

Big Cats Not For Private Ownership, Expert Says

Vet expert says exotic animals such as lions and tigers are best left to be cared for by zoos or preserves, not individuals.

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Bonnie Beaver, DVM, a professor at Texas A&M University, with her cat Trapper, discourages the public from owning big cats or other exotic animals. It's the Chinese Year of the Tiger, which might tempt some people to fulfill a dream to buy one, or a similar exotic big cat.

But animal-behavior expert Bonnie Beaver, DVM, a former president of the American Veterinary Medical Association and a professor at the College of Veterinary Medicine and Biomedical Sciences at Texas A&M University, says that exotic animals such as lions, tigers, cougars, bears and chimps, are best left to be cared for by zoos, not individuals hoping to make them pets.

"Wild animals do not adapt well outside their native habitat," Beaver says. "They tend to retain their basic characteristics and their wild nature, and people who try to make pets out of them often get hurt, some very badly. I would strongly urge anyone considering buying an exotic animal to think twice about the idea. There is not one good reason to own one."

Beaver adds that there are some stories of individuals who have owned a wild animal for many years, and for no reason, the animal turns on them and attacks, sometimes with fatal consequences.

"These animals can turn from a loving creature to a potential killer in a split second," she says.

Actress Tippi Hedren, founder of Shambala Preserve in Acton, Calif., takes in exotic animals that people have given up after discovering they didn't have the means to care for them. In a CatChannel.com video, Hedren urges private citizens not to purchase or take in big cats.

Texas is believed to have more exotic animals than any state, so that numerous counties have passed stricter regulations in the ownership and care of exotics.

"Animals are made for a certain environment," Beaver said. "And when you change that environment, the animal usually suffers in the long run."