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Rebuttal to Carole Baskin campaign of hatred

I have been working to enlighten the animal extremists for the past several years and have been amazed at how they continue to ignore the facts and cling to their [campaign of hatred](#).

Reality is that at we are into at least the tenth generation of captive-bred white tigers. Have there been genetic bottlenecks in the history of this color mutation? Absolutely. Has careful out crossing created perfect examples of beautiful, healthy felines proving deleterious inbreeding has been corrected? Absolutely. But these fanatics refuse to open their own eyes, or do real research into what is really involved in reputable breeding programs to create a new breed, or line of animal.

The July 28, 2010 issue of the national magazine [Newsweek](#) jumped down this same crooked path. In their two part article, they create the false impression that people with tigers are either criminal enterprises, facilities in decline, crazy nuts with pet tigers in their apartment, or the victims of sensationalized attacks. Newsweek looked at [tiger breeding](#) and bought the phony "facts" being generated by spokespersons for the self-aggrandizing, tax-exempt sanctuary [Big Cat Rescue](#).

Big Cat Rescue is actually a former exotic feline breeding and brokering business originally called Wildlife On Easy Street and owned by Carole and her husband Don Lewis. They invented the gimmick of a rent-a-cabin, complete with a real wild cat for the night. Carole was once a member of the Feline Conservation Federation the organization I serve as executive director. When she was a member it was called the LIOC, and it published several articles written by her.

In the November/December 1996 LIOC Newsletter, Carole was given the opportunity to rebut the findings of the London-based World Society for the Protection of Animals (WSPA) after they did a surprise inspection of her Wildlife on Easy Street facility. The end of the WSPA report follows:

Conclusion: *This collection of animals is set in forty acres and is in private ownership. Some of the animals have been rescued, but most had been purchased at animal auctions. The questionable practice of the breeding and sale of animals to individuals and zoos is an important source of income. This collection does not regard itself as a zoo and does not charge an entry fee to the public. However, the public can visit by appointment with a \$3 donation.*

Verdict: *This zoo would have failed inspection under*



the standards of the U.K. Zoo Licensing Act.

The November/December 1997 LIOC Newsletter published Carole's take on all the hubbub over the escape of her cougars. She describes the escapees as "two cougars who were three-years old, bottle-raised pets." And then she offers her opinion on the damage animal rights extremists do when they spotlight these rare events. Her words were:

"When something like this happens it hurts us all. The vast majority of people will not know what the facts were. All they will remember is that some fancy sounding group said people shouldn't own exotics and that one escaped. When bills are presented to ban exotic ownership, the general public is not going to realize the devastating consequences for the species involved. Hindsight is always 20/20. We have since thought of countless ways this could have been prevented (including having quietly fed the offending parties to the cats), but it won't change things now."

And the next year in the July/August 1998 Newsletter Carole tries to help other owners learn from her mistakes with the story of her cougar, Fleetwood, who needed emergency surgery. Carole wrote:

"Many x-rays later with no results the vet decided to open him up and in addition to peritonitis, they discover that his intestines are laced and permeated with purple nylon and worst of it is a rupture where the harness buckle he has swallowed has burst through the intestinal wall, causing massive internal bleeding."

A March/April 2001 LIOC Newsletter article by Carole dealt with the daily stress of running a non-profit facility with over 100 cats. The Carole of the past was writing for a different audience. That Carole supported captive feline husbandry and understood her place in the scheme of things, and the incomparable value of the spiritual connections animal people have with nature's felines. She wrote:

"Nothing speaks tranquility like a leopard hanging in the branches or a tiger wading in the water. Nothing can quiet your soul like the purr of a mountain lion. We invite you to pull up a chair and have a lynx or a bobcat come sit in your lap while you stroke its luxurious fur. You are in the cat's enclosure and it can choose to come be with you or not. When it does, you know that you have crossed over that invisible barrier into the mind of the most mysterious animal. Making that connection between human and creatures that are considered untouchable by most is an epiphany experienced by the very few. It is during this meeting of the minds that people say they have seen God or that they have felt their own spirit move in a way that it never has before. But this is just the very beginning."

I first met Carole Lewis in 1997 when she attended the LIOC annual convention in Tallahassee, Florida with her declawed snow



leopard cub, a present from her husband Don. Back then Carole and Don were proud to own the most diverse collection of wild cats in private hands. They promoted themselves as conservation breeders and bought rare felines such as leopard, ocelot, fishing cat, and snow leopard from other breeders and zoological dealers. I asked Carole about their property in Costa Rica. She answered that she wished her husband Don would go there and never return. A few weeks later Don disappeared and his body has never been found. After a seven year wait, the court declared Don legally dead and Carole inherited his fortune.

