

# FELID TAG TIMES

A quarterly publication of the Felid Taxon Advisory Group of the Association of Zoos & Aquariums

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Photo: Eric J. Brock

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ASSOCIATION  
OF ZOOS &  
AQUARIUMS

## Felid TAG News

### New Felid Tag Chair and Vice-Chair

Congratulations to new Felid TAG Chair, Don Goff, and Vice Chair, Cheryl Morris! Both Don and Cheryl have been actively involved in the Felid TAG for a number of years. We are excited about the leadership and the passion they will bring to the TAG in their new roles.

A big thank you must go out to Norah Fletchall and Bill Swanson for their 10 years of fantastic leadership to the TAG. They kept the TAG moving forward and achieving the goals we set for ourselves and continued to push this group to be one of the best TAGs! We look forward to seeing them more relaxed at TAG meetings and enjoying the view from the back of the room.



Chair Don Goff



Vice Chair Cheryl Morris



Photo: Connie Lemperle

### Looking to Exhibit and/or Breed Caracals?

The Caracal SSP is looking for institutions interested in exhibiting and/or breeding caracals! This species is one of the most striking and athletic of small felids. Please contact Kristen Clark, SSP Coordinator, at: [ClarkK@si.edu](mailto:ClarkK@si.edu), Smithsonian's National Zoological Park, Animal Care Sciences, MRC 5507, Washington, DC 20013-7012.

### Snow Leopard Breeding and Transfer Plan Finalized

The Snow Leopard SSP has produced a breeding and transfer plan that is now final and can be found on the AZA website.

## Moving Forward with Serval Sustainability

The Serval SSP is not sustainable. No big surprise, as many SSPs are in the same boat. However, there is absolutely no reason the Serval SSP cannot move towards sustainability. The genetic diversity of the population as it stands will drop below 35% within 100 years. Space in AZA institutions is currently not adequate to hold a sustainable population. Servals are available from outside the SSP population due to their increasing popularity in the private sector, but few of those are of known genetic background. Genetic backgrounds of servals coming from private hands have not been documented rigorously. Although there are almost 100 servals in the Serval SSP, less than 20% of those individuals have a known pedigree, reducing options for sound breeding recommendations. Although it is understandable for zoos to conveniently obtain servals quickly from the private sector (breeders or pet owners), the practice of obtaining servals from entities that did not track genetic background for sustainability purposes has created our poor sustainability status. The prominence of servals as program animals (defined as a non-domestic felid used outside of its enclosure, on or off site, with the primary purpose of educating the public [Felid TAG position statement, 2009]) has also contributed because most program servals were obtained from entities that did not track genetic background for sustainability purposes and do not contribute to the breeding population. As an attempt to increase serval space and improve sustainability, the Serval SSP would like to establish a source for program servals from within the SSP population utilizing servals of known pedigree.

At least 25% of SSP servals are being used as program animals, spanning over 27% of holding institutions. Servals are far more predominant as program animals than any other exotic cat species. Historically, zoos have obtained program servals from private breeders (often at a great expense) that did not provide documentation of genetic background. These servals are now considered "generic" without an understanding of their place of origin. These servals



Tautphaus Park Zoo



Cincinnati Zoo

do not contribute to the sustainability of the population both because of their unknown genetic background and because institutions are rarely willing to allow their program servals to be a part of breeding programs.

According to the 2009 Felid TAG RCP, the number of serval spaces was estimated to decrease. A space survey taken this year revealed that serval spaces have actually increased without the building of new exhibits. This increase is attributed to an increased use of servals as program animals. A few non-holding institutions have communicated interest in obtaining program servals, reinforcing the demand. Slotting servals into the program animal niche may foster sustainability by adding space through moving servals out of exhibit space and into program animal space. Doing this may open up exhibit space for more servals or other small cat species that also need space to advance towards sustainability. Although there are a wide range of opinions on the ethics of managing felids as program animals and their effectiveness at spreading the message of conservation without promoting private ownership of exotic cats, there is clearly a demand for program cats under the belief that appropriate presentation of program felids using a clear ethical message will prevent spreading the wrong message. If there is such a demand it makes sense for the Serval SSP to attempt to satisfy the demand from within the SSP.

