

ANIMAL ISSUES **DIGEST**



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WELCOMING WOMEN FOR WILDLIFE**



WELCOME

Spring is finally here – a long time coming where I am in Chicago. The bright sunny days, green grass, and budding trees bring a vibrant sense of freshness and renewal. I can only imagine that Lyla, our newest primate sanctuary resident, sensed a spring-like awakening when she arrived at our sanctuary and felt the sun on her face and set foot on natural ground for the first time in her life. Read about Lyla on page 3.

This spring, Born Free USA's work is flourishing. In this edition, you'll read about our legislative work (page 9), global conservation initiatives (pages 4 and 5), and in-depth reports on animals in captivity (page 8), and the thrill killing industry (pages 6 and 7).

You, our supporters, are an integral part of our growth and development. Through your contributions, taking action, and spreading our message of Compassionate Conservation, you provide the elements that nourish and cultivate seeds into lasting change for wildlife in our world. Thank you.

Warmly,



Angela Grimes
Chief Executive Officer
Born Free USA



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We work to ensure that all wild animals, whether living in captivity or in the wild, are treated with compassion and respect and are able to live their lives according to their needs. We seek to have a positive impact on animals in the wild and protect their ecosystems in perpetuity, for their own intrinsic value and for the critical roles they play within the natural world.

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MEET LYLA, RESCUED FROM LIFE AS A PET

In February 2023, our team was contacted by Round Rock animal control in Texas to ask if we could help them with the urgent rescue of a young rhesus macaque named Lyla. Lyla had been kept in a hoarding situation by a private owner who did not have a permit for her. In a short court case, her former owner relinquished responsibility, admitting that he had treated Lyla cruelly and could not properly care for her. Custody of Lyla was granted permanently to Born Free USA. Her living conditions in her former home were some of the worst our team had ever seen. She had a dirty, barren cage with nothing in it but a scrap of filthy blue fabric, which she used to shield herself from sight when someone approached. She paced frantically in her cage, and we were deeply concerned that her trauma might mean she would struggle to settle into her new home.

We could not have been more wrong! Almost immediately on arriving at the sanctuary, Lyla's stereotypies subsided significantly and she formed fast bonds with her human caregivers. Incredibly, for a monkey who had been denied the company of others for the entire seven years of her life, she was curious and vocal with her neighbors. She seemed to understand monkey social cues and body

language, which bodes well for her making friends. In the last week, we have tried to introduce her to Maude, an elderly rhesus macaque who was exploited in a laboratory in her former life. The pair eyed each other curiously for a while and then had a shouting match! So, perhaps we haven't found the perfect friend for Lyla just yet, but we are sure we will!



FUND LYLA'S LIFELONG CARE!

Sweet Lyla has a heart condition that will require medication and treatment for the rest of her life. We are holding a special fundraiser to raise \$2,500 towards her veterinary care, with gifts for generous friends of Lyla.

- \$15 donations receive a "Keep Wildlife in the Wild" sticker.
- \$50 donations receive a Born Free USA tote bag.
- \$65 donations receive a limited-edition Lyla adoption package!
- + *three more giving levels!*



To fund Lyla's treatment, return your gift with the enclosed envelope and write "Lyla" on the memo line, or visit bornfreeusa.org/lyla.





RECORD NUMBERS OF SPECIES PROTECTED BY CITES!

Decisions to protect a species under the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) can have serious and long-lasting consequences for the survival of that animal or plant. African elephants are a prime example. Prior to being included in CITES in 1989, up to 100,000 elephants were being slaughtered every year for their ivory. The international ban on ivory trade by CITES prevented the impending extinction of the species (although serious pressure from illegal poaching remains an enormous challenge).

Recognizing the impact of CITES on threatened species of animals and plants, the West African region published a powerful document titled “*Regional Declaration on a Robust Response to the Extinction Crisis*,” which appealed to the CITES community to be ambitious during the 19th meeting of the Conference of the Parties to CITES (CoP19) in Panama last November. This declaration highlighted that up to one million species are threatened with extinction and that unsustainable international trade is a leading driver of this crisis.

