

INFOSHEET

BIG CAT SANCTUARY

FLORIDA, USA

1. PREFACE

We offer you a unique opportunity of working with a small variety of exotic animals. All animals at our sanctuary originate from situations where the animals were abused, neglected or their owners had them as pets but could no longer care for them. When you participate in this project, you support the rescue of these wild animals in captivity and the conservation of their wild counterparts.

Your time, energy and donation allow the sanctuary to provide a permanent home for these animals to live out their life peacefully in large natural habitats. You will learn about the many issues that face these wild animals in captivity and get a better understanding about what it takes to care for them on a daily basis. All our animals are kept in oversized habitats that far exceed the government standards here in the US. Since these animals were mostly kept as pets reintroduction in nature is out of the question as they never learned to hunt for prey.

During your stay at the project, you will be staying at the main building at the sanctuary. There will be a volunteer coordinator to provide you with all the necessary information about the routines, rules and precautions in order to safely be around the animals. There is a wide range of project activities including maintenance, feeding and general care for the animals.

2. DOMESTIC, WILD AND EXOTIC ANIMALS

A brief report on the animals you will deal with at the sanctuary. On 10 acres / 4 hectares we currently house about 20 exotic and domestic animals. We have the following species at the sanctuary: Tiger, Leopard, Cougar, Bobcat, African Serval, Ostrich, Emu, White Tail deer, and an Iguana. There are also free-roaming feral cats and some domestic animals that are calling the sanctuary home.

2.1 Domestic animals

Feral cats are at the sanctuary due to the extensive issue with free-roaming non-sterilized cats throughout the US. All of our feral cats have been trapped in the past, sterilized and vaccinated against disease and are allowed to roam on the sanctuary grounds. The sanctuary also has a dog that belongs to the owner.

2.2 Exotic animals

Every exotic animal at our sanctuary has its own story. For example, we have two Siberian tigers that were bred to be white and when they were born a golden colour, they were at risk of being euthanized or end up in the wrong hands. There are also two cougars that were rehomed from

another sanctuary that was forced to close its doors, and a leopard whose owner became ill and could no longer care for him. Our animals are not taken from the sanctuary grounds at any time other than for emergency veterinary care. We do not exhibit our animals off property because it would cause unnecessary stress and a danger to the public.

3. LOCATION

The Sanctuary is located in Pasco County, Florida, which is about one hour North of Tampa Florida towards the west coast of Florida. Pasco County is one of the fastest growing counties in Florida. The sanctuary is located in a very rural area but there are already signs of development. The facility is very close to another larger city named Brooksville. Although rural, there are many stores, restaurants and densely populated areas nearby.

There is no regular public transportation, so if you do not have a car, you are dependent on the sanctuary staff taking you to stores or for leisure activities. You are expected to entertain yourself at the sanctuary if no one is available to take you off property. The sanctuary is also close to Crystal River, where you can experience natural springs and take diving trips, take part in underwater photography tours, ecology tours, and bird and wildlife identification. Crystal River is also home of the only growing herd of West Indian manatees. They congregate here because of the warm waters flowing to the surface from the Florida Aquifer in local springs.

There are various opportunities in the area to go canoeing along some of the most beautiful rivers in Florida such as the Pithlachascotee River that runs through New Port Richey. Canoeing or kayaking Florida's rivers allows for extensive native wildlife viewing, you will encounter alligators, an extensive variety of native wild birds, and other wildlife.

4. OUR MISSION

The organization was founded in May of 2000. The founders realized that the problems facing wildlife in captivity were significant. Often, exotic animals found in captivity, are purchased by individuals who want to own them to enhance their personal status or for financial gain by breeding them for profit. Unfortunately, most people don't know that exotic animals in captivity have complex nutritional, dietary and medical needs that are extremely costly when you own one of these animals. Most of these situations end with the animal being euthanized or forced to live a life of misery in unsanitary conditions. There are also situations where people just run into hard times, and no matter how much they love their animals, they aren't able to provide for them anymore so they are looking to place their beloved animal(s) with a sanctuary such as ours.

