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POMERADO NEWS

Business Spotlight: Lions Tigers & Bears is fierce about protecting exotic animals

Lions Tigers & Bears is a nonprofit organization in Alpine dedicated to providing sanctuary to abused and abandoned exotic animals.

To learn more, the *La Jolla Light* posed the following questions to founder and director Bobbi Brink:

Q. When did your establishment start? Who founded it? What is its mission?

A. I founded San Diego's Lions Tigers & Bears in 2002 when I got a call about two tigers named Raja and Natasha who were living in a 6-by-12-foot chain-link enclosure in a backyard in Texas. The owner bought the tigers as a gift for his wife, but they were getting divorced and he did not want the wife to have the tigers.

I had wanted to start an animal sanctuary ... after working with animals since 1990 and witnessing firsthand the abuses of the exotic animal trade when I was living in Texas.

When I got the call, I knew I had to act quickly, and in less than 30 days I secured the permitting, funding, transportation and location to bring the cats to Alpine, the same site the sanctuary is located today. What began with the rescue of Raja and Natasha is now Lions Tigers & Bears, home to more than 65 animals across 19 species.

Lions Tigers & Bears provides a haven to abused and abandoned exotic animals and inspires an educational forum to end the exotic animal trade. As a state and federally licensed 501(c)(3) nonprofit, Lions Tigers & Bears allows the animals in its care to live out their lives with



dignity in a caring and safe environment.

I also work across the country to coordinate the rescue of big cats, bears and exotic animals and relocate them to reputable sanctuaries where they will live peacefully. ... To date, the LTB rescue team has rescued more than 1,100 big cats, bears, wolves and other animals.

Q. What services do you offer?

A. Lions Tigers & Bears is a refuge for retired circus animals, exotic animals formerly used for ... photo and petting opportunities and abandoned, illegally owned big cats, all who've been rescued and given forever homes in wide open habitats.

The public is welcome to book visits, become a member, host events or stay the night at White Oak Wild Nights, the onsite, private two-bedroom luxurious retreat.

During visits, which happen Wednesdays through Saturdays, guests embark on a two-hour guided visit of the sanctuary to learn about each of the animals and its rescue story. Guests can even feed the animals part of their daily diet with a keeper during a "Feed with the Keeper" or "Behind the Scenes" experience for those 18 or older.

At White Oak Wild Nights, guests can enjoy multiple pools and a hot tub, an outdoor kitchen, roaming the sanctuary, observing the animals and can opt to have a meal prepared by a local private chef.

Q. What makes you and/or your enterprise unique compared with similar ones?

A. Lions Tigers & Bears is San Diego's only big cat and bear sanctuary and the first in Southern California. The sanctuary is one of the only ones in the country to be accredited by both the Global Federation of Animal Sanctuaries and the American Sanctuary Association. To be accredited, a sanctuary must meet very stringent guidelines regarding habitat size, animal care, etc.

Every animal at the sanctuary has been rescued. They each have a unique story, but their common bond is that they are victims of the exotic animal trade. They've been born in captivity, used for profit — like cub-petting opportunities, the entertainment industry or roadside zoos — and then dumped off. Others have been bred and sold as pets, and then their owners abandon or try to sell them because they don't have the capacity or know-how to care for them.

The sanctuary is nestled on 143 acres on the edge of the Cleveland National Forest, and it provides a peaceful life for ... exotic and ranch animals (lions, tigers, black bears, grizzly bears, bobcats, a leopard, a mountain lion, servals, llamas, horses, a donkey, goats, sheep, chickens, peacocks and a macaw).

At Lions Tigers & Bears, we do not buy, sell, breed, trade or exploit animals. It is a no-contact facility, meaning no visitors or staff will ever have one-on-one contact with these animals.

Q. What's new recently that you want everyone to know about?

A. Lions Tigers & Bears has rescued and taken in 15 animals since 2021, including a tiger from an abandoned Oklahoma zoo, a 700-pound grizzly bear that retired from the film industry and two Himalayan black bears that had been neglected for years by a defunct roadside zoo.

My team and I are often law enforcement's first call to rescue an animal, as we are one of the only sanctuaries in the country equipped to rescue, transport and provide veterinary care to rescued animals. We have a state-of-the-art, self-contained 18-wheel animal rescue hauler that provides a safe space for the animals to make them as comfortable as possible on their journey to their new home.

Also, there are many opportunities to volunteer — including food preparation, special events and office help, carpentry or even training as a visit guide — and every task is important to the sanctuary's operations.

Q. What are the advantages of working with La Jollans?

A. La Jollans have taken a great interest in Lions Tigers & Bears. We have several longtime members and donors who live in La Jolla that we deeply appreciate. It takes a lot of work and resources to keep this sanctuary open and able to rescue even more animals. We're grateful for the support we receive from our visitors and donors.

Learn more at lionstigersandbears.org.

— Business Spotlight features enterprises that support this publication. ♦