But is placing servals in this role the right move or even possible? First, there must be zoos willing to produce servals for program use and good coordination between them and the requesting institutions. This would involve the willingness from the breeding institution to pull kittens from the dam and begin the process of raising the kittens to be effective program animals. The requesting institution would then receive the kitten at an agreed upon age. It makes sense that the exchange happens as early as possible as it should be the requesting institution's responsibility to ensure the kitten is properly raised to be an effective program animal. Any institutions that would like to be a program serval breeder should contact the SSP coordinator (Dan Dembiec, [dembiecd@jacksonvillezoo.org](mailto:dembiecd@jacksonvillezoo.org)).

Second, there has to be adequate expertise available to raise servals to be program animals and ensure their proper welfare. Servals, like any other undomesticated animal, may behave inappropriately for programs. It takes a

certain level of expertise to either ensure that appropriate behavior is maintained while on a program or to recognize when a serval should not be on program. Each program serval-holding institution should have this level of expertise on staff and a training program in place. The time and manpower it takes to raise and maintain appropriately behaving program servals will need to be considered and planned for by each institution before moving forward with obtaining program servals. It is a possibility that some servals may not work out as program animals. Although the SSP will certainly try to help trouble-shoot these situations, it will ultimately be the holding institution's responsibility to plan for this possibility.

Third, program animals with known pedigrees will need to be incorporated into the breeding population. Although there have been multiple cases of reproductively unaltered servals as successful program animals, commonly a distinction is made between program servals and breeding servals, with the belief that breeding or unaltered servals cannot make good program animals due to having less manageable (aggressive, stubborn, etc.) demeanors. It'll be a continuous task of the SSP coordinator working with holding institutions to incorporate the genetics of program servals into the breeding population without diminishing their program demeanor. Taking advantage of servals that do not work out as program animals may be one way. This also may be an opportunity to experiment with artificial reproduction techniques.

Last, it's our duty as an AZA program to ensure the proper message is portrayed from implementing servals as program animals. For example, we would not want to influence the public to go out and get a serval as a pet. Therefore, it is important that public programs that include servals evaluate their effectiveness at passing on the intended message. There should be a consistent means to measure this effectiveness across multiple facilities and validate their utilization. It would also be a good idea to be fairly consistent across facilities in the type of message that is being communicated.

Any institution requesting a program serval should contact the SSP coordinator (Dan Dembiec, [dembiecd@jacksonvillezoo.org](mailto:dembiecd@jacksonvillezoo.org)). Before doing so, please read over the Felid TAG's position statement on the use of felids as program animals from 2009. There will be a few requirements in place before a request for a program serval is granted. The requirements have not been finalized (possibly by next Felid TAG Times), but they will be heavily based on the recommendations within the Felid TAG's position statement. It will certainly take time for this initiative to take off. Please have patience and communicate successes and concerns. But if done well with compliance once this program is in full swing, sustainability of the serval population will improve, program servals will be more easily accessible and cheaper to obtain, and institutions will be more satisfied.

- Dan Dembiec, Serval SSP Coordinator

### Successful Lion Re-introduction Following Aggressive Encounter

The North Carolina Zoo recently re-introduced a pair of lions after a difficult introduction that began over a year before. In September of 2010, our former female lion was euthanized after a brief battle with cancer. This left our 11 year old male lion alone. He was mother-reared and housed in his natal group until his arrival at the zoo in March 2001. He was housed with his brother and with our former female from 2003 until her passing (a pairing that resulted in two sets of cubs). During introductions to his previous female and both sets of cubs this male had never exhibited any aggression leading to injuries.

A new female, mother reared and born in September 2009, arrived at the NC Zoo in October 2010. Prior to her move to the NC Zoo, she was housed with her parents, aunt, and littermates. No unusual behaviors were reported from the previous institution. During her quarantine period, she exhibited high stress with each new situation, but she adjusted fairly quickly to the routine, which included frequent training sessions with staff. She moved from quarantine to the lion building in November 2010.

