

LOCAL

Big cats rescued from Tiger King Park now thriving in San Diego County

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Jem and Zoe were rescued from a Tiger King park. (Credit: Lions Tigers & Bears / The San Diego Animal Sanctuary)

SAN DIEGO (FOX 5/ KUSI) — A tale of two tigers connected to the underworld of big cat breeding and a murder-for-hire case has concluded with a happy ending.

Their names are Jem and Zoe. They were rescued from Tiger King Park in Oklahoma back in May 2021.

The name “Tiger King” may be recognized by many who have seen the true crime documentary series detailing the life of former private zookeeper Joe Exotic, who is now a convicted felon.

The three-season series peers into the community of big cat conservationists, collectors, private zoos and animal sanctuaries that span the country.

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In short, Joe Exotic had a rivalry with a woman named Carole Baskin, the owner of Big Cat Rescue. Baskin had accused Exotic of abusing and exploiting the big cats for personal gain.

That feud ended with Exotic behind bars, where he's serving a 21-year prison sentence. Court records state he attempted to hire two men to murder Baskins. A murder-for-hire plot that was unsuccessful.

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Since Exotic's downfall, his big cat park has been shut down due to ongoing violations of the Endangered Species Act. Rescue teams came in to rehome the animals once under his care.

The founder of [Lions Tigers & Bears \(LTB\)](#), an exotic animal rescue and sanctuary in Alpine,

made it her mission to help. [Bobbi Brink](#) and the LTB rescue team, along with other sanctuaries, used trucks and trailers to rescue a total of 69 big cats from the park.

The animals were then transferred to reputable sanctuaries across the U.S. That's when Jem and Zoe made their way to San Diego County, finding their new home at LTB. According to Brink, the long road to recovery for these tigers was just beginning at that point.

“Their condition was dire, marked by severe malnutrition, emaciation, dull skin, and other issues,” LTB explained. “The trauma from long-term abuse led to the development of uncharacteristic behavior, such as not eating for days at a time.”

LTB’s founder said it took a long time for Jem and Zoe to start displaying normal behavior. Now three years later, LTB told FOX 5 that the tigers are finally “living their best lives in their forever home.” They have both gained weight and are “adapting beautifully” despite past abuse.



Jem and Zoe are seen playing at Lions Tiger & Bears rescue in Alpine. (Credit: Lions Tigers & Bears / The San Diego Animal Sanctuary)

“Missions like these are impossible without the support from compassionate individuals,” LTB said while referring to generous donors who have given financial support to the rescue.

The sanctuary is hosting a fundraising event called “Wild in the Country” on May 18 from 2-6 p.m. There will be a silent and live auction, as well as dinner and entertainment. Brink said this is their biggest fundraiser of the year, and she encourages San Diegans to join in on the fun.