



A leopard enjoys a place in the sun at Big Cat Rescue in Tampa, Fla.

## Big Cat Rescue

TAMPA, FLA.

### An Evolving Mission

Carole Baskin started the sanctuary in 1992 to house 56 bobcat and lynx kittens rescued from a fur farm. While the group initially rehomed some of the animals, after seeing many cats abandoned as they matured and became harder to care for, Carole concluded that they should not be kept as pets.

### Purr & R

Today, Big Cat Rescue provides sanctuary to more than 100 exotic cats. “This is basically a retirement home,” Howard Baskin says. The enclosures on the wooded property are designed so the cats can hide if they choose to—which reduces stress—and people often comment on how content the cats look.

### Hear Me Roar

The few good sanctuaries can’t accommodate all the exotic cats living in backyards, roadside zoos, and other abysmal situations, Howard explains. “We can’t rescue our way out of this problem.” That’s why Big Cat Rescue devotes significant resources to lobbying for bills like the federal Big Cats and Public Safety Protection Act, which would essentially ban private ownership and breeding of big cats. Says the HSUS’s Michael Markarian, who serves as vice president of the Global Federation of Animal Sanctuaries: “It’s about addressing the root causes of cruelty, not just the symptoms.”

## A Happier Home

**THE CHAIN-LINK CAGES** on the farm in Atchison, Kan., were too small and rickety for the tiger, cougars, and other wild cats they housed. The animals’ owner had abandoned them in muddy enclosures thick with feces and urine. There was no fresh water in sight.

“It looked like at one time [the owner] had put some straw in the cages, and you could barely even see that,” recalls Gale Ingham, operations manager for the Tampa, Fla.-based Big Cat Rescue, one of several organizations that assisted in the early May rescue operation. “It was absolutely disgusting.”

And dangerous, adds HSUS director of cruelty response Adam Parascandola. When the tiger jumped on the side of his cage, the chain link “would just kind of bow out.”

Authorities arrested the owner and seized 11 animals, who were transported to sanctuaries in Kansas, Texas, and Florida. Big Cat Rescue itself took in two lynx, two bobcats, a bobcat hybrid, and a serval.

“They were amazing

with the small cats,” Parascandola says of the Big Cat Rescue team. “They were able to net and safely draw blood, give vaccinations, and remove all of the smaller cats except one small lynx without sedating them.”

After arriving at the 55-acre sanctuary in Tampa, the six cats inspected their new digs with looks of wonder, Ingham says: “They were just awed at being somewhere where there was grass and fresh water and lots of room to run and play.”

Seeing animals removed from squalid conditions become happy in their new surroundings is one of the most rewarding aspects of the sanctuary’s work, notes advisory board chairman Howard Baskin, who is married to founder and CEO Carole Baskin. But the organization’s goals go beyond rescue to include lobbying for public policies that would prevent such situations in the first place.

“What is really unique about us,” Carole says, “is that we spend so much time and energy on trying to put ourselves out of business.”

— James Hettinger



Carole and Howard Baskin