

Big Cat Rescue

MAY 2013 WINNER - 2,431 VOTES

With more than 100 exotic felines, life at Big Cat Rescue can get a little wild.

As founder and CEO Carole Baskin says, “There’s no such thing as a normal day.” The Tampa-based organization has won May’s SunState Charity of the Month with 2431 votes on Facebook. The nonprofit works as an educational sanctuary, housing 14 species of abandoned cats, such as lions, tigers and leopards. Many have been abused as performance animals, given up by ill-equipped pet owners or even saved from slaughter.



Although the rescue’s saved cats are unable to be released into the wild, a big part of the organization’s mission is to raise awareness about the challenges of big cats in captivity. Baskin said people should be helping the wild populations.

“They’re too incredible to keep in cages,” Baskin said.

Big Cat Rescue is the largest sanctuary in the world dedicated specifically to abused or abandoned exotic cats. Beginning in 1992, the sanctuary now sits on 55 acres in North Tampa and brings in nearly 30,000 people a year for tours, all run by volunteers.

Since opening, Baskin’s beliefs about exotic pet ownership have evolved. Her introduction to the world of big cats started when she rescued 56 bobcat kittens that were going to be slaughtered for their fur.

She raised them with the help from other owners, later giving them away as pets to what she believed would be good homes. However, as the years went by, failed pet owners would come back to Baskin, unable to handle their big cat’s transition to maturity. Since then, the true difficulties of raising a wild animal have become clear.

Unfortunately, the organization still takes in new cats from around the country that are in dire situations, especially from areas where laws against ownership are not strictly enforced. Just earlier this year, Big Cat Rescue saved six cats from a run-down enclosure in Kansas without proper food, clean water or space. Dead animals were found alongside soiled and unattended cages. The owner was said to have abandoned the property altogether.

In response to tragedies like this, Big Cat Rescue is pushing for federal legislation to ban exotic cats as pets, which Baskin said would solve much of the problem and redirect efforts toward sustaining wild populations.

“Our primary goal is to put ourselves out of business,” Baskin said. “There shouldn’t be a need to run around rescuing big cats.” ■

Learn more at www.bigcatrescue.org.

TO NOMINATE A CHARITY OF YOUR CHOICE OR TO VOTE FOR YOUR FAVORITE NOMINEES, VISIT:

www.facebook.com/SunStateFCU

and click on “Charity of the Month”.

