

Jungle Animals

By Lillian E. Pedulla

Many people have asked me about jungle animals, cats in particular, and it is about time I wrote about them — so here goes!

There are a great number of small jungle cats from many countries, and I have been collecting the various breeds for more than twenty years. Not only have I been collecting but living and even



sleeping with them as well. This hobby started before I was five years of age. At that time I collected anything that crawled—snakes, lizards and, to the horror of my family, I had spiders complete with webs all over my bedroom and allowed no one to touch them. Incidentally, there was a program on television not long ago showing spider pets. I never did find out who the owner was because my daughter quickly turned the television off when she saw the huge spiders, some as large as soup plates, and by the time I came from the rear of the house the program was gone. It is interesting to know of other people who have hobbies similar to mine. Although I have had many spiders I

never managed to get a tarantula such as those on this program. There are a few “spider fanciers” and a great number of “reptile fanciers,” the latter properly designated “herpetologists,” and there is both a National and an International Reptile Fanciers Association.

Long ago I found that one cannot keep both reptiles and felines. If the reptiles are too small the felines kill them and vice versa. There is a lot to be said for reptiles as pets, they are very quiet and not a disturbance to the neighbors.

My family finally decided that they could not control my fancy for pets and that it was a case of “If you can’t beat it, join it.” They purchased several Persian cats for me and a variety of dogs. We lived on a farm so the animals were no trouble except that I would **not** keep them outside but insisted that they sleep in my room. However, the family decided that the domestic animals were preferable to what I was keeping there before. It was during this period that I discovered that most animals would get along together but would not tolerate reptiles, so the reptiles, with the exception of a pet lizard, had to go outside.

All was well for a while, and then one day in my wanderings I came across an animal which resembled a German Shepherd but was wicked and hated people. The owners had to throw it’s food to it and finally decided to shoot it. Upon my request they gave me the animal. Every cent I could get was spent on food for him and day by day I succeeded in getting closer. After about three weeks I could stand next to this animal and then, very gently and all the while talk-

ing in a low voice, I put my hands on his head. Although he went rigid I did not remove my hands and kept on talking. After several days of this, I brought a heavy chain leash, snapped it on, released the tie chain and away we went. After running all over the surrounding territory and scaring the wits out of people who saw us, I managed to get him home! My family by this time had learned not to be surprised and also not to go near that new "dog." They found out later that it was not a dog but a wolf. I got that wolf when I was about fourteen years of age and kept him, despite everyone including the law, until I was nineteen years old, when he died from poison. The entire time I owned him he never even growled at me but was known as a "killer" with anyone else. He was kept in a walled-in barnyard and slept in the barn. He broke any type of chain I put on him or, if not the chain, the collar broke. One night a "gentleman of the road" sneaked into our barn to spend the night, and spend the night he did, but up in the rafters hanging on for his life. The wolf very quietly kept trying to grab him all night and I found him there next morning. What he said cannot be repeated here and afterward he reported my wild animals to the police. The police arrived with all intentions of shooting my wolf but we had a double barreled shotgun sitting just inside the door and, without a word, I grabbed it and pointed it at the uniformed intruders. I do not remember any exchange of words but thereafter no police ever showed up because of my pets.

In the meantime I had taken up "Beauty Culture," specializing in permanent waving. I then took jobs with various national permanent wave companies, demonstrating their products and in this capacity was present at most of the hairdresser's conventions. The only unusual thing was that wherever I went I took along a couple of my more antisocial animals. This was necessary because no one else could handle them and I did not dare leave them at home. Some of the bosses objected but others found that the animals drew more of a crowd and that is the point of a hairdresser's convention. The more hairdressers you can get at a booth, the more you can sell!

In between times I was married but **not** to an animal lover, and certainly not to a lover of the kind of animals I had around—So that marriage did not last very long. Either get along with my pets or get out! Animals learn very quickly who is afraid of them, and all of them **love** to play the game I call "scare the people." It did not take my pets very long to find out that my first husband was scared to death of them and finally they would not allow him in the same room with me. I have been given many ultimatums and each time my answer has been: "I am keeping my pets—good bye."

After that one was gone I was married again and still had my pets plus a daughter from the first marriage. By this time I had seen Siamese cats and had bought three. I did not know about stud cats as all males I had had before were altered. When the cats matured the male started to spray in my bedroom. While talking to an old breeder on the telephone, I was asked by her if my male had started to spray and, in my innocence, I replied. "No." Later I told her that my male was no longer housebroken and was wetting all over the baseboards. That was the end of that conversation as she almost had hysterics. It was then that I had a room made into a cattery with large walk-in cages.

