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Performing Animal Welfare Society Marks 10-Year Anniversary of Largest Big Cat Rescue in U.S. History

Captive wildlife sanctuary saved 39 tigers from nightmare conditions, certain death

San Andreas, Calif. (July 9, 2014) – It was 10 years ago this year that the California-based [Performing Animal Welfare Society](http://pawsweb.org) (PAWS) undertook the largest big cat rescue in U.S. history, saving 39 tigers from certain death. The tigers had been confined in shocking conditions in a pseudo-sanctuary called Tiger Rescue in Colton, Calif., where state officials made a grisly discovery: 90 dead tigers, including 58 baby tigers in freezers.

“The scene at Tiger Rescue was horrific,” said PAWS president and co-founder Ed Stewart. “There were so many sick, injured and neglected tigers that needed intensive care, rehabilitation and a permanent, healthy home. PAWS just had to step up and help these animals.”

The California Department of Fish and Game first seized 10 tigers from Tiger Rescue in 2002 after finding them in filthy cages and suspecting the owner of illegal breeding. Only after executing a search warrant in April

2003 did agents discover the real extent of the death and suffering at the facility. The State seized control of Tiger Rescue and 54 remaining big cats. An animal protection organization, the Fund for Animals, found homes for all but 39 tigers. Sanctuaries around the country were at or near capacity, and most zoos did not want tigers of unknown genetic origin.

PAWS committed to taking the remaining 39 tigers, but first had to construct a specially designed facility that provided grass, trees, swimming pools and room to roam. Transport of the tigers took place over an eight-month period, with six 400-mile journeys to PAWS' 2300-acre captive wildlife sanctuary, ARK 2000, in San Andreas, Calif.

"These tigers had never walked on grass before," said PAWS veterinarian Dr. Jackie Gai. "It was incredibly touching to see them quickly adapt to their new, natural habitat home and to behave like tigers should for the first time in their lives."

Today, 18 remaining tigers continue to enjoy their spacious, natural habitat enclosure. Many of the big cats have since died from age-related conditions.

PAWS estimates that it has cost more than \$3.75 million for housing, food, staff and veterinary care for the tigers, who continue to require specialized treatment. The non-profit organization relies on private donations to help support care of the animals.

"There is only one answer to the horrible exploitation of captive big cats that is taking place across the country today, and that is to stop the reckless breeding of these animals," concluded Stewart. "There is no excuse for using big cats for entertainment and media appearances, photo ops, or as someone's 'pet.' It is a recipe for unspeakable suffering."

For more information on PAWS, please visit www.pawsweb.org.

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Founded in 1984, the [Performing Animal Welfare Society](http://www.pawsweb.org) (PAWS) operates three sanctuaries in Northern California that are home to a large variety of species including 11 Asian and African elephants, African lions, tigers, and other exotic animals rescued or retired from circuses, zoos and the exotic pet trade.

PAWS is licensed by the U.S. Department of Agriculture and the California Department of Fish and Wildlife. It is accredited by the Global Federation of Animal Sanctuaries, and is rated a four-star charity by Charity Navigator.

PAWS is currently celebrating 30 years of rescue, sanctuary care, education and advocacy.