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COLUMNIST
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Maverick, a tiger rescued as a 9-month-old cub from a private collector, celebrated his arrival six years ago this week at Lions Tigers and Bears animal refuge in Alpine. (Courtesy photo)

Tigermania: As, Maverick, the “tiger king” of Lions Tigers and Bears in Alpine celebrated his birthday on Monday, the sanctuary founder took some shots at Netflix’s current docu-series ratings darling: “Tiger King: Murder, Mayhem and Madness.”

While the series has taken the internet by storm, Bobbi Brink says it falls seriously short in its depiction of the reality that captive big cats endure when exploited for profit in the United States. She says, “They left the animals out of the story.”

Brink acknowledges having clashed in the past with Joseph Maldonado-Passage, aka Joe Exotic, the colorful and controversial operator of the Oklahoma exotic animal park depicted in the series. He was convicted a year ago and sentenced late last month to 22 years in prison for two counts of murder for hire, multiple breaches of regulations governing trade in illegal wildlife and nine violations of the Endangered Species Act, including shooting five tigers to create more space in cages for other exotic cats and selling tiger cubs.

“Maverick’s story is not unlike that of many other captive tigers who have been victimized by the exotic animal trade,” Brink says. Facilities, like those depicted “Tiger King,” are “the grim reality for more than 10,000 tigers languishing in captivity at this very moment.”

What “Tiger King” doesn’t clearly show, she explains, is the ongoing cycle of breeding, exploitation and disposal of animals required to operate a facility that profits off photo ops and cub handling.

“Female tigers are bred, cubs are pulled just hours after birth, used (handled) for up to 12 weeks, and then after they’ve literally outgrown their use, what happens? The truth is — we don’t always know,” Brink says “As long as there is a demand for baby cubs to be held and posed with and the desire to own these wild animals as pets, these places are going to continue to breed, and animals are going to continue to suffer. “

Maverick came to Lions Tigers and Bears six years ago at 9 months of age after being confiscated from a backyard in Ventura by the California Department of Fish & Wildlife. The cub had been purchased for Compton rapper Michael Ray Stevenson, who uses the stage name Tyga, without the proper exotic animal ownership licensing. Today the “cub” has matured to a healthy 419 pounds, Brink reports, and is certainly no one’s idea of a household pet.

“Not all tigers wind up as lucky as Maverick,” she says.