



Big Cats & People: Injury and Death Rates Rising. Public at Risk Warn Experts

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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(SAN FRANCISCO, Calif.)— October 14, 2003— Children and adults are increasingly being bitten, scratched or killed by wild animals kept as pets in this country.

So far, this year alone (2003) there have been at least 22 big cat incidents. This includes 2 fatalities, 11 injuries, and 9 animal escapes. In the past 5 years there have been at least 68 incidents involving captive big cats; this includes 7 deaths, 35 injuries, and 26 animal escapes. CWAPC also tracks reported incidents involving other captive wild animals including primates, bears, wolves and reptiles; the total number of incidents is much larger.

The Captive Wild Animal Protection Coalition (CWAPC), which represents 20 leading animal protection organizations, zoos and sanctuaries, believes keeping wild animals as pets is dangerous for people and inhumane for animals.

Last week alone, 3 people were bitten by tigers. And 2 tigers, 1 bear, and 1 alligator were confiscated from private homes in New York and South Dakota.

“Even the most highly trained tiger can revert to her wild instincts in a second,” says Sarah Tyack, Deputy Director of Animals in Distress for The International Fund for Animal Welfare (IFAW). “Yet thousands of tigers languish in houses and yards across the nation. How many more injuries and attacks must happen before this ridiculous situation is addressed?” asks Tyack.

Every month there are a number of incidents involving human injury, death and animal escape, most we never hear about. In an effort to understand the extent of the problem CWAPC maintains an extensive database to track incidents involving wild animals.

“This is a huge number of incidents and what is even more alarming is the increase in the rate of incident occurrence. Each tragedy, each injury or death underscores the fact that wild animals are

not appropriate pets,” say Kim Haddad, a veterinarian and Manager of CWAPC. “The only appropriate captive situation for wild animals is in professionally managed and regulated facilities. The idea of a tiger in an apartment and an alligator in the bathtub is hard to imagine, but this really does happen in this country. It’s absolute madness,” Haddad continues.

What The Public Can Do:

You can help prevent your child, neighbor, friend or pet from being the next statistic by doing three simple things:

1. Immediately report any situation involving wild animals that seems dangerous to people and/or inhumane to animals to local police, animal control and to CWAPC;
2. Support federal and state legislation to regulate the trade in wild animals for use as pets;
3. Never buy a wild animal as a pet!!

“Earlier this year, we had a scare with an outbreak of monkeypox,” states Wayne Pacelle, a senior vice president of the Humane Society of the United States. “Now, there’s been a flurry of incidents involving big cats. Before the next pet-keeping fad causes us problems, it is time to adopt state and federal policies to halt the trade in wild animals for use as pets.”

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