

Phasing out big cats in private ownership

The Punjab Wildlife and Parks Department (hereafter referred to as 'the department') notifies the 'Guidelines for the Management and Acquisition of Big Cats 2011 (hereafter referred to as 'guidelines'), including the requirements of enclosure size.

However, the department now introduces a plan to phase out the ownership of big cats in private breeding farms, residential homes, and other places in private ownership. This action is taken because of risks of zoonosis, public safety, serious animal welfare concerns, and the nature of private breeding farms (sale of live animals and their derivatives) as well as the unregulated nature of big cats in individual ownership. This step is taken to align with the Government of Pakistan's commitment to the CITES and CBD. Big cats (Lions, Tigers, Puma, Cheetahs, and Jaguar) are not indigenous to Pakistan, therefore, their captive breeding under private ownership serves no purpose of conservation. The main purpose of keeping big cats in Zoo's or Safari's is educational, scientific research, and tourism. It is to be noted that indigenous species of big cats and medium to small cats are already protected and it is illegal to keep them in private places.

Phasing out plan of the big cats in private ownership has the following components as approved by the **Punjab Captive Wildlife Management Committee**:

1. All owners of big cats will be required to declare their big cats and will be given a timeframe of one month for doing so. All these owners will register their big cats with data on number, age, etc. according to the procedure issued by the Punjab Wildlife and Parks Department.

Housing in Private Wildlife Parks and Safari Parks

2. Registered Private Breeding Farms, Private Wildlife Parks and Private Safari Parks and as mentioned in Section 20 of the Punjab Wildlife (Protection, Preservation, Conservation and Management) Act 1974 (As Amended in 2025), that meet the standards of the 'guidelines', and only those that are open to the public for education purposes can keep big cats. These facilities must have an education programme including a) signage sharing different aspects of these wild cats such as their behaviour, interesting features, threats facing the wild populations, conservation challenges, etc. b) visitors/school programme c) online presence to guide and educate the public.
3. The registered private breeding farm owners shall declare the number, age, species and other details of their captive big cats on Wildlife PASS app, within timeline.
4. Breeding of big cats will only be allowed to a level to sustain their captive stocks and are only allowed to sell big cats to registered 'Private Wildlife Parks and Safari parks'. Only registered Private Breeding Farms or Private Wildlife Parks or Safaris will be allowed to carry out transaction related to big cats among themselves and that too through the permission of Wildlife Department. Any stock replenishment/gene pool diversification can only be done through exchanges/breeding loans with public zoos and/or private facilities registered with the Wildlife Department for the purpose.
5. The Wildlife & Parks Department portal will maintain the data of private wildlife parks and safaris/zoos to improve transparency and to be able to track mortality, exchanges, sale, etc.

6. Rules for the registration of Private Wildlife Parks, Private Safari Parks must be framed.
7. Each and every big cat owner including owner of private wildlife breeding farm shall be bound to microchip the animal and upload its unique number on the wildlife pass app. Within a period of 3 months at his own cost.
8. Standards for keeping of big cats must be followed by all owners and private wildlife breeding farm owners' otherwise legal action shall be initiated.
9. As regard the big cats in possession for display purpose with the circus. The owner of circus shall be bound to declare the animals, neuter/ use contraceptive and keep them in appropriate cages/spaces. He will also be bound to get the license issued for each big cat.

Big cats in residences

Big cats cannot be kept at residences or in residential areas. Considering that some individual owners of these big cats may have a strong emotional bond, the department is offering the following:

1. All owners of big cats who currently have big cats at their residences or in residential areas will have to make alternate arrangements to shift them to farms or farm houses out of residential areas ensuring the standards of keeping/enclosures as indicated in the 'guidelines' are met and shall obtain possession license.
2. Such owners will be given a period of six months following the last date of declaration of big cats to take measures to stop the breeding of their big cats. The solution has to be permanent. Either they should neuter their big cats or use contraceptive measures to restrict the breeding.
3. If the individual owners are unwilling to neuter the big cats or make the investment in the enclosure, they have the option to give their big cat's away (sale/donation to registered breeding farms or registered private wildlife park/safari).

Additional points:

- Individual owners have the choice of voluntary exit.
- No big cat owner can take big cats outside the premises of farms or their registered zoo/safari/park for public display or allow visitors inside an enclosure even if these animals are fully trained and/or tamed.
- The Punjab Captive Wildlife Management Committee can choose to euthanize big cats humanely in order to prevent any compromise on the welfare of animals.