



Guidance on the keeping of Leopards (Panthers), Puma (Cougar) and Jaguars

Dangerous Wild Animals (Northern Ireland) Order 2004



- 1. Species Names**

Panthera pardus - Leopard (panthers)

Puma concolor - Puma (cougar, mountain lion, panther)

Panthera onca - jaguar
- 2. Additional information**

All members of the cat family, except for the domestic cat (*Felis silvestris catus* – previously known as *Felis catus* or *Felis domesticus*) require a licence under this legislation.

Cat species other than those listed in paragraph 1 may have different husbandry and housing requirements to those listed below. If you propose to keep a large cat species not listed above, please contact the Department of the Environment for further advice.
- 3. Conservation status**

Leopards, jaguar and some subspecies of puma are classified as Annex A species under EC Regulation 338/97 (relating to the Convention on Trade in Endangered Species (CITES)).

Special permits must be obtained to buy, sell, breed or use Annex A species for any commercial purpose.
- 4. Housing overview**

These cats are large, solitary animals, spending much of their times in trees in the wild. They may be kept in large outdoor enclosures, or in an indoor enclosure with an outside exercise area.

It is recommended that they are shut in at night for security reasons.

- 5. Keeping experience** In order to protect the welfare of these animals and to protect keeper safety, keepers must be able to demonstrate a good knowledge of husbandry and handling of the species they wish to keep.

There should normally be a second named person nominated and included on the licence who is competent to care for the animals should the owner be absent or incapacitated.

Housing Recommendations

- 6. Construction** As these cat species are excellent climbers, outdoor enclosures must have a roof. Outdoor enclosures are normally made from wooden or metal posts and wire mesh. Large indoor enclosures may have one glass or Perspex wall, or windows.

All enclosures should have a smaller holding facility for the cats, to allow keepers to safely enter enclosures to clean, and to permit the veterinary treatment of the animals if necessary. This may double as the animals night-time holding quarters. As a general rule, three separate den areas should be allowed for two cats, to allow the confinement of one animal whilst still being able to use the other dens in rotation, to allow cleaning.

Any concrete or artificial flooring used should be non-slip.

For outdoor enclosures, there should be a natural dirt or planted floor covering if possible. Bark is good for the feet and absorbent.

7. Fencing

Fencing for enclosures must be strong enough to withstand the weight of the cats climbing on it, and the mesh size used must be small enough to prevent the animals becoming entangled. There must be an impenetrable roof to the enclosure.

The fencing should be set into concrete foundations to prevent the cats digging underneath. All fencing should be well maintained.

These cats benefit from a high degree of privacy, and ideally the enclosure should only be fenced on one or two sides, with the remaining walls being solid in construction. Planting outside the enclosure can also shield the animals and make them feel more secure.

8. Size

Enclosures should be as large as possible. It is recommended that single animals should have at least 28m² (300 ft²) floor space, and the enclosures should be at least 3 m (10 ft) high (3.5 m (12 ft) high is better).

The space provided should be increased by 50% for each additional cat in the enclosure.

Consideration should also be given to paragraph 18 on exercise and enrichment when designing the animals' enclosure.

- 9. Temperature and Shelter** Normal outdoor temperatures in Northern Ireland should be tolerable for leopard, puma and jaguar, however adequate shade and protection from the elements should be provided. In very cold weather they should be given unlimited access to their heated den area.
- The cats should be provided with a heated den if temperatures drop below 10°C (50°F). Frostbite to tails can be a problem, particularly in leopards.
- 10. Lighting** In the wild, these cats are more active during the night. The natural light in outdoor enclosures is appropriate during the day. Additional lighting may be required inside dens or holding facilities, to allow the keeper to clean and maintain the enclosure easily.
- 11. Ventilation** Enclosed holding quarters should have some suitable form of ventilation.
- 12. Drainage** The drainage of the outdoor enclosures must be capable of rapidly removing all excess water. Drains should be designed to avoid injury to the animals. Any open drains, other than those carrying surface water, should be outside the enclosure. Any faecal material must be disposed of in an environmentally sound manner.
- If a pool is provided in the enclosure, the surface drainage must not drain into the pool. There must be a way to drain and clean any pool provided.

13. Cleanliness

Outdoor enclosures should be maintained in a clean state, with faeces, food debris and litter being removed on a regular basis. Since cats “scent mark” by rubbing their cheeks and head and urinating on their enclosures, thorough disinfection of the outdoor enclosures should be done sparingly.

Keepers should not enter the enclosure with the animals. A separate holding enclosure should be incorporated that allows the keeper to enter safely to clean and maintain the main enclosure.

