACT: No lion or tiger has ever escaped into a neighborhood and attacked an innocent bystander. Ever. While there have been 24 big cat related fatalities in 25 years, every single one of those have involved individuals who willingly placed themselves in contact with big cats.

Myth #2: Big Cats, Lions and Tigers are territorial and require group interactions. Privately owned Big Cats are typically isolated and spend the majority of their day in a small enclosure unable to roam and express natural behaviors freely. These animals are time bombs waiting to explode.

FACT: The only cats that actually require group interaction are lions. All other cats (big and small) typically keep to themselves and sleep 18 hours a day. In the wild they would come together to either mate or fight over territory. Even so, private facilities typically spend effort and money on improving the animals' environment. The animals in the wild roam mainly to find food and mates. In captivity those needs are met by regular feedings and managed breeding opportunities.

Myth #3: The American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA), The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) have all expressed opposition to the possession of Big Cats, Lions & Tigers.

FACT: There have been no public announcements by the USDA, AVMA or CDC regarding their opposition to private possession of big exotic cats.

Myth #4: The majority of states do not keep accurate records of exotic animals entering their state, so it is impossible to determine exactly how many exotic animals are privately held.

Fact: All states have government agencies that register native and exotic animals. Each state has Animal Control, DNR, or Fish and Game authorities which enforce the laws concerning these animals. In addition, the owner of an exotic big cat must have health certificates (OVI – Official Veterinary Inspection) to transport cats from state to state.

Myth #5: Big Cats belong in their natural habitat and not in the hands of private individuals as “pets.” By their very nature, these animals are wild and potentially dangerous and, as such, do not adjust well to a captive environment.

FACT: The Big Cats' adjustment to their environment depends entirely on whether it meets their actual needs, not on whether it is a captive environment. Virtually all exotic big cats in the U.S. were born in captivity and would not survive in the wild. Big exotic cats are being eradicated from this planet in huge numbers and their natural habitat is being destroyed wholesale. There are less than 500 Siberian tiger in the wild, less than 1500 Bengal Tigers, less than 1200 Asian Indian Leopards. The captive cats of today are the result of over 15 generations or more of captive breeding programs and may be the only hope of saving the species at all. Therefore, captive breeding of big exotic cats is paramount to the species' ultimate survival.

Myth #6: Big Cats do not make good companions. They require special care, housing, diet, and maintenance that the average person cannot provide. When in the hands of private individuals the animals suffer due to poor care. They also pose safety and health risks to their possessors and any person coming into contact with them.

Fact: The people who handle these Big Cats do inherently face some risk, but they are fully aware of it. Actually there are more people killed by toasters each year in the U.S. than by exotic animals. Big cats do not behave like their wild counterparts because generations of captive breeding have acclimated them to captive life. The fact is that there are many private citizens who **do** have the resources, desire, and capability to provide a safe and adequate environment and that all states have enforcement agencies capable of looking after the adequacy of the facilities.

Myth #7: Individuals who possess Big Cats often attempt to change the nature of the animal rather than the nature of the care provided. Such tactics include confinement in small barren enclosures, chaining, beating “into submission,” or even painful mutilations, such as declawing and tooth removal.

Fact: Declawing is already prohibited by the USDA. Each state has laws and enforcement agencies that oversee the enclosures of these cats and other standards for their care, including extensive animal cruelty regulations. While some private zoo parks or sanctuaries meet higher standards than others, there is no factual basis for the claim about attempting to change the nature of the animals as these facilities operate today.

Myth #8: When an owner of a Big Cat, Lion or Tiger realizes he/she can no longer care for it, they usually turn to zoos and other institutions such as sanctuaries to relieve him/her of the responsibility. However, all the zoos and accredited institutions could not possibly accommodate the number of unwanted Big Cats, Lions & Tigers. The majority of these animals are euthanized, abandoned, or doomed to live in deplorable conditions.

Fact: While some private owners do close down their facilities over time, there is no prospect at all of a widespread rash of closures. There is no factual history of widespread euthanasia, abandonment, or mistreatment, even during the recent severe economic recession. Privately owned animal collections and breeding farms across the U.S. hold a better genetic representation of these species than do the big zoos. Therefore, captive breeding of big exotic cats is paramount to the species’ ultimate survival.

**Please urge your Congressman and U.S. Senators to vote NO on this deceptive legislation.
NO on H.R. 263 / S.1210**

