

Felid TAG Key Educational Messages

The Felid Taxon Advisory Group (TAG) recommends the following key messages for AZA member institutions to use in their educational efforts relating to wild cats.

Message 1: Wild cats serve as key predators in a wide range of environments.

- There are 36 species of wild cats ranging in size from the three-pound rusty spotted cat to the Amur (Siberian) tiger, which can weigh over 600 pounds.
- Wild cats are found in most terrestrial habitats including grasslands, tropical and temperate forests, deserts, mountains, and wetlands.
- Cats are highly adapted for a predatory lifestyle, possessing:
 - acute binocular vision and camouflage for detecting and stalking prey
 - long, powerful legs and flexible skeletons to provide strength and speed
 - sharp claws and long canine teeth for subduing prey
 - scissor-like molars and a rough tongue for shearing meat and cleaning down to the bone
- Cats play an important role in maintaining balanced ecosystems by keeping prey populations in check.
- The presence of wild cats serves as an indicator of a healthy environment with abundant prey populations and intact habitat.



Message 2: Wild cats face significant and urgent challenges to survival in the wild.

- Despite legal protection, many wild cat species are threatened or endangered due to a lack of law enforcement resulting in declining populations, even in parks and reserves.
- The primary threats to wild cats, which continue to escalate, are habitat loss and poaching for furs and traditional medicines.
- Conflicts between wild cats and people are severe in some regions. Wild cat predation on livestock and wild cat attacks causing injury or death to humans frequently lead to retaliatory killing and negative community attitudes.
- The survival of wild cats requires immediate conservation action.



Message 3: Scientists around the world, many affiliated with AZA institutions, are dedicated to learning more about wild cats in order to conserve them.

- Scientific studies of wild cats are on the rise, providing data on the distribution, ecology, and population status crucial to conservation planning efforts.
- Wild cats are elusive, wide-ranging, and occur in low densities, making them challenging subjects for researchers.
- High-tech tools such as remote cameras, satellite tracking, laboratory testing of DNA and hormones, and powerful data analysis software assist researchers in learning more about cats in the wild.

Message 4: Wild cat conservation depends on local community members and other stakeholders valuing wildlife.

- Range country education efforts are important for raising awareness of wild cats and their role in a healthy ecosystem.
- Wild cat conservation is enhanced by the development of economic incentives for local communities to protect wildlife, such as tourism, marketing traditional crafts, and sustainable harvesting and farming of forest products, specialty crops, or livestock.
- Conservationists focus on building capacity for cat conservation by assisting local communities in creating action plans for their region and by training local people and government representatives in research, education, and law enforcement techniques.



Message 5: AZA accredited zoos and aquariums play a key role in the conservation of wild cats.

- Many species of wild cats are successfully managed in breeding programs at AZA institutions, maintaining genetically viable and stable populations that serve as ambassadors to promote awareness and conservation action in visitors through educational exhibits and programs.
- Discoveries from behavioral and veterinary research on cats at AZA institutions contribute to the conservation of wild cats.
- Zoos and aquariums contribute funding and staff support for wild cat field conservation and research projects and provide training for range country conservationists.

Message 6: AZA institutions provide high quality care for cats to meet their physical and behavioral needs.

- AZA zoos and aquariums employ well trained zoological professionals to provide care for their cats, utilizing the best practices in the industry to maintain high standards of husbandry, nutrition, and health care.
- AZA institutions develop comprehensive behavioral enrichment programs to offer their cats opportunities for mental and physical stimulation and make choices in their environment.
- AZA zoos and aquariums utilize training – with an emphasis on positive reinforcement – to enhance cat management, provide exciting and meaningful experiences for visitors, and allow cats to voluntarily participate in physical exams, blood draws, and other veterinary procedures.

Message 7: You can contribute to the conservation of wild cats.

- Visit AZA accredited institutions and support their research and conservation efforts.
- Support other organizations dedicated to wild cat conservation.
- Protect wild cats and their habitats by making cat-friendly choices in your daily life:
 - Avoid purchasing products made from wild cats.
 - Purchase sustainably-harvested wood products.
 - Buy palm oil-free products whenever possible.
 - Keep only domestic house cats, not wild cats, as pets.
- Support legislation that contributes to wild cat conservation.



Message 8: Wild cats are not appropriate pets.

- It is unsafe to keep any type of wild cat as a pet; all species are extremely powerful and exhibit behaviors that are dangerous or lethal, even when hand-reared and cared for by people their entire lives.
- Many state laws prohibit the keeping of wild cats as pets, and those that currently permit private ownership of wild cats are under review.
- Few people have the expertise and resources necessary to provide for adequate welfare of a wild cat kept as a pet, including its needs for sufficient space, exercise, nutrition, veterinary care, and enrichment.
- Keeping a wild cat is a long-term commitment that is expensive and time-consuming. When an owner is no longer able to provide for a wild cat, there are limited options available for placing it in a new home and euthanasia may be necessary.
- Instead of considering a wild cat as a pet, visit your local animal shelter and adopt a domestic cat. Spay or neuter your pet and provide it with a good indoor home.

