



Guidance on the keeping of Lions and Tigers

Dangerous Wild Animals (Northern Ireland) Order 2004



- 1. Species Names** *Panthera leo* - Lion
Panthera tigris - Tiger
- 2. Additional information** All members of the cat family, except for the domestic cat, require a licence under this legislation. The domestic cat's scientific name is *Felis silvestris catus* – previously known as *Felis catus* or *Felis domesticus*.

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** Tigers and the Asiatic lion 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

Tigers are generally solitary animals preferring to live alone. Lions are often sociable and may be kept in compatible groups. Both are large, powerful land-living species. They do not need trees or high walkways in their enclosures, however elevated resting platforms should be provided for both species in their outdoor enclosure and in the den area.

They may be given free access to an indoor den and outdoor enclosure, but must be shut in during the night for security reasons.

Both lions and tigers do best when maintained in outdoor, spacious and well planted enclosures.

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** Although adult lions and tigers are not accomplished climbers, they are able to jump very well. Young animals can climb very well, and outdoor enclosures should therefore either have very high sides with an overhang, or a roof, to prevent their escape. Outdoor enclosures are normally built from metal posts and wire mesh.

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' nighttime 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.

7. Fencing

Fencing for enclosures must be strong enough to withstand the weight of the cats climbing on it or jumping against it, and the mesh size used must be small enough to prevent the animals becoming entangled. Fence height must be at least 3.5 m (12 ft) with an inwards overhang of 1 m (3 ft) at 45° to prevent the cats from jumping out. Enclosure height should not be lower than this.

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

Although lions are social animals, both lions and tigers will require 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, however branches should not be allowed to overhang the enclosure.

8. Size

All large felids are territorial and require their own space. Enclosures should therefore be as large as possible. It is recommended that single animals should have at least 37m² (400 ft²) floor space, and the enclosures should be at least 3.5 m (12 ft) high.

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

- 9. Temperature and Shelter** Normal outdoor temperatures in Northern Ireland should be tolerable for lions and tigers, however adequate shade and protection from the elements should be provided.
- The cats should be provided with a heated den if temperatures drop below 10°C (50°F).
- 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.
- 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 cats. 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

Tigers 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 are not kept together unless the group is already established.

Lions may be kept in a group, however it is still very dangerous to introduce new animals, and should only be done by experienced keepers if adequate separation facilities are available.

There should be several visual barriers if more than one animal is held in an enclosure, to allow them to hide from one another.

If more than one animal is kept, 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. It is important that the male is able to hear and smell the female during any separation if he is to be reintroduced later.

- 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 doors and gates 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 mimic 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 wooden sleeping platform for each animal should be provided.
- 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 encouraged. In particular, it is important to provide at least one elevated resting area per animal (at high and low vantage points), where they may spend most of their time.

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.

Tigers often enjoy running water and will swim if a pool is available.

19. Provision for capture and transportation

As has been stated previously, 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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