Thanks to the tireless efforts of many countries, and in particular those from West Africa, CoP19 resulted in a record number (more than 500) new species being protected by CITES.

These include:

Sharks, Rays, and Guitarfish:

Thirty-seven percent of shark species globally are threatened with extinction. Illegal, Unsustainable, and Unregulated (IUU) fishing for fins and meat has resulted in massive population declines. This is why the listing of almost 100 new species of sharks, rays, and guitarfish on CITES is a victory.

Glass Frogs: These beautiful animals, with transparent skin and large eyes, are threatened due to high demand for the exotic pet trade. CITES decided to include glass frogs in Appendix II, which will regulate the trade and ensure it is sustainable.

Sea Cucumbers: Heavily exploited for consumption as “beche-de-mer,” some species of sea cucumber have experienced huge population declines. For example, the wild population of *Thelenota ananas* has crashed by 80-90%. CITES adopted the inclusion of *Thelenota* sea cucumbers into the CITES Appendices.

Tree Species: More than 150 new tree species are now protected by CITES, including African rosewoods, African pod mahoganies, and trumpet trees.

Taking Action to Stop Zoonotic Illnesses at CITES

International trade in wild species is a threat to human health. Zoonotic diseases are illnesses that are spread between people and animals – and the global scale of the trade in species of animals known to carry zoonotic diseases is staggering. Between 2009 and 2018, 29% of the 90 million live CITES-listed animals traded internationally (around 26.5 million animals) belonged to a family associated with at least one disease of zoonotic origin.

- Seventy percent of emerging infectious diseases are of zoonotic origin (e.g. Ebola, Zika, Nipah).
- Microbes “spill over” due to contact between wildlife, domestic animals, and people.
- Wildlife trade and consumption are two of the key drivers of zoonotic disease emergence.

CoP19 was the first conference of parties to be held since the COVID-19 pandemic, and thanks to a strong proposal from West Africa, an array of new measures were adopted by CITES focused on reducing the risk of zoonotic disease emergence. These measures include ensuring that live animals in trade are properly cared for to minimize risk of injury, ill health, or cruel treatment.

WORKING WITH PARTNERS IN WEST AFRICA TO COMBAT WILDLIFE CRIME

Transnational Organized Criminal Groups (OCGs) carry out illegal logging, poaching, and illicit trade in wildlife across West Africa. This wildlife crime threatens the long-term survival of many species, damages ecosystem services (e.g. fresh water and healthy soil), and undermines the rule of law. These groups are complex, involving a web of criminals that use sophisticated methods to link poachers in West Africa to consumers, buyers, and sellers in the U.S., Asia, Europe, and elsewhere. In addition, these groups often carry out other forms of transnational organized crime, such as trafficking of drugs, weapons, and humans, in conjunction with wildlife trafficking.

The West Africa Strategy on Combating Wildlife Crime (WASCWC) was developed to provide West African nations with a mechanism through which they could prevent these criminal enterprises from operating in the region. Among many objectives, the WASCWC recognizes the importance of training all those responsible for enforcing the law, including police, customs, wildlife authorities, fisheries, prosecutors, and the judiciary. Every step in this chain needs to understand how to combat wildlife crime to ensure that criminals can be brought to justice.

From 2018 to 2020, Born Free USA carried out assessments in all West African countries and found that judges and prosecutors in many countries do not receive adequate training in wildlife and forest laws. Informed by these assessments, in August 2022 and February 2023, Born Free USA, in collaboration with the Global Law Alliance for Animals and the Environment, organized four training

workshops for judges and prosecutors from Benin, Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Liberia, Mali, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone, and Togo.

Modules included a broad range of topics, including sentencing, penalties, and asset recovery in wildlife crimes. This was a 'train the trainer' initiative, with the aim of ensuring that those who attended the workshops will be able to roll out the training to other judges and prosecutors involved in tackling wildlife crime.

