

## AAFP Position Statement

### Ownership of non-domestic felids

By definition, non-domestic felids are wild, exotic and untamed. Wild and exotic cats are dangerous animals and only trained, regulated and qualified professionals with facilities to meet the welfare needs of these cats should keep them. The American Association of Feline Practitioners (AAFP) supports and encourages federal, state and local ordinances and laws that prohibit the importation and ownership of non-domestic felids by individuals.

#### Public safety considerations

✦ **Safe facilities** The average individual does not have the knowledge or expertise to build a suitable facility to acceptably house and maintain the undomesticated felid, either publicly or privately.

✦ **Caretaker's knowledge of behaviors** Individuals are unlikely to be qualified to properly identify behaviors that are dangerous. Children and adults have been seriously injured or killed, even when the animal involved was 'only playing'.

✦ **Unpredictability of the non-domestic felid** The instinctive behaviors of the adult cat replace the dependent behavior of the juvenile, resulting in biting, scratching and destructive behaviors without provocation or warning. Because of the unpredictability of their behavior, and the potential to kill or seriously injure people and other animals, these cats cannot be kept as 'pets'.

✦ **Jurisprudence** Compliance with federal, state and local law and permits can provide a measure of safety and welfare control only if the ordinances are enforced.

#### Welfare considerations

✦ The welfare of these cats is dependent on the proper facilities to provide adequate and complete and balanced nutrition, fresh water sources, thermal protection control, lighting, adequate space requirements, and sufficient environmental enhancements to allow for normal behavior and social interaction.

✦ The specialized facilities must be built to ensure the five freedoms (see AAFP position statement on general principles of feline welfare at [catvets.com/guidelines/position-statements/principles-welfare](http://catvets.com/guidelines/position-statements/principles-welfare)), and to ensure the continuous, life-long dedication to the nutritional, medical and social needs of these cats. This is essential to the welfare of these cats.

✦ It is virtually impossible for an untrained, non-licensed individual to fulfill these responsibilities for the lifetime of the non-domestic cat. While as cubs these cats may

be appealing and adorable, once the cat is full-grown, the financial responsibility for proper maintenance and upkeep is substantial. As a result, the non-domestic felid is invariably placed in an inadequate, unsafe and inhumane facility. In the hands of untrained, non-licensed individuals, these non-domestic felids have repeatedly been found to be housed in substandard and unsafe facilities that do not protect the public or the welfare of the cat. Substandard nutrition and neglect further deteriorate the welfare of these cats. Ultimately, many are abandoned or killed for meat and pelt.

✦ Specialized veterinary medical care to properly attend to the medical needs of these cats is available to a limited degree in certain parts of the USA, but completely unavailable in other parts of the country. The ability to provide medical care is absolutely necessary for the welfare of these cats.

✦ Few sanctuaries exist for the non-domestic felid, and most of these sanctuaries are filled to capacity. Some of these sanctuaries are substandard as well. Public and private viewing of these collections should be discouraged because of safety and welfare considerations.

✦ For these reasons, the AAFP believes the keeping of non-domestic felids by individuals is dangerous and inhumane.



The caracal (*Caracal caracal*) – from the Turkish 'karakulak' meaning 'black ear' – is a fiercely territorial medium-sized (11–18 kg) cat ranging over the Middle East and Africa. It is one of the non-domestic species that is sometimes ill-advisedly kept as a 'pet'. ©Wikimedia Commons

#### References

- 1 Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service. United States Department of Agriculture's miscellaneous publication 1560. **Position statement: large and wild exotic cats make dangerous pets.** [www.aphis.usda.gov/animal\\_welfare/downloads/big\\_cat/position.pdf](http://www.aphis.usda.gov/animal_welfare/downloads/big_cat/position.pdf). (2000, accessed December 20, 2018).
- 2 Captive Wild Animal Safety Act of 2003. Federal Register Vol. 72, #158 August 16, 2007, Department of the Interior.
- 3 Liebman MG; Michigan State University, Animal Legal and Historical Center. **Detailed discussion of exotic pet laws.** [www.animallaw.info/article/detailed-discussion-exotic-pet-laws](http://www.animallaw.info/article/detailed-discussion-exotic-pet-laws) (2004, accessed December 20, 2018).
- 4 American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals. **Position statements on exotic animals as pets.** [www.aspc.org/about-us/aspc-policy-and-position-statements/position-statements-exotic-animals-pets](http://www.aspc.org/about-us/aspc-policy-and-position-statements/position-statements-exotic-animals-pets) (updated 2016, accessed December 20, 2018).
- 5 American Animal Hospital Association. **AAHA position statement: wild animals as pets.** [www.aaha.org/professional/resources/wild\\_animals\\_as\\_pets.aspx#gsc.tab=0](http://www.aaha.org/professional/resources/wild_animals_as_pets.aspx#gsc.tab=0) (revised 2014, accessed December 20, 2018).
- 6 Martell JEM. **Dangerous, wild or exotic animal ownership and its relationship to animal hoarding [abstract].** Joint International Educational Symposium on Animal Welfare; 2009 Nov 8–11; Michigan State University, East Lansing, MI, USA. [www.avma.org/Events/Symposiums/AnimalWelfare/Pages/Dangerous-wild-or-exotic-animal-ownership-and-its-relationship-to-animal-hoarding.aspx](http://www.avma.org/Events/Symposiums/AnimalWelfare/Pages/Dangerous-wild-or-exotic-animal-ownership-and-its-relationship-to-animal-hoarding.aspx) (accessed December 20, 2018).

This Position Statement is intended to update and replace the AAFP's earlier Position Statement 'Ownership of non-domestic felids', published March 2010