There are many so-called "sanctuaries", that portray themselves as rescue facilities for exotic animals but seem to be more interested in breeding or purchasing cubs while leaving adult animals who desperately need homes with no place to go! Our mission here is to rescue animals without prejudice. We do not breed, or sell our animals and we do not take our animals out in public or allow direct contact with the public.

We were founded to provide the animals we rescue with over-sized natural habitats where they can

live out their lives peacefully while being provided with the best possible care they deserve. Our animals call the sanctuary their permanent home where they can be safe from harm. Where possible we introduce animals for companionship and enrichment. Our animals are neutered and spayed so there is not accidental breeding as we have a NO breeding policy. We currently have only one animal that is not neutered: a male leopard who does not currently share his habitat with another leopard.

With so many exotic animals in need of homes, we realize that we can't rescue every animal that we are approached with, so we often enlist the aid of other organizations and people with similar goals to help us place animals in need. The sanctuary is operated by an all non-paid volunteer staff, therefore we have no administrative cost, which ensures that all donations go directly towards the cost of care for our animals.

Our project focuses on the importance of proper management of captive wild animals and does not promote private ownership of exotic animals. We teach management in a professional manner and our program stresses the importance of proper management of exotic animals in captivity. The animals we rescue are not pets. They are wild animals and their behavior is unpredictable. As such there are strict rules in place and direct contact is avoided unless there is a medical need and it is done under strict supervision by sanctuary staff or a veterinarian. If you are looking for a volunteer opportunity that offers direct contact with animals you should consider one working with domestic animals.

Any and all violations of the sanctuary rules will cause a volunteer to be the subject of immediate dismissal from the property under escort by security, and/or management or staff. Due to insurance reasons and the welfare of the animals there are NO exceptions to this policy. Safety of the animals, management, staff, interns and volunteers always comes first at our facility. If an exotic animal bites or scratches you, it immediately places the welfare of the animal and our entire facility at risk, so this is no laughing matter and the above rules should be taken serious!

5. HOW YOU CAN HELP

This project is not a tourist program! It is a project that is in need of volunteers who want to actively participate in the activities of proper care and maintenance of our animals. The sanctuary staff tries to accommodate all volunteers that do not have transportation and will make every attempt to take volunteers on trips into town for shopping or other off-site activities. However, volunteers must be prepared to spend quiet evenings or afternoons (due to extreme heat) alone, but computer access and television is available in the rooms for that reason.

You will actively participate in the daily routine of the sanctuary by participating in the following activities:

- clean animal habitats and their surrounding areas;
- to prepare and distribute the food for the animals;
- clean the food preparation areas before and after feeding;
- assist in animal enrichment activities;
- assist in operant conditioning;
- construction and maintenance of animal habitats;

- to be a tour guide as part of our education program;
- assist in the general grounds maintenance of the sanctuary.

During your time at the project you will be supervised by one of the sanctuary staff members. The work can be hard and strenuous at times but is very gratifying as you are making a difference in the lives of these animals. A sense of responsibility and a serious commitment to abide by our sanctuary safety rules is most important in any activity because you will be so close to dangerous wild animals.

The projects daily tasks and special projects will determine your schedule but you will also be allowed time for having fun and relaxing on or off property.

6. SANCTUARY RULES

The sanctuary will require that you will sign a waiver/disclaimer for you to abide by the sanctuary rules:

You will participate primarily for the animals. Please read the regulations below, you are required to understand and agree with them. These rules are in place for both your safety and the protection of our animals. In most cases that a person is injured by an animal, even though it is not the animals fault, the animal is usually killed – so we need to prevent at all costs that a person might be injured by an animal!