This training was made possible thanks to the USAID West Africa Biodiversity and Low Emissions Development (WABILED) program, for which Born Free USA is an implementing partner.



**WILDLIFE TRAFFICKING GROUPS ARE
COMPLEX, INVOLVING A WEB OF CRIMINALS
THAT USE SOPHISTICATED METHODS.**

NEW REPORT EXPLORES THE

I walked into the large room and was immediately struck by the loud rattling noise of thousands of stressed snakes. In the room, there were three pits where snakes were being harassed for paying audiences, as well as another area where decapitated snakes were being skinned by staff and members of the public, including children. Over the course of one weekend in March each year, thousands of snakes are killed as part of the contest, and winners receive cash prizes. The level of animal cruelty is overwhelming, with snakes being handled, kicked, “milked” for their venom, and ultimately killed. This is one of the largest thrill killing contests in Texas, the Sweetwater Rattlesnake Roundup.

The Sweetwater Roundup is just one example of the ways in which thrill killing of innocent animals has become an increasingly popular way for people to spend their time. Texas acts as an epicenter of thrill killing in the United States and is home to some of the most egregious practices of this kind. From killing contests to trophy hunting, to hunters gunning down pigs from helicopters, Texas has more opportunities for the would-be thrill killer than anywhere else in the U.S. For this reason, we have focused on the Lone Star State as our case study for our newest investigation, *Thrill Kill: Recreational Animal Slaughter in the U.S.*

The West Texas Big Bobcat Contest is a killing contest that happens three times per year, each time calling on its participants to kill as many animals as possible. The payouts are eye-watering, with the killer of the “biggest bobcat”

walking away with close to \$50,000 in prize money. Other jackpots, including for the most grey foxes killed, the most coyotes killed, and the most bobcats killed, total in the thousands of dollars each. Others such as the Wise County Hog Contest and the Varmint Extreme Contest follow similar frameworks and pay out large jackpots. The aim of these competitions, like the rattlesnake roundup, is as much death as possible for as much money as possible. There have been calls to ban killing contests from around the country, but they remain legal in 42 states.

Texas is also home to a burgeoning business in trophy hunting of exotic species. Ranches like Ox Ranch, and



Texas Hunt Lodge proudly advertise endangered – and even extinct in the wild – African species for people to kill if they are willing to pay thousands of dollars. The animals are felled by rifles and bows wielded by often amateur hunters. While hunters generally argue that a clean shot and a quick death is imperative, the videos published by these ranches show multiple animals injured and thrashing around on the ground as a result of a poor aim. In one video, a deer is shot with a crossbow and runs into a pond, where he drowns as the hunters laugh hysterically and film on their phones. Another hunter kills a large porcupine as the animal quietly forages and ambles around in a wooded

'THRILL KILLING' OF ANIMALS

area. Failing to kill the porcupine with the first shot, the hunters film the animal as they struggle on the ground. The ranch calls the porcupine hunt a “unique opportunity.”

If killing contests and trophy hunting were not enough, the feral pigs of Texas are subjected to perhaps the most terrifying of ordeals as people pay thousands of dollars for the opportunity to gun them down with automatic weapons from low flying helicopters. Companies such as Helibacon and Pork Choppers take advantage of aerial hunting laws in Texas by renting out a gun seat in their helicopters and allowing inexperienced hunters loose with semi and fully automatic rifles and bows at terrified pigs running below them. The videos published on Helibacon’s website show laughing hunters reflecting on the experience. One hunter says:

“We pulled up on the first hogs and... I kinda blacked out and just started shooting... rounds off everywhere, I wasn’t aiming for anything, I got so excited...” Another laughs as he says it was “fantastic” to “see the guts everywhere.” A bow hunter tells the camera that it is a “bucket list” item for him to try this. He admits that he does not know if it will work. He shoots multiple pigs, who continue to run with the arrows sticking out of their skin. Even fellow hunters commented on the video that it was cruel.

