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Mountain lion dropped off at Las Vegas Zoo

<http://www.kvbc.com/Global/story.asp?S=5461809&nav=15MV>

It was a surprising find at the front gates of the Las Vegas Zoo. Someone abandoned a sick mountain lion. He was dropped off a few days ago and now staff members are nursing him back to health.

The mountain lion was probably a house pet, but wore out his welcome when he started to get bigger. The zoo director says the one year old was dropped off in the middle of the night, found in a wire cage at the front entrance.

Staff members took him in. They say he'd clearly been starved and was severely malnourished. The 50 pound cub has also been de-clawed and neutered.

If he hadn't been dropped off, the zoo director says this lion probably would have been put down.

Staff members think they can nurse him back to health in the next few months and then the zoo is planning to make him the star of a new exhibit. To help take care of this mountain lion the zoo is asking for donations. If you would like to help out call 647-4685 or drop them off at 1775. N. Rancho.

http://www.reviewjournal.com/lvrj_home/2006/Sep-28-Thu-2006/news/9914512.html

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CASTOFF CAT'S NEW LAIR

Zoo takes in mountain lion left at its gates

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A mountain lion expresses himself in his new home Wednesday at the Las Vegas Zoo. The 11-month-old male

cat was left at the entrance to the zoo last week. The zoo will renovate an existing exhibit to house its newest resident.

Photos by [John Gurzinski](#).



Las Vegas Zoo director Pat Dingle says the zoo's new big cat gradually is becoming comfortable with his new surroundings.

It was abandoned last week at the gates of the Las Vegas Zoo, a malnourished mountain lion stuffed into a too-small wire cage.

Las Vegas Zoo director Pat Dingle and his staff took the big cat in, gave it a medical check-up and housed it in quarantine for observation. "His behavior told the story," Dingle said Wednesday. "He'd been starved. He attacked his food in an extremely aggressive and starving manner."

It's not the usual way that the zoo obtains new residents, but with no other local entity licensed to house mountain lions, Dingle said they've made the decision to give the cat a home. His previous owner ensured it wouldn't be able to live in the wild -- the young male, estimated to be between the ages of 10 months and a year -- has been neutered and declawed.

The cat also has been taught attack behaviors, Dingle said, and obviously is accustomed to rough play. Encouraging interactions like that between a human and a natural predator is something Dingle called "incredibly stupid."

"Most of the people that buy these cubs don't know what they're doing," Dingle said, adding that it takes much training and time to provide care for a mountain lion. "And 99 percent of the time, the animals have to be put to sleep."

The foundling mountain lion is being brought back to health with several small meals a day. He also has been given the room to rediscover his natural behaviors. This week, Dingle said the cat learned how to reach the highest platform in its habitat and is quite happy surveying its territory from on high. That's what a cat would do in the wild, Dingle said.

The mountain lion also has been stalking the birds and chickens that pass by its exhibit with a great deal of concentration.

The zoo keepers do have to treat the animal with care; Dingle was jumped by the cat on Wednesday, although it didn't sink its teeth into him.

"Because he's been abused, it makes our job more difficult," Dingle said.

This is the first mountain lion that's been left at the zoo, Dingle said, but exotic pet owners often leave their animals in containers outside the facility. Dingle has seen rattlesnakes, an alligator, birds, reptiles and other creatures that have become too much of a problem for their owners to handle. In most cases, the zoo calls in Animal Control. The zoo isn't equipped to operate as a pet sanctuary, Dingle said.

Possessing a mountain lion in Nevada requires a special permit from the state Department of Wildlife, Dingle said. But he believes this cat probably comes from someone who was unlicensed.

"People often have unrealistic ideas about wildlife," said Kelly Clark, conservation education chief for the Nevada Department of Wildlife. "Whether you're out on a trail feeding Cheetos to a ground squirrel or keeping a mountain lion as a pet, both are inappropriate. Wild animals need to be in the wild."

Dingle said the zoo now is focused on helping the mountain lion fit into its big cat community, which includes two rare Turkmenistan caracals and a Malaysian tiger, of which there are fewer than 70 in captivity. That means renovating the existing mountain lion habitat, currently occupied by a wallaby. The cost is estimated at \$30,000, and Dingle is hoping the community will help support the project. For more information, call 647-4685. The zoo, at 1775 N. Rancho Drive, is open daily from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.

The zoo also is considering a contest to name the mountain lion, Dingle said.

"We want to make him comfortable," he said. "He's going to be at the Las Vegas Zoo for the rest of his natural life. For a mountain lion, that's between 12 to 15 years."