Once she moved to the lion building, a mesh howdy was established between the two lions one week after her arrival. During this exposure she was initially extremely fearful of our male although observed aggression levels from either lion were brief. Visual introductions were going well with the length and level of anxiety decreasing each day. Over the course of one month, the anxiety level at the mesh became virtually absent and any brief moments of aggression (generally when visual contact was re-established) resulted in the female submitting in front of the male.

The decision was made in early January of 2010 to proceed with physical introductions. The lion holding consists of four rooms with a hallway running behind the first three, opening into the fourth room at the end. During introductions, all the doors are opened leaving a large runaround with two exits from each room. When the doors were opened, the male approached the female slowly (upright posture with no growling) which resulted in female launching herself onto his shoulders and back. At this point he knocked her down and held her for approximately three seconds before releasing her. He backed away and she retreated into the next room where shortly after he again approached her slowly. She directed aggression towards him again, which led him to bite her hind quarters, knock her down, and then hold her down by her throat. He refused to let her up so keepers tried to intervene with distraction devices. He paid little attention to these but released her on his own shortly after. The whole introduction lasted approximately one minute. Injuries at this point, based on visual exams to both cats, appeared to be minor.

Unfortunately, in the next 24 hours the female's condition deteriorated rapidly. She became lethargic and was hesitant to eat and drink. The decision was made to immobilize to assess the injuries which included severe trauma to the trachea and two bite wounds, one resulting in damage

to her hipbone. She quickly developed a systemic infection and her medical care became extensive for the next month.

Once she was cleared medically she began her normal routine again to the extent she would cooperate. Her anxiety and fear response to the male was severe. In an attempt to reduce her stress, she was given the ability to make choices about her surroundings whenever possible. Her choices included howdy contact with the male and space to avoid visual access to him. Unfortunately, at times those choices meant that she would not come off exhibit, staying out for up to 7 days at a time. Each time part of her routine changed, her reliability in coming off exhibit fell apart. Unfortunately, this dramatically decreased the time animals were in howdy contact and so a management decision was made to allow the animal on exhibit access to the night quarters during the day in hopes that more contact was made.

Over time, the female's overall stress level decreased dramatically, even working her way up to re-establishing visual contact on a regular basis. Due to limited interaction during the day that keepers could observe, we began videotaping the holding space in the evenings and early morning. Within a couple of weeks of evening recording, her frequency approaching the mesh increased, although often aggression was the result. All interactions were charted with proximity and the level of aggression from each lion recorded. Slowly, aggression decreased and she started exhibiting submissive behaviors or indifference. By early February (13 months after previous physical introduction), observations of affiliative behaviors, resting near each other, and roaring together were common.

To gain more information and judge the female's reaction to change, we began leaving a shift door slightly open (initially only 2 inches) so they could sniff one another without mesh between them but they could not reach a paw through. They would approach, sniff, and vocalize at one another with the female showing little signs of stress. At this time, they were choosing to spend increasing amounts of time in close proximity and virtually all negative interactions had extinguished, so we decided to proceed with physical introductions again in April. Prior to physical introductions, the female was started on contraception, to be continued at least until the pair proved they could coexist peacefully without the complications of cycling and pregnancy. During planning meetings for introductions, the decision was made to allow the female a safe zone. To create this zone, the entrances to one of the four rooms were closed to the point where she could enter and the male, Reilly, could not.

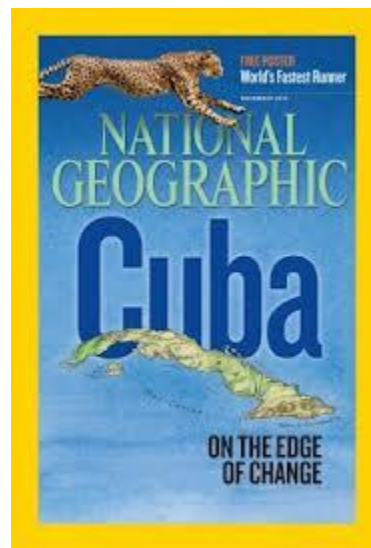
As physical introductions began, they approached each other, she in a submissive crouch and Reilly in an upright posture. Once he came within approximately three feet of her, she swatted at him briefly and retreated to the safe room. She chose not to leave that area again that day, but showed little agitation once she determined he could not follow her. Once the doors were shut for the day, both cats were observed rubbing the mesh at the other. The second day, the same behaviors occurred, but she showed little signs of stress, retreating back into her safe room once he came in close proximity to her. Over the next week, they were kept together most of the day and separated at night.