In addition to the extreme animal cruelty meted out by participants, our research also uncovered other disturbing findings on the wider views of some of the companies and individuals in question. For example, at the rattlesnake roundup the confederate flag – widely recognized as a hate symbol – was proudly displayed

behind more than one stall. Repeated racist, sexist, homophobic, and transphobic remarks and posts were made by multiple individuals and companies on social media platforms, in publications, on podcasts, and at live events. The links between animal cruelty and other forms of discrimination and harm should not be ignored.

— Dr. Liz Tyson-Griffin,
Programs Director

With this new report, Born Free explores the dark and disturbing truth behind thrill killing of animals and calls for an end to these brutal practices. You can read the full report, explore the accompanying resources, and take action help end thrill killing at bornfreeusa.org/thrillkill.

SAVE A LIFE – DONATE TO BORN FREE USA

Every donation made to Born Free USA supports our life saving work for animals. Millions of animals, each one precious, need protection from killing contests, wildlife trafficking, trapping, exploitation, the fur trade, and more. Please open your heart



to them and make a gift with the enclosed envelope or visit bornfreeusa.org/donate.





ANIMAL ESCAPE INCIDENTS HIGHLIGHT PROBLEMS WITH ZOO CAPTIVITY

Zoos make many false claims, most notably including that their existence helps improve species conservation in the wild; animals kept in captivity at zoos live healthy, fulfilling lives; and, at the very minimum, they are safe places for the public to visit.

As concerningly highlighted by recent news reports surrounding the Dallas Zoo, including the mysterious death of a vulture, the escape of a clouded leopard, vandalism in the form of holes cut into animal enclosure perimeter fences, and stolen emperor tamarins (among several others), the role of zoos and their existence altogether have consequently fallen under more scrutiny. How can the public trust that zoos help conservation efforts in the wild if the very individuals under their care in captivity cannot be reliably protected?

Similar incidents within the past year have occurred at numerous zoos across the United States, shedding light on what Born Free has argued all along: zoos provide little more than entertainment for human visitors at the expense of wild animal welfare. Sadly, the threat animals pose to public safety during

these dangerous incidents sometimes costs them their lives.

For example, at the Jacksonville Zoo and Gardens in Florida, a five-year-old North American black bear named Johnny escaped an exhibit “behind the scenes” and subsequently had contact with a zookeeper. He was shot dead by the zoo’s lethal weapons team. The keeper was hospitalized with multiple injuries.

At Wild Florida, an escaped rhino was chased, shot, and killed by staff members. In the weeks following this incident, an inspection revealed that Wild Florida was non-compliant under the federal Animal Welfare Act regarding other animals kept at the facility, including in 2022, when several Barbary sheep escaped the property and were killed by hunters.

When keeping wild animals in cages does little to benefit their survivability in the wild, harms their individual welfare, and results in their premature, undeserved death – how can zoos continue justifying their existence if all they stand for becomes null and void when tragedies recur?

Read our report about polar bears in captivity, *Born to Roam*, part of a collection of reports written in collaboration with Born Free Foundation, which summarizes the issues of keeping large mammals in captivity, at bornfreeusa.org/borntoroam.



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FIGHTING FOR WILDLIFE IN THE 118TH CONGRESS

We are now several months into the new 118th Congressional session, which is already proving a challenging political environment. But, as always, we remain steadfast and undeterred in our mission to advocate for good policy!

We hope to build on the recent success of the Big Cat Public Safety Act by prioritizing the Captive Primate Safety Act this Congress. This bill seeks to prohibit private possession of all non-human primates. These animals are highly intelligent with complex needs that are irreconcilable with the realities of a captive life as pets. Passing this bill will effectively put an end to the inhumane and dangerous primate pet trade.

Born Free USA will also continue to advocate for the Refuge from Cruel Trapping Act, a bill that would ban the possession and private use of body-grip traps within the National Wildlife Refuge System (NWRS). The inherent purpose of these refuges is to be a sanctuary for native wildlife. And yet, according to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, trapping currently occurs on 262 refuges across 47 states – 46% of all refuges! Passing this bill will significantly truncate the scope of trapping in this country and make these public lands true refuges for wildlife and the public.

