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Lions Tigers & Bears' statement on Bronx Zoo tiger who tests positive for SARS-CoV-2

San Diego sanctuary taking every precaution to ensure health and safety of its 65+ rescued big cats and bears.

ALPINE, CA (April 5, 2020) - Lions Tigers & Bears, an accredited big cat and bear sanctuary located in Alpine, San Diego County, California continues to uphold the health and safety of its 65+ rescued big cats and bears residing at the sanctuary after learning that a tiger living at the Bronx Zoo in New York has tested positive for SARS-CoV-2 (the virus that causes COVID-19 in humans). The United States Department of Agriculture's (USDA) National Veterinary Services Laboratories announced confirmation, which is the first known instance of a tiger being infected with SARS-CoV-2. Samples from the tiger were taken and tested after several lions and tigers at the zoo showed symptoms of respiratory illness.

Lions Tigers & Bears Founder and Director, Bobbi Brink, states "The health and well-being of our animals comes first and foremost. Our sanctuary has a stringent cleaning protocol under normal circumstances, and since the COVID-19 outbreak, and ensuing global pandemic, we have taken even greater measures to disinfect and sanitize all areas of our sanctuary, including animal habitats."

Public health officials believe the big cats became sick after being exposed to a zoo employee who was actively shedding virus. The zoo has been closed to the public since mid-March, and the first tiger began showing signs of sickness on March 27. All of these large cats are expected to recover. There is no evidence that other animals in other areas of the zoo are showing symptoms.

Brink states “We have been following the impact and potential of this virus very closely, and now that we know that a tiger has tested positive in New York, we have activated additional measures to safeguard our animals here. This includes all animal caretakers being required to shelter-in-place on-site, and significantly reducing the number of volunteers to include only those who are highly trained and essential to daily animal care. Additionally, all animal keepers are being required to wear masks, and we’re implementing even more frequent sanitizing of common touch points.”

Lions Tigers & Bears is a strict no contact facility. It has worked throughout the U.S. and abroad, coordinating the rescue and relocation of big cats, bears, and other exotic animals from private ownership, roadside attractions, and defunct facilities. To date, the sanctuary has rescued more than 500 big cats and bears, providing transport and placement at reputable sanctuaries in more than a dozen states. The sanctuary offers lifetime sanctuary to 65 animals, providing them with ample room to roam in species-specific habitats, while providing specialized diets and veterinary care.

LIONS TIGERS & BEARS is a federally and state licensed 501(c)3 nonprofit rescue facility dedicated to providing a safe haven to abused and abandoned exotic animals while inspiring an educational forum to end the exotic animal trade. Lions Tigers & Bears is a NO KILL, NO BREED and NO SELL facility that allows the animals in its care the opportunity to live out their lives with dignity in a caring and safe environment. Lions Tigers & Bears is one of the few sanctuaries in the United States with the highest level of accreditation from the Global Federation of Animal Sanctuaries and the American Sanctuary Association.