- Locked barricade fences around the animal habitats are there for your safety! You are NOT allowed to go beyond the barricade fences unless they are accompanied by a staff member or have prior permission from one.
- While inside the barricade fence area, DO NOT attempt to pet the animal or put your hands inside the enclosure. If you are caught doing this, you will be asked to leave immediately. Close barricade doors when entering and exiting the barricade areas!
- Please do not feed the animals! Our residents are on a specific diet. If you would like to give an animal something, please discuss it with a staff member first. This includes ANY type of toy! Anything that an animal can destroy and ingest is LETHAL!
- Do NOT attempt to take something away from an animal! If it is something they shouldn't have, notify a staff member immediately.
- Do not attempt to enter an animal's habitat unless accompanied by a senior volunteer or staff member.
- While cleaning an animal habitat, always make sure the animal is properly locked out! And, make sure that the outside safety door is closed and secured with 2 clips while inside.
- When working inside an animal's habitat, remember to take out anything you brought in with you! Check the habitat thoroughly before releasing the animal from its lock-out area.
- ALWAYS HAVE 2 PEOPLE CHECK ALL CLIPS AND LOCKS ON ALL HABITAT DOORS! If you are not asked by a staff member or senior volunteer to double check the clips and locks on a door, DO IT YOURSELF!
- Close all gates and doors after entering or exiting a habitat or barricade area. This also applies when opening a barricade door to change an animal's water or removing a food dish.
- Do not run around the premises or make loud noises! Please be respectful of the animals'

environment.

- If you do not understand the rules or have any questions and/or concerns please talk to a staff member or senior volunteer. Staff members/Senior volunteers are not necessarily subject to these same rules. Failure to follow (obey/observe) these rules will be considered grounds for dismissal and depending on the infraction you may not be allowed to return.

Clothing Requirements / Dress Code:

- You are welcome to use an iPod or other portable music player, but DO NOT use it while working inside an animal's habitat or while inside a barricade!
- Please wear clothing appropriate for outdoor weather and exposure. Sturdy, closed toe, shoes are recommended at all times. Sunscreen and bug repellent are recommended.
- For volunteers working for the day; beverages are usually available, but if you have specific needs, you may want to bring your own. If you plan to be on property for the day, you may also want to bring lunch or a snack. A refrigerator and microwave are available for your use. NO alcoholic beverages are permitted.

7. PRACTICAL INFORMATION

7.1 Period

You can participate all year long. You can register for a period of two or more weeks, but no longer than 3 months. Maximum of 2 people may participate at the same time.

7.2 Costs

In addition to the SVI inscription fee, you pay US \$100 per week for your stay at the Big Cat Sanctuary.

Included in the price:

- Supervision;
- Room and board (including sheets, pillows, blankets, bath and face towels);
- Special dietary needs can be met if not too exclusive;
- Internet access, computer access, and TV.

Not included in the price:

- Travel to and from USA;
- Airport transfer fees to and from Tampa airport and the sanctuary (free, or US \$30 one way, \$60 two-way; see below);
- Cancellation insurance, travel, luggage and accident insurance;
- Personal trips during your time off, and any meals purchased off sanctuary property;
- Personal expenses such as: Souvenirs, drinks, entrance fees, medicines, etc.

7.3 Accommodation & food

You live in a private or semi-private room in the main sanctuary residence. Depending on how

many other volunteers are attending this project at one time, you may share your room with 1 other volunteer (same sex). Beds are a double bed or single bunk beds (two levels). All rooms have keys and they can be locked. The sanctuary does have lockers available but we have not seen any need for using them. Hot shower, towels and laundry facilities are at your disposal. Facilities to relax after working hours are available. Each room is equipped with a satellite connection and color television, DVD player, and desk top computer with high speed internet (Wi-Fi) access available for personal use, which you are welcome to use any time you like and is free.

Food is provided at the sanctuary and included in the fee. Full kitchen privileges are available for your use, special arrangements such as vegan or vegetarian food can be made. The food offered is not vegetarian unless you specify your special dietary needs before you arrive, this includes special dietary needs for medical conditions.

Alcohol: Alcoholic drinks are only offered and allowed during outings or during special occasions as directed by the sanctuary staff. Beware if you drink alcohol in your free time or during special events, you are not allowed anywhere near the animals unless you are 100 % sober.