On day four of the introduction, her safe room was taken away, which led to her staying in closer proximity to the male.

The following week, they were put together on exhibit (with access to holding early in the week) during the day and separated at night. We observed minimal snarling and occasional swatting. The female was submissive as a result of any aggression from the male. After two weeks of night-time separation, we began keeping them together 24 hours a day except during feeds.

They have been together for five months now with no significant problems. The female is interested in staying near our male and is most often the initiator of interactions. They frequently sleep within two feet of each other on exhibit and are showing much more affiliative behavior. They do currently have a breeding recommendation and she is being taken off birth control. The staff, despite high stress levels as a result of these introductions, is thankful to have had such a wonderful learning experience. The lessons we learned were to be flexible and willing to adjust plans based on the individual needs of each animal, and above all, patience.

- Beth McChesney, Zookeeper, North Carolina Zoo



#### National Geographic Captures Cincinnati Zoo Cheetah's Sprint on Camera

Be sure to check out the November issue of National Geographic Magazine, which includes never-before-seen high speed photographs of the Cincinnati Zoo's cheetahs running. Photographer Chris Johns and his crew used a high-def digital cinema camera shooting at 1,200 frames per second and three cameras shooting at 42 frames per second mounted to a remote control sled that ran along a 400-foot-track. Watch a video documenting the filming process at: [ngm.nationalgeographic.com/2012/11/cheetahs/behind-the-scenes-video](http://ngm.nationalgeographic.com/2012/11/cheetahs/behind-the-scenes-video). You can even watch the cheetah run in slow motion on the digital edition for iPad and iPhone. The issue also features an article on cheetahs.

## Other Felid News

### Pallas' Cats Documented in the Himalayas

Camera traps set by World Wildlife Fund in Bhutan to survey snow leopards have caught Pallas' cats on camera. This is the first time this species has been seen in the Eastern Himalayas.

### Pallas' Cat is the New Moscow Zoo Mascot

In other Pallas' cat news, a popular vote on the Moscow Zoo website led to the election of the Pallas' cat as its new mascot. It beat out the hedgehog, polar bear, tiger, fox, and Steller's sea eagle.



### Swim With Tigers at a Private Zoo in Florida

At Dade City's Wild Things, a private Florida zoo, guests can pay \$200 for 30 minutes of hands-on interaction with a Siberian tiger cub, including a dip in the pool. Currently, there are no laws restricting public contact with wild animals like tigers until they reach 40 pounds.

### Big Cat Legislation Introduced to Congress

Two pieces of legislation have recently been introduced to Congress that would address private ownership of big cats—Big Cats and Public Safety Protection Act (HR 4122) in February and the Big Cats and Public Safety Protection Act (SB 3547) in September. If passed, the bills would prohibit the private possession and breeding of big cats. Only zoos, licensed sanctuaries, and conservatories would be allowed to own and breed large cats. Contact your Representative to support the bills and learn more at [www.facebook.com/BigCatsAct](http://www.facebook.com/BigCatsAct).

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Photo: Kathy Moore, Cincinnati

Happy Winter!

Jaguarundi Phase-in  
Caracal Yellow SSP  
Serval Yellow SSP  
Fishing cat Red Program  
Amur leopard Yellow SSP  
Canada lynx Yellow SSP  
Lion Green SSP  
Cheetah Yellow SSP  
Snow leopard Yellow SSP  
Sand cat Red Program  
Ocelot Yellow SSP  
Pallas' cat Red Program  
Puma Yellow SSP  
Clouded leopard Yellow SSP  
Bobcat Yellow SSP  
Tiger Green SSP  
Jaguar Yellow SSP  
Black-footed cat Yellow SSP

## Submissions

Felid TAG Times is edited by Shasta Bray, Felid TAG Education Co-Liaison. Please send comments, suggestions, and submissions to [Shasta.bray@cincinnatiatizoo.org](mailto:Shasta.bray@cincinnatiatizoo.org). Submission deadline for the February issue is January 2.