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Big Cats

Big Cats: Big Threat or Cuddly Kitten?

Members of the recently founded informational website, Responsible Exotic Animal Ownership (REXANO), want legislators to know that big cats and other exotic animals might not pose the threat that many assume.

"In the USA, only one person dies per year as a result of attacks by captive big cats, 1.5 by captive reptiles, 0.125 by captive bear and 0 by captive non-human primate," said Zuzana Kukol, co-founder of the Responsible Exotic Animal Ownership (REXANO) and a Las Vegas tiger trainer. "In comparison, 45,000 people die each year in traffic accidents, 47 by lightening and 1,600 by falling from stairs."

Kukol co-founded the website with Scott Shoemaker in January of this year to provide information on exotic animal ownership to legislators and the public, Kukol said.

"We are sick of legislators listening to small, extremist groups of animal rights," she said. "We're trying to stop this craziness."

Right now, Kukol has her eye on a proposed federal bill known as Haley's Act that would ban direct contact between big cats and a member of the public, such as picture taking. Zoos are exempt from the proposed legislation.

In California, a man and his wife recently pled guilty to federal charges after their Siberian tiger wandered around a Ventura County neighborhood for four weeks in 2005 until it was shot and killed by authorities.

Big cats that escape are unlikely to cause any harm, Kukol says. "These animals, when they get out of their cage, they are out of their territory, unsure," she said. "They just hide and wait for someone to rescue them."

There are always going to be irresponsible owners, but, "Laws don't stop idiots," she said.

Most of the people killed by tigers and other large exotic animals were handlers, Kukol says. "It's an occupational hazard, but we have chosen this," she said.

A former resident of communist Czechoslovakia, Kukol said she is particularly weary of any laws that might limit people's rights, including animal ownership.

Breed-specific laws are also on the group's radar as is the California Healthy Pets Act that would mandate spay and neuter laws for many pets.

"We don't need more laws," she said. "We need laws enforced."



Zuzana Kukol, REXANO co-founder and Las-Vegas tiger trainer, with Pebbles, the tiger.

Posted: June 11, 2007 5 a.m. EDT

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Comments On - Big Cats: Big Threat or Cuddly Kitten?

Zuzana is right!!!! We need better enforcement of current laws-- Not more laws. The USA has an epidemic of animal rights idiots, who would have you believe that all domestic animals and captive wildlife should not share their lives with humans.

**Lisa, Birdville FL,
Posted: 6/11/2007 6:08:01 AM**

I completely agree on everything this article stands for. I will one day own a Bengal Tiger and I KNOW that I will be the best parent for this tiger, and that it will get the very best of everything available to it. It is not fair to me, or the tigers, that there are complete idiots out there that ruin these joys in life for us.

"We don't need more laws. We need laws enforced"

That goes to say with every law enforcement out there. Stop trying to control people's lives, and instead try to make it better for them by enforcing laws already in place for a damn good reason.

**Cacy, Murfreesboro TN,
Posted: 6/11/2007 7:21:04 PM**

Excellent article. Factual and to the point.
If we let the AR groups make the rules, we will all be without our cats, and whatever other furry, scaly, and feathered friends that share out lives.

**Stein, Pound WI,
Posted: 6/11/2007 7:24:55 PM**