

Big Cat Rescue: Heeding the Call of the Wild

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China Doll the Tiger

There he is, lounging in the warm Florida sun, with rays of light reflecting off his magnificently striped coat. Simba, the 300-pound tiger, is relaxed and satisfied. He appears to have it all, until he lazily stretches out his large paws, and yawns, showing the world that he has been defanged and declawed. His previous owner had the misguided notion of trying to turn this carnivorous creature into a pet. As a result, Simba's chances for survival in the wild are gone. Luckily for him and over 100 other animals at Big Cat Rescue, he's been given a safe home forever. This inspiring organization offers refuge to more than 14 species of big cats from all over the world. Here they are respected just as they would be roaming free on the grounds of their native homelands. But how did so many big cats, some from halfway around the world, come to reside at this Florida sanctuary?



Jumanji the black leopard, peering through his Christmas tree

A Date with Destiny

On a seemingly ordinary day in 1993, Carole Baskin and her husband were traveling through Minnesota when they made a discovery that would change their lives. Lined up in cages were 56 animals – each one for sale so that they could be killed for their fur. Baskin was horrified by the discovery. “I never knew these places existed,” she says. Moved by the sight of these glorious creatures and sickened by their impending fate, Baskin and her husband found themselves asking, “How much for *ALL* the animals?” and then writing the check that would save the animals’ lives. “There was no way that we were going to leave a single cat behind to die,” she adds. And so began what is now the world’s largest accredited sanctuary devoted exclusively to cats.



Natasha and Willow - Siberian Lynx

The staff at Big Cat Rescue offers these rare and regal animals a second chance at life, caring for them in a manner that is completely suitable and appropriate for them.

The Path to Nine Lives



Skip the bobcat

Their latest addition at the sanctuary is Skip the Bobcat. Skip was found injured on a highway and brought to the shelter for help. An examination showed that he had suffered a crushed pelvis and required extensive treatment. The organization immediately put out a mass appeal to supporters. With the aid of some special sponsors, the wounded wildcat was lucky enough to receive top notch veterinary treatment. Since that time, Skip has become an internet superstar, with a constant stream of people regularly checking on his progress via live cam at www.ustream.tv/channel/bigcathospital. If Skip is able to make a suitable recovery he will be released into the wild, as nature intended, following in the footsteps of Hope, Chance and Faith – three fellow bobcats who we're previously rehabilitated at the sanctuary.

Treated Like the King of the Jungle

From hardship to hope, these glorious creatures are bestowed with a life that Garfield could only dream of. The big cats are routinely treated to such feline favorites as Sardine Martinis and Blood-Sicles. Although that might not seem appetizing to you, it is the purr-fect prize for these proud predators. Caretakers even train to understand and imitate a series of 16 cat sounds such as roaring, chuffing and caterwauling in an effort to help retain the animal's wild instincts. These and other enrichment programs for the residents of Big Cat Rescue create a place where their natural dignity and graceful way of life is returned to them.



Hallelujah the Cougar

Become a Cat-alyt for Change

With only eight staff members and a dedicated group of over 100 volunteers, Big Cat Rescue offers a wonderful opportunity for anyone wishing to help these beautiful animals. Sherry Levesque has been a volunteer for over five years and says, "It's not always easy work, but it's fulfilling work." Volunteers are required to donate at least four hours every week to the 55-acre, no-touch facility. It's through the generosity of these caring individuals that the organization's vision of compassion and respect come to life.

Although the sanctuary has succeeded in saving hundreds of big cats, the overall plight of their species can only be helped through a combination of education and legislation. Jeff Kremer, Big Cat Rescue's Director of Donor Appreciation, reflects on the overwhelming task before them. "You can never do enough, but you can always do more," he says. For this reason, they've created a page on their website that makes it easy for anyone, from anywhere in the world, to become an "Advocat" for the animals. You can help in a variety of ways: reach out to lawmakers to enact legislation, organize fundraisers, create an awareness campaign and even sponsor a particular cat, if you like.

Rich Rewards

When we follow our hearts – and allow our love and passion to motivate us – we can create wondrous things. That’s what Carole Baskin did the day she saved those 56 animals from the fur farm. By giving expression to her ideals, she has created a safe haven for some of nature’s most precious resources. Although it wasn’t without personal sacrifice, it is rich with rewards. When asked who has made a positive impact on her life, she emotionally reflects on the way her daughter has handled this monumental endeavor. “When we started this venture, my daughter was 12 years old, and that was essentially the day her childhood ended. But she has spent all these years selflessly caring for these animals, and I couldn’t be more proud of her.”

www.youtube.com/watch?v=XmsGCC7nA1A

If you’d like to visit, volunteer or donate to Big Cat Rescue you can find more information on their website, www.BigCatRescue.org.