

October 6, 2024



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OnlyFans, trafficking and drug dealers: How a jaguar cub wound up in a California suburb

At less than a month old, unsteady on his small paws, the jaguar cub was already working. While others born in the Amazon rainforest were still being nursed by their mothers, he was rented out to do a photo op in a Texas hotel room for \$1,000 an hour. People snapped their fingers to get the cub's attention and held him on their laps. They posed with him for photos later posted on Instagram. In video of one such photo shoot, the cub — smaller than a house cat — shrank back from the loud voices around him. As the jaguar wandered on the hotel carpet, Abdul “Mannie” Rahman, who had paid to rent him, decided he wanted to purchase the tiny feline.

Rahman, who made his money illegally selling marijuana, paid a discounted rate of \$25,000 and another \$1,000 to have the cub transported from Texas to his California home — breaking federal law. “All I knew was the jaguar was cute, and I had the money, and I wanted it,” Rahman, now 36, told The Times. The love affair did not last long. Investigators say the jaguar was sold from one drug dealer to another. Six months after he was born, the cub was dumped at a San Diego sanctuary, malnourished, patches of fur missing, covered in feces.

The ensuing investigation would ensnare a Texas woman notorious for dealing in exotic animals (and posing naked with them on her OnlyFans account), result in federal charges and eventually lead to the rescue of yet another jaguar. It would also provide a window into the exotic pet trade and the ill-fated animals caught up in it.

‘Tiger mom’

The fuzzy cub, eyes half-closed and claws outstretched, appeared on Instagram at 14 days old. Trisha Meyer, who refers to herself as a “Texas Zookeeper,” posted a gallery of photos and videos, holding the jaguar in the palm of her hand, squeezing him to her cheek. In one 2021 video, as the cub lay on Meyer's lap, he licked at the empty air. “thankful to be his momma,” Meyer wrote about the cub, whom she called Amador. “#catmom”. Meyer, now 42, made a living selling exotic animals from her home in Texas, where the laws on exotic pet ownership are liberal and business is brisk. She posted pictures of macaws, monkeys, tigers and foxes. On Meyer's OnlyFans page, the posts were less PG. She sandwiched Amador between her exposed breasts. “Message me for video special request,” she wrote.

It's unclear how Amador wound up in Meyer's care, but by then she had a long and checkered history with animals, both exotic and domestic. A California resident had gone to authorities in the fall of 2016, alleging that he had paid Meyer \$3,000 for a Savannah kitten, whose spotted coat resembles that of a wild cat. The buyer never received the cat, according to a criminal complaint filed in Texas.