

From: Kate Hendrickson (PETA Foundation) <KateH@petaf.org>

Sent: Wednesday, October 26, 2011 3:17 PM

Subject: Your Inquiry to PETA

Dear Bobbi,

Thank you for contacting us about Big Cat Rescue and its practice of feeding live rabbits and chicks to big cats. This is a contentious subject that will not likely have a solution that satisfies everyone.

While the mission of Big Cat Rescue is to provide a permanent, safe refuge for tigers, lions, cougars, and other feline species who have been used in circuses and roadside displays or kept as "pets," the facility does also rescue and rehabilitate injured or orphaned wild bobcats for eventual release back into their natural home.

Bobcats are carnivores who eat rabbits, rodents, birds, and other small prey. Bobcats who have been orphaned (through car accidents, poaching, etc.) must learn how to hunt and catch prey before being released, or their chances of survival are greatly reduced. The Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission calls the practice the "best chances" doctrine. For those animals who are permanently incapacitated and unable to be released, PETA recognizes and accepts that predators need to eat meat. We have no quarrel with feeding carnivores animals who have been killed humanely.

PETA has been following the development of Big Cat Rescue since the mid-1990s, when the facility operated as Wildlife on Easy Street and held a U.S. Department of Agriculture Class B dealer's license, meaning that the preponderance of its business was breeding animals.

We were pleased when Big Cat Rescue stopped breeding animals and began to discourage both breeding and the private possession of exotic animals as pets.

We expressed concerns to founder Carole Baskin about the facility's boarding of Ringling Bros. circus tigers and its defense of Ringling's treatment of big cats. We also urged her to stop allowing visitors to "hand-feed" and "train" the cats. While it appears that direct contact between visitors and the animals has been eliminated, the cats are still subjected to daily tours, during which visitors encroach upon the animals' feeding times, as well as shows that display the "operant conditioning" used to train the cats.

In 2006, a Florida television station did an investigation into Big Cat Rescue and reported some deeply troubling findings, including that at least 30 of the 150 cats at the facility were not rescued but were actually born at the facility.

In the wake of this investigation, Carole Baskin resigned from the county's animal advisory board after being asked to do so by Hillsborough County Commissioner Brian Blair. Blair said that he

had “received an abnormal amount of questions and concerns from citizens and the media” about her. According to The Tampa Tribune, “In a file several inches thick with letters and Web site printouts, Baskin was accused of mishandling resources and misrepresenting herself and how she obtained Big Cat Rescue’s animals.”

As you can see, there is much work to be done. Please write a polite note asking that Big Cat Rescue close to the public and spend every minute attending to the complex needs of the animals it keeps:

Big Cat Rescue
12802 Easy St.
Tampa, FL 33625
813-920-4130
info@bigcatrescue.org

To learn more about our campaigns to help animals used in entertainment and get tips on how you can get active to help these animals, please visit [HYPERLINK "http://www.peta.org/issues/Animals-In-Entertainment/default.aspx" \t "_blank"](http://www.peta.org/issues/Animals-In-Entertainment/default.aspx)
<http://www.PETA.org/issues/Animals-In-Entertainment/default.aspx>. To make a donation to support our efforts, please go to [HYPERLINK "http://www.peta.org/donate" \t "_blank"](http://www.peta.org/donate)
<http://www.PETA.org/donate>.

Thank you again for contacting us and for your concern for animals.

Sincerely,

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