14. Social dynamics and behavioural considerations

These cats are solitary in nature, and are intolerant of adults of the same sex. Breeding pairs may live together however the introduction of a mate can be difficult and dangerous. It is therefore recommended that animals not be kept together unless the group is already established.

If a group of animals is kept together, there should be several visual barriers to allow them to hide from one another and some provision should be made to separate them if necessary. This would normally be in the form of a divider in the holding enclosure or indoor sleeping quarters.

If a breeding pair is kept, there must be a way to separate the female from the male to give birth and rear her young.

- 15. Prevention of escape** The animals must be secured in a holding pen that can be operated from outside, before a keeper enters the enclosure. A double door must always be used to prevent the animals escaping past the keeper as the gate is opened. All gates and doors should be padlocked at all times.

The public must not be able to gain access to the perimeter of the enclosure – this may require the erection of a secondary fence. Signs warning of the danger should be erected.

- 16. Food, drink and bedding** These cats require a meat diet. Whole prey items should preferably be fed, including the skin and bones. It is common practice in zoos to starve large cats for one day a week, to prevent obesity and to mirror the natural gorging and fasting feeding methods used in the wild. Appropriate supplements should be provided.

Fresh drinking water should be provided at all times.

Bedding material for these animals is not normally required. A raised wooden sleeping platform for each animal should be provided. Each animal must have a separate den in which to feed and sleep.

- 17. Visiting interval** The animals must be monitored at appropriate intervals, normally at least once every 24 hours.

18. Exercise and enrichment

The provision of enrichment items to provide the animals with a stimulating environment and opportunity to exercise is extremely important for these animals. These species enjoy climbing, and there should be plenty of opportunity to express this behaviour within the enclosure. This may be achieved by the use of trees, logs, platforms and suspended walkways.

In particular, it is important to provide at least one elevated resting area per animal, where they are likely to spend most of their time.

Jaguars will enjoy bathing and swimming in pools if these are provided.

Other suitable enrichment would include the use of novel feeding methods (hiding the food around the enclosure or using different food items) and by including plants into the enclosure. Toys such as logs and commercially available “boomer balls” may also be used to provide stimulation for the animals.

- 19. Provision for capture and transportation** There should be some method of enclosing the animals into a holding pen, to allow the safe cleaning of the enclosure and the administration of veterinary treatment. The door mechanisms for these holding pens should be operable from outside the enclosure.

Veterinary treatment should be provided on-site.

A licence, issued by the Department of the Environment, for the keeping of these animals may specify restrictions on the movement of these animals and procedures to be followed. Specially constructed transport crates will be required.

- 20. Emergency planning** There should be a written contingency plan in place to be used in the event of an emergency, for example fire, flood, animal escape or injury to the keeper.

- 21. Notification Requirements** A licence, issued by the Department of the Environment, for the keeping of these animals may specify procedures to be followed in the event of an escape and on the provision of information to the Emergency Services (e.g. the Fire Service) on the dangerous wild animals being kept.

You are required to notify the Department of the Environment of any intentions to breed the animals.

22. Prevention and control of spread of infectious disease

Some provision should be made to allow the separation of sick or injured animals if a group is kept.

The keeper should provide details of their veterinary arrangements with a practice prepared to treat these animals. A schedule of veterinary care, including vaccination and routine parasite control is required, and the keeping of records of veterinary attention is essential. These animals are susceptible to feline diseases carried by domestic cats.

Animals acquired from outside the United Kingdom may be subject to rabies quarantine regulations. Anyone requiring further information should contact the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs.

There are no transmissible diseases carried by these animals that pose a risk to the general public as long as there is no direct contact, and visitors are not allowed to handle the animals or their by-products. Keepers should be aware of the risks of Toxoplasmosis, a potentially harmful parasite that may be transmitted to humans through cat faeces. For this reason, good hygiene practices should be always observed when handling cats, or cleaning their enclosures.

Explanatory Notes

These notes have been produced to provide people wishing to keep dangerous wild animals with guidance on the requirements they may have to meet. In determining whether or not a licence should be issued, the Department of the Environment will consider the information provided by the applicant when applying for a licence. The Department will also arrange for a suitably qualified person to carry out an inspection of the premises at which the animal or animals will be kept and the inspector's report will also be taken into consideration. It is at the Department's discretion to waive certain recommendations, or add additional ones, to the guidance provided in this document. There is a right to appeal within 21 days if a licence is refused or if the applicant contests conditions applied to a licence.

Contact Information

For further information on the Dangerous Wild Animals (Northern Ireland) Order 2004, contact the Department of the Environment, Northern Ireland Environment Agency, Biodiversity Unit on (028) 9056 9557

For CITES enquiries:

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For rabies quarantine enquiries:

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