The next time I saw Carole Lewis was in April 2002 when she attended the Association of Zoos and Aquariums (AZA) Felid Taxon Advisory Group meeting. She had applied for Wildlife on Easy Street to be a participating breeding facility for the Ocelot Species Survival Plan (SSP). But her rent-a-cabin-with-wild-cats business made the Ocelot SSP shun her, and the AZA also denied her facility accreditation application as well. I believe this rejection from the AZA was one of the events that led to the transformation of Carole into a radical opponent of captive breeding and conservation.

My husband and I toured her Wildlife on Easy Street facility Christmas Day 2002. Carole was gracious, personally guiding us since the facility was closed to the public. We got to see the tigers that Ringling Brothers circus paid WOES to provide for their retirement. They lived in small, circular enclosures built on the sandy soil around a big pond. Carole invited us to enter the enclosures of her people-friendly bobcats and Siberian lynx. Carole discussed her plans for her future. Since her husband Don had disappeared in 1997 his fortune had been tied up in court battles with his children. Carole told me she had hired a firm to do a financial analysis of Wildlife on Easy Street and devise a business plan to make it profitable.

The firm Carole hired recommended changing the name Wildlife on Easy Street because it did not conjure up animal abuse or generate public pity. In 2003 WOES became Big Cat Rescue, even though there were no big cat rescues, only a private collection of felines either purchased or born at the facility. Her public message is crafted to appeal to donors who support rescuing exotic felines from abuse. This new image has achieved for BCR the financial rewards Carole craved.

In 2004 the USDA presented several Big Cat Symposiums, including one in Dallas, Texas. Carole attended this symposium and it was the last time I visited with her. Carole was drinking only her special diet shakes as part of her personal makeover. She was preparing herself to become a public figure. By now she had completely reversed her views. This new Carole was no longer writing about the spiritual connection between animals and humans, or that it was an epiphany experience. This new Carole was on a rampage campaign to stop everyone from owning, breeding or touching nature's felines. She told me she got her inspiration from "The Secret," and that she was no longer satisfied to just care for her own collection of cats and provide them a good life. This Carole wanted the spotlight currently held by Tippi Hedren and Carole Asvestas and Pat Darby. This Carole intended to be the next outspoken animal rights personality.

As the CEO of Big Cat Rescue, Carole owes her success to an intensive marketing makeover that attracts ignorant followers and the financial support of the multi-billion-dollar animal rights industry. Carole works tirelessly to bury the skeletons in her closet,

and that is why, I believe, she is constantly shoveling dirt on others on her animal abuse 911 website.

Positioned as an insider spokesperson, Carole wages constant war on private captive conservation, and especially the white tiger, even though she does not possess the experience, knowledge, or understanding to speak intelligently on this subject. Carole's web site, and ranting Internet blogs quote [writings of former veterinarian Dr. Dan Laughlin](#) as Carole's authority on white tiger breeding. Carole overlooks the fact that Mr. Laughlin was tried and convicted in federal court in 1985 for theft and interstate transport of five white tiger cubs.

Mr. Laughlin's lie that 80% of white tiger offspring fail to survive due to inbreeding is a mathematical impossibility. If his assertion were true, the white tigers could not have expanded to the hundreds of felines alive today. What is true is that early on, both AZA zoos and private facilities intentionally inbred and line bred to pass on the recessive gene for the white tiger coat. And certainly even today there are facilities that do not have good genetics but this is the minority and is not a reason to condemn the practices of the majority.

Carole also quotes the outspoken and highly opinionated entomologist Ron Tilson, who is the AZA Amur Tiger SSP coordinator. Ron needs to create more cage spaces for his tigers in the AZA zoo system and must stop the AZA member zoos and the public from wanting this color morph. Ron is notorious for his rants and condemnations of the white coat mutation and the hybrid sub-species tigers. Ironically, Ron suppresses the truth about AZA's SSP population of Amur leopards, which are also not pure, just like the white tigers, because years ago they were also hybridized.

Carole will always be known to those who have been long-time members of the exotic animal community for her notorious practice of wholesale buying entire spring litters of bobcat and lynx kittens and transporting them in five gallon buckets from the cool northern states into the summer heat of central Florida and reselling these "bucket babies" to unsuspecting novice pet owners. Under such stressful conditions, many of these innocent neonate felines died shortly after they were sold. I know this as fact because many of Carole's heartbroken customers called me in tears asking for help since Carole would not talk to them. I understand that Carole is drawing upon her own personal experiences when she claims that most kittens born in captivity do not survive to adulthood. In her case, this is true.