Lastly, Born Free USA and our partners are working hard on legislation to phase out mink fur farms in the United States. Mink, especially when kept cruelly confined in close quarters, incubate zoonotic diseases such as COVID-19. Because the minks' upper respiratory tract is exceptionally well suited to be a conduit to

humans', these farms create the perfect conditions for new mutations of diseases that can jump to humans – possibly creating the next global health crisis. The bill, Mink: Vectors for Infection Risk in the United States (the Mink VIRUS Act), seeks to protect public health and human safety by implementing a one-year phase-out period of domestic mink fur farms.

We hope to see all three of these priority bills introduced in Congress in the coming months, and we will need your help to move them forward!

CALLING ALL ACTIVISTS!

Each year, we receive messages from concerned animal lovers asking for our help. Whether they want to prevent a circus from coming to town or petition the city to pass a ban on fur sales, we wanted to provide resources to better encourage local activism. In response to these noble requests, we compiled an Activist Toolkit; a comprehensive virtual package of free resources including fact sheets, flyers, how-to presentations, social media graphics, and more to supplement a variety of campaigns – even for the most amateur animal activists.

These resources will encourage the municipal, county, and state-level changes that are equally as important as the federal legislation we often focus on. Visit bornfreeusa.org/action-center/toolkit/ to access the Toolkit.

WELCOMING WOMEN FOR WILDLIFE TO THE SANCTUARY!

Earlier this spring, Women for Wildlife members held their first members' gathering at Born Free USA's primate sanctuary in south Texas. Attendees received a private tour of the sanctuary, learned more about our rescued monkeys, and met sanctuary staff. We assembled and delivered enrichment boxes to a few monkeys, which included some of their favorite treats such as granola, dried fruit, and nuts.

Our Women for Wildlife program launched in 2022 to engage our supporters on a deeper level with our work. Membership donations support Born Free USA's sanctuary as well as specific wildlife projects that the group votes on annually. Last year, members voted to support the purchase of wildfire prevention equipment at the sanctuary. Attendees had the opportunity to see the equipment firsthand during their members' visit to the sanctuary.



A special thank you to all our Women for Wildlife members who generously supported our primate sanctuary in 2022. We hope you will join this amazing group of compassionate individuals making a positive difference for the rescued monkeys at our sanctuary and other wild animals around the globe.



WOMEN FOR WILDLIFE

Join Women for Wildlife or purchase a gift membership today! Your donation will support Born Free USA's primate sanctuary as well as specific wildlife conservation projects. Members will vote on their designated project to support this fall.

Learn more about our membership levels or, if you're ready to join or renew, please visit bornfreeusa.org/womenforwildlife.

You may also include your membership donation in the enclosed envelope with this magazine. Please remember to include "Women for Wildlife" in the check memo. For questions, please email Wendy Coonrod at wendy@bornfreeusa.org.

PLANTING SEEDS TO GROW FOR YEARS TO COME...

As lovers of wildlife, we put our passion for animals to work every day. But how can we make sure our love of wildlife lives on after we're gone? A simple act today can grow into a towering legacy, like planting a seed that becomes a tree. This act is planning your legacy gift to Born Free USA.

When you choose to add Born Free USA to your will or estate plan, you are ensuring that animals will be able to live freely even when you can no longer be there to speak for them. The legacy gifts we've received have done so much good for animals. They ensured we could continue to protect wildlife throughout the pandemic, they helped fuel our decade-long fight for big cat protections, and they allow us to continue to grow our primate sanctuary as more and more monkeys need a home. Thanks to these gifts we have grown over the last two decades and risen to the challenges facing wildlife. Ten, 20, 30 years from now, Born Free USA will still be here. Protecting endangered species, standing against trapping and trophy hunting, caring for rescued monkeys, making the world a better place for wild animals. And with a legacy gift, you can still be there too, wherever there are animals most in need.

Born Free USA has free online tools to help you plan your legacy through our friends at FreeWill.

To learn more visit bornfreeusa.org/planned-giving



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