Shortly after I had the cattery built, a friend arrived with a strange looking cat which was spitting and snarling. She had taken it from a pet shop and brought it to me. It was covered with fleas, full of worms and very ill. Well, I knew when I saw that cat that my friend was never going to get him back. That was my first ocelot, "Chuckie." I tamed him down but I was the only one who could handle him after he grew up. When he arrived I set him down in the kitchen and he sat there snarling at nothing. My husband came home, stopped dead in the doorway and asked, "What is that?" I tried to tell him that it was just a cat but he demanded to know "what kind of cat?" As I said, I intended to keep that cat but told the whole family that it was boarding. Each time my friend came to visit, the family asked when she was taking that animal. She did not want him but would always answer "one of these days." I then decided to get a female to match and, when the female was about to arrive, I broke the news that "Chuckie" was mine and his prospective mate was on the way. No one seemed a bit surprised but it was easier said than done. I did get quite a few spotted cats but **none** were of the same breed as my "Chuckie." Either they were smaller or larger and the same thing applied here as with reptiles versus cats, the larger spotted cat trying to kill the smaller. I might say here that while I have had many breeds of spotted cats as well as a few without spots, I have never been able to get any jungle cat to breed with any other than its own particular breed.

At this very moment I have a very small "*Felis libyca ornata*" in with a domesticated stud cat, and I kept a Burmese in with my small spotted Koret cats for more than a year. The Koret stud bred a female of his own breed but never even looked at the Burmese queen although she came in season regularly. I finally bred her to a Burmese male and she produced a litter, then back with the Koret for another year. Still no offspring so I again bred her to a Burmese and she is due now. Incidentally, the pair of Korets stay in my bedroom at all times so I know when they breed. A Koret is much the same size as a small Siamese, females being smaller than males, and they do breed and reproduce with their own kind. Most zoologists have tried breeding various breeds together without success. We have a theory that if these different breeds of jungle cats would breed together that there would be only **one** breed of jungle cat or, in fact, only one breed of cat. I, personally, theorize that perhaps similar jungle cats from different countries might breed together, such as the ocelot and the Indian fishing cat which are very much alike both in size and in coloring. I have ordered "fishing cats" for breeding to the South American ocelot, but since many countries have placed an embargo on their native animals it is becoming increasingly difficult to get anything shipped in. Artificial insemination has worked with a lion and tiger breeding but these cats do not breed naturally.

It is an expensive proposition to collect small jungle animals for none of these have any natural immunity to the diseases that our civilized animals have come to tolerate. This is similar to the possible problem of transmitting disease by space travel, as germs might be carried from our planet which would kill living creatures on another. Also, this accounts for the vaccinations required for those of us who

travel from one country to another. It is true that jungle animals are the product of a "survival of the fittest" situation but this does not confer immunity to the diseases of their civilized cousins. Each time I take jungle cats to a cat show I worry for weeks afterward about what they might have "picked up", for I have lost animals from this very thing. Since many of our feline diseases are airborne it does not help to keep the jungle cats separated by placing them in a different room. I like to help the clubs by placing some of my animals on exhibition and have never charged except for expenses and certainly not for loss afterward. It is much safer and more lucrative to put them on exhibition for furriers and similar interested markets, and I have had no ill effects from showing them in fashion shows.

Many people after seeing jungle cats on display immediately decide that they would like to own one. Well, not everyone is capable of handling this type of pet so I shall attempt to explain the characteristics of the better known breeds. I think that the best known is the spotted cat known as the Ocelot. This cat grows to be about twice the size of a domestic breed, weighing as much as twenty five pounds, all muscle, when fully grown. This one stays, most of the time, on the floor or on furniture and has all the habits of our "regular" cats with the exception that many of them will eat "things" such as clothing, rubber or plastic toys. For this reason they should be given only large bones or wooden toys. They have a habit of suddenly turning on anyone holding them and trying to bite. At first they do this playfully, but, at the first sign of fright on the part of a human, the ocelot will turn and really attack. It is a case again of "scare the people" and if they succeed once they will work overtime. That is why it is very important that a nervous person **NOT** have an ocelot, or for that matter, any other jungle animal. Ocelots can be broken to sanitary pans as easily as any other cat.

The next on the list is the Margay which, while small, is not too difficult to handle. It never walks on the floor, preferring to parade along the top of the drapes or swing from the curtains. This habit cannot be broken so you either give up drapes completely, replace them at least once a month, or just have them in ribbons. The same things applies as regards turning on the person handling them and if once a margay manages to scare someone, it never stops. They can get pretty mean but then I have known of domestic cats that have been just as wicked. One thing for sure, you never get chewed to almost hamburger by a jungle cat for he usually takes one good bite and then runs away.

