

Mountain Lions Attract Visitors

A pair of big cats is star attraction at N.Y. animal preserve.

Posted: Dec. 17, 2008, 3 a.m. EST

The Brookhaven Ecology Site, Park & Animal Preserve on Long Island, N.Y., is the new home of Morgan, a 14-month-old male mountain lion from a zoo in Puerto Rico, and 8-year-old Simba, who was rescued from a veterinary clinic where his owners had abandoned him. Now, the pair lives together like brothers, with the younger Morgan playfully teasing his older "sibling," *Newsday* reports.

The pair is on display with the rest of the 100 animals at the Brookhaven Ecology Site, Park & Animal Preserve's free zoo, open 9 a.m.-4 p.m. every day except major holidays in Holtsville, N.Y. Other animals include bears and a bald eagle, all of which cannot be released back into the wild.

Simba and Morgan are the latest in a line of mountain lions to live at the wildlife center. Kimo came in 1987, rescued from an owner who kept him locked in a cage meant for a dog. Sasha was rescued in 1991 from an apartment where she was kept illegally as a pet. Both big cats lived out their lives at the center, eventually dying of old age in 2000 and 2007, respectively.

Owning a mountain lion is illegal in New York, where the animals are considered extirpated, or locally extinct. The habitat for mountain lions — also known as cougars or pumas — ranges from northwest Canada to southern Chile.

Though not able to return to the wild, Simba and Morgan seem to enjoy their space at the wildlife center. "We try to always keep the animals in pairs," said April Perry, a horticulturist at the center. This gives the animals companionship — and the opportunity for regular play.

"It's funny to watch them because they are just like watching a house cat," Perry said. "You forget how dangerous they can be."