

Bears & Big Cats find new life at sanctuary

In 2002, Bobbi Brink founded Lions Tigers and Bears animal rescue that helps to save and give new hope to animals that were abused and being used for the exotic-animal trade.

BY LAUREN C. NIELSEN. PHOTOGRAPHS BY KATHLEEN REEDER

dedicated to providing a safe haven for unwanted and abused exotic animals, Lions Tigers and Bears animal sanctuary was founded in 2002 by Bobbi Brink. The vast and beautiful sanctuary is located near Alpine, California, beside the Cleveland National Forest. This location provides a peaceful atmosphere for the animal residents with plenty of room for them to roam and explore without the dangers they had previously faced in the world.

After seeing victims of the exotic-animal trade first hand, Bobbi was motivated to start the animal rescue and provide those animals with a safe home. In addition to giving these animals a safe haven, Lions Tigers and Bears also strives to educate the public about the abuses of the exotic-animal trade. They are a 'no kill, no breed sanctuary' meaning they allow the animals in their care to live out their lives with dignity in a caring and safe environment.

Sixty animals are currently housed at the sanctuary. In addition to housing lions, tigers, and bears, the sanctuary also houses other large cats like leopards and bobcats; farm animals like llamas, sheep, goats, horses, and cows; and others including a miniature horse, domestic cats, and a parrot.

To educate the public, the sanctuary provides programs for the public who visit. Bobbi shares: "On each visit, the visitors watch an educational video and then walk to each habitat with a keeper who provides additional information and education about the animals, the exotic animals trade and how we can stop it."

The sanctuary also encourages the public to get involved by donating money, donating gifts in kind and volunteering. You can even symbolically adopt one of the animals with a recurring monetary donation. Volunteers are always needed to help with everything from office tasks, to carpentry, to community events, to fence building. There is no lack of ways to help the sanctuary's animals live happy and peaceful lives.

To keep the animals healthy and happy, the sanctuary provides more than a home for them – they also provide food, water, enrichment, medical care as needed and vaccines.

As for the bears at the sanctuary, Lions Tigers and Bears is home to ten different bears of three kinds – Black bears, Grizzly bears and Himalayan bears. Each bear, of course, has a name, a few of which include

Blossom, Teddy, Baloo and Delilah. And while all of the bears have back stories, some even have stories of where they got their names.

One of Bobbi's favourite stories is that of Meatball, the California black bear: "Meatball was visiting people's homes and pools in Glendale, California and was seen holding a frozen bag of meatballs, hence the name Meatball," Bobbi tells us. "He'd been removed twice from the Glendale area and placed back in the wild but returned a third time. At that time, the people of Glendale didn't want any harm to come to Meatball, so Lions Tigers and Bears was contacted and now he's living here forever."

Lions Tigers and Bears rescues exotic animals from all across the US and helps them find homes at other sanctuaries if they are unable to take the animal in themselves. The sanctuary has taken in residents from Oklahoma, to North Carolina, to California and more. This is truly what the sanctuary is all about: the rescues and the animals. And this is what Bobbi loves most about her work. "Rescuing them is very satisfying as we're getting them out of a bad condition and into a new forever home."

The rescued animals at Lions Tigers and Bears are thriving in their forever home and those working at the rescue will continuously strive to save animals and maintain their care and safe keeping at the sanctuary for years to come.