I can understand why Carole abandoned all efforts to be part of conservation breeding. She was rejected by the AZA, and she ruined her reputation in the private sector with her poor animal husbandry practices and dishonest business dealings. Only by moving away from her past could she hope to start over. She spends a lot of time these days attempting to rewrite history and paint herself as a savior to animals. She is emboldened by her followers and believes she can get away with murder. Carole continuously spouts off phony statistics to any reporter who will give her attention. She regularly writes scathing letters about any private facility given positive news coverage. Carole is on a crusade to prohibit private captive breeding programs and force exotic felines into extinction.

The fact that Carole is using the writings of a man who lied to the grand jury and was convicted of felony theft to back up her criticisms of white tigers means that she has no standards or

ethics. Dan Laughlin has never been involved in any breeding programs. Mr. Laughlin testified he took the white tiger cubs out of concern for their welfare, but when he stuffed the five newborn neonates into a cardboard box, falsified all the paperwork, and flew them as cargo from Seattle to Louisiana, he put these tiny innocent lives in mortal danger. And two of the cubs he stole died. Mr. Laughlin claimed that white tigers were terribly inbred, and therefore had no value, hoping to establish to the court that that they were worth less than \$5,000. His elaborate ruse to avoid prison failed, and Judge Polozola found him guilty of felony interstate transport of stolen property worth more than \$5,000.

Carol is allowing Mr. Laughlin to use her web site to launch his outdated and totally absurd accusations against the current population of white tigers. Carole still does not understand genetics and how recessive genes work. I have contacted her about the mistakes she has on her web site but she continues to deliberately get it wrong.

Today, most white tigers have the benefit of genetic diversity because over the past four decades many white gene tigers have been out crossed to unrelated orange tigers, creating heterozygous offspring, which improves the health and physical beauty of the white tiger.

Carole uses Kenny, the grossly disfigured white tiger living at Turpentine Creek Sanctuary to further her campaign of hate. This is the ultimate exploitation of an unfortunate animal. I do not know if this feline suffers from some congenital defect, or if it is truly the result of negligent breeding practices, and I doubt Carole does either.

All tigers in America are destined to live out their entire lives in captivity. There is no 'wild' out there to be reintroduced into. Captive bred tigers are adapting to the only habitat they will ever occupy. Whether tigers are sub-species pure and living in an AZA zoo, or privately owned and of unknown pedigree, serves the exact same conservation function. Captive born tigers are all educational ambassadors. The hand-reared, people friendly tigers, and the beautiful white tigers in particular, are extremely good at charming Americans into caring deeply about their cousins in nature struggling to survive and this is what motivates people to protect ecosystems.

I am appalled, but not surprised, that Big Cat Rescue is exploiting the white tigers for their own economic gain, rather than incorporating these magnificent felines into proper conservation education messages. The private facilities that create captive habitat, and provide daily care and veterinary needs for white tigers are being unfairly vilified by Carole's sick campaign to breed hatred for one of nature's most beautiful and beloved creation. Carole's deceitfulness is a direct threat to the future survival of not just white tigers, but all tigers.

Captivity is a lifeboat for the tiger, and the privately held population has the population size and potential habitat to ensure long-term sustainability.

The US Fish and Wildlife agency acknowledges the following as true:

"That all wild tiger habitat continues to be converted to agricultural purposes, while remaining patches of tiger habitat increasingly are becoming fragmented and isolated from each other. This loss directly affects tigers, as well as the prey on which they

depend. Poaching and illegal trade of tigers, domestic as well as international, especially for traditional Chinese medicine, continue despite increased national and CITES controls.”

“Generic and white tigers can enhance survival of the species in the wild through their exhibition in a manner designed to educate the public about the ecological role and conservation needs of the species, and by satisfying demand for tigers so that wild specimens or captive purebred subspecies are not used.”

If Carole has her way, she will gladly destroy the only tiger population that can survive into the future. Carole is endangering not only wild tigers, but also all captive felines, and that is why I am addressing her campaign of hate. Knowing Carole, she will lash out at the FCF for daring to expose the truth about her. But if she is going to make herself a public figure, the public deserves to know whom this figure really is, and what motivates this figure to act so outrageously.

I care deeply about felid conservation and survival of tigers and that is why I am addressing her campaign of hate. I hope Carole seeks the truth and comes to deal with her anger and guilt, so that she wakes up and realizes her actions threaten the survival of the very endangered creatures she claims to care about so that she can once again be a positive force for exotic wildlife.

Lynn Culver
Executive Director, Feline Conservation Federation