7.4 Flights

You will have to make your own travel arrangements to Tampa, Florida, USA. The animal sanctuary is about a 45 minute automobile drive from Tampa. You should make arrangements with the sanctuary employees to be picked up at the airport in Tampa and transported to the sanctuary. **You must contact the volunteer coordinator via email at least 2 weeks in advance** please.

We ask that you schedule your arrival and departure on a weekday after 18:00 hrs (**6 PM!**) or on a Saturday or Sunday (any time during the day). The fee for the pick-up and drop-off both together is due immediately in cash upon arrival and prior to departure, no exceptions.

You don't have to pay the arrival transfer fee if you are able to schedule your airport pick up time in Tampa to be between 5:30 **PM** (17:30) and 7:30 **PM** (19:30), Monday through Friday only. You don't have to pay the return transfer fee if you are able to schedule your airport drop off time in Tampa between 7:00 **AM** and 8:30 **AM**, **Monday through Friday only**.

7.5 Medical & health

It is required that you have **proof of a valid tetanus vaccination** and **proof of medical insurance** upon your arrival at the sanctuary. Rabies vaccinations: It is not a requirement that you are rabies vaccinated, and in any case if you want to you are able to obtain the necessary anti-rabies vaccination locally. There are no incidences of rabies at this time in the area. Always check about six weeks before travelling to the project with the appropriate health authorities in your country to receive updated to date information about health precautions.

7.6 Medical services

There are no medical facilities at the sanctuary, however we do have first aid kits available in case of an emergency and there is a hospital nearby as well as emergency services available in the immediate area.

7.7 Insurances

You are **required** to carry both **travel insurance and cancellation insurance**; the travel insurance **should cover full medical costs**. The sanctuary will **not** accept any liabilities that could have been covered by travel insurance or cancellation insurance.

7.8 Conditions for participation

The sanctuary does not discriminate against persons with disabilities, however you must be in general good mental and physical health and able to withstand the Florida heat, which can sometimes be up to 40 degrees Celsius. The summertime is also marked by daily tropical downpours and heavy thunderstorm activity with dangerous and lethal lightning storms. Florida is also a state with hurricane activity between May and November.

In addition:

- You must respect and love animals;
- You must be tolerant towards others and abide by all sanctuary rules, any violation of a sanctuary rule is grounds for immediate dismissal and you will not be eligible for a refund;
- You must welcome team work but also be able to work alone;
- You must be able to speak and understand English;
- You must be at least 18;
- You must vaccinate for tetanus, it is preferred that you email this proof via email to the sanctuary prior to your arrival;
- You must have a life and accident insurance for the period that you are going to be at the sanctuary.

7.9 Money

It is recommended that you exchange money at the airport or before your trip. We can take you to a bank at any time to get additional funds from ATM machines if you ensure that you bring instruments that allow you to withdraw money from a foreign ATM machine from your bank account overseas.

7.10 Smoking

Smoking is allowed in designated areas. Cigarette stubs and other garbage must be discarded in designated bins, anyone who does not properly discard a cigarette, will not be allowed to smoke on property after such incident. During the dry season, wildfires are common in Florida and therefore we are extremely careful and have strict rules.

8. ADVISE ON PERSONAL TRAVELLING ACCESSORIES

We advise you to bring light and old clothing; you are going to get dirty working with the animals. You will be working in rain and mud or in a very dry heat, depending on the season. During the months of February and March you may want to bring a sweater and jacket as it does get cold. Any other time of year is marked by extreme heat and rain.

Work clothes: Long pants and shorts, bring closed shoes (lots of bugs here in Florida), long and short sleeve shirts and tank tops. Baseball caps are allowed but any hats that fall off your head easily not recommended. Make sure you do not bring new shoes that you have not worn before, as you will do a lot of walking. You can bring clothes for leisure activities such as beach ware, evening ware or just some nice clothes to go to a casual dinner in. Towels, soap, shower necessities, tooth paste are all included unless you have personal preferences and you can bring your own.

Some other suggested items are:

- valid passport (and visa – if required for your nationality)
- printout of this information brochure
- printout of the sheet with additional information you will receive after booking
- your travel / health insurance papers (proof of medical insurance upon your arrival at the sanctuary)
- proof of a valid tetanus shot
- sunglasses, hat or cap
- sunscreen lotion
- swimsuit
- clothing (long trousers that dry quickly, shorts, T-shirts & shirts with long and short sleeves, sweatshirt)
- waterproof jacket
- comfortable shoes (sneakers, sandals)
- spare glasses for those who wear them
- personal items
- camera

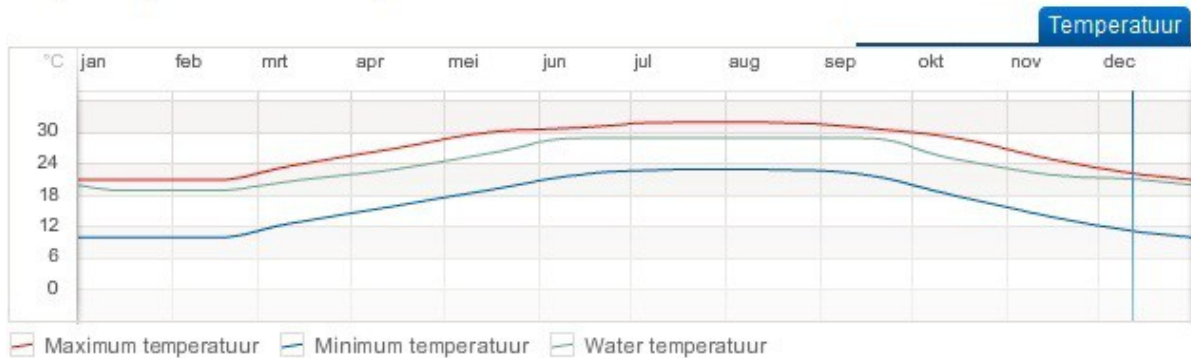
You can wash your clothes at the sanctuary, we have washer and dryer available so when you are packing, consider you don't have to bring too much clothing. There are stores in the area where you can buy cheap shirts if necessary for about \$5 to \$10 and pants for \$10 to \$20 as well (Wal-Mart).

9. PRACTICAL TIPS

9.1 Time and climate

Florida time is Eastern US time and is generally five hours earlier than Central European Time.

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9.2 Electricity

The voltage in Spring Hill is 110 volts.

9.3 Special Days

January 1: New Year

May 31: Memorial Day

July 4: Independence Day

November 22: Thanksgiving Holiday

December 25: Christmas

9.4 Money

The monetary unit of the US is the US dollar \$. One dollar equals 4 quarters (25c), 10 dimes (10c) and 20 nickels (5c). In December 2011, one US dollar is approximately 0.77 Euro; 1 Euro is approximately 1.29 US dollar. Credit cards are normally accepted especially VISA and MasterCard. The prices of goods in the US are relatively cheap for people from Euro-countries due to a strong Euro and you can get anything you need 24 hours a day.

9.5 Bank & Store Opening hours

Bank hours: Monday through Friday: 9 to 5 pm.

Store hours: There are a variety of stores open in the US, many of them open 24 hours.

9.6 Passport and visa

Please check with your airline to determine if you need a visa to enter the US. You can also check this with your booking agency or the US Embassy in your home country. You should bring enough money to finance your stay and have the ticket for your return trip and any kind of emergencies also.

9.7 Safety

At the project you do not have to worry about your personal safety if you follow the sanctuary rules

around the animals. If you go off property on your own, you should consult with the sanctuary staff before going anywhere to get an idea on how to be safe. Of course, you should always be alert as you would in any country you visit. **At no time is the sanctuary responsible for your personal safety while off property and in cases where volunteers do not follow the safety rules.**

10. CONTACT INFORMATION in Europe

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