The Jaguarondi, also from South America, is supposed to be untamable but there are some individuals which can be tamed and I have had several of these. They also are the most susceptible to cat illnesses and fatalities among this breed are high. The Jags are "ground" cats and while they do have the usual retractable cat claws, they seldom do any climbing. If they are of a nice disposition they usually retain this temperament but if they are nasty—. Well, anyway, it takes months of very careful handling to keep them tame enough to handle after they have been tamed.

Then there are the "Dune Cats" from India and Pakistan which

I have bred and from these breedings have been successful in rearing the litters. These have fur like the Abyssinian, but are considerably larger than domesticated cats, having very long legs and short bodies. While they are not bob-tailed cats, the tails are shorter than the ordinary breed of cat and the tips of their ears bear long black tufts of hair. These cats are the most mischievous of all the breeds I have owned, for they sit and **think** what they can do next to annoy people. They swoop across the dinner table snatching food right from the plate from which you are, at that very moment, eating; they deliberately knock things down, always at a safe distance from you, and then run away looking, to me, as though they were laughing. With six of these, a mother and five kittens, running over the house it was hectic, to say the least. My husband once hung a shirt on the back of the chair, left the room, and one of the Dune cats made off with the shirt and put it under the davenport. It took quite a while to find that shirt, although it took less than a minute for the Dune cat to make it disappear, and, in the meantime, my husband was wondering if he really **had** put a shirt on that chair! These cats run and hide anything which they can carry, seeming to have a sixth sense as to what will be missed in the shortest time and that is what they hide. If you allow them to run free in a bedroom, as I did with three at one time, they all team up in the middle of the night, taking the bottom of the covers in their teeth and gradually pull them over the foot of the bed and onto the floor. One wakes up and wonders who is in the room playing tricks, turns on the light and there they are, covers in teeth and backing away from the foot of one's bed. This game is only played while someone is in bed and first was tried on me while I was staying alone in a New York hotel. As a matter of fact, I have found that the animals from India or Pakistan, or the deserts, all have mischief to spare, for the three breeds of desert animals which I own are very mischievous. So, unless one has a terrific sense of humor it is best not to have desert cats or foxes. I have both and have raised litters both of these cats and the foxes.

There are some compensations in having animals such as I have. Once in a while one gets very rare specimens, such as one shipment which I received containing a pair of full grown Rusty Spotted Cats, almost extinct. My hands were full trying to acclimate them. Adult wild cats will not eat anything but live food and it is all but impossible to make them eat "dead" meat. The dealer in Japan had written that he had a pair of very rare cats, quoting a price so high that I was dismayed. I made up my mind that I would not pay it and then ran as fast as I could to get a certified check to send for them. In due time they arrived, packed in an exceedingly heavy barred crate, which, of course, ran up the shipping rate and which was so constructed that I could not see what was inside. Sometimes the importers send in very odd animals purporting to be cats but actually very different from felines, such as the foxes from India and the mongoose, or meercat, from Africa. Anyhow I finally arrived home with my unopened crate and, as usual, took it into the bathroom and removed the side to release the occupants. Two cats leaped from the crate, flew around like birds, snarled, spit and knocked everything down. I kept very quiet as I was afraid that they would kill themselves if they got more

excited. Before twenty four hours had passed I managed to pick up the female and finally both quieted down. I kept them until they bred and then called Mr. Ulmer, the curator of the Philadelphia Zoo, and described the two cats to him. He was amazed to hear my description as he thought that they were rusty spotted cats which were supposed to be extinct. Anyway, the Philadelphia Zoo bought the male as I wanted to get a litter from the female before selling her. Unfortunately, the litter did not survive so both cats are now at the zoo, and I am to get a kitten if they do reproduce. I was not very pleased when I first saw that pair, but was more than pleased when I found how rare they were, for I am sure there are no others in the country.

There have been some very amusing (?) things happen, as the arrival of the foxes. I did not know that it was against Federal law to import foxes but my foxes arrived in a completely closed crate as large as a coffin with just a narrow air opening around the top. As the customs men never allow me to open crates at the airport, I just paid the custom tax and brought the box home. Inside that box were nine foxes, which as adults are about one third the size of our native fox. Two weeks later I took them on television and told all about them, even to their country of origin. When I got home the telephone was practically leaping off the desk. It was the customs men! They were almost incoherent, asking if I wanted to have us all land in the federal prison. Also, they yelled GET RID of those foxes. Until that episode I had no intention of keeping any of the foxes as I had not ordered them. Not long after that program two men with credentials arrived but as the foxes had been shipped in a crate marked "Jungle cats" there was no record of any foxes being imported. The men played the game of "Scare the people" much as do the jungle cats but I would only tell them that no foxes had been imported, that if they could find a record of such an importation that they could then take action. My story was that I went into my yard and there were the little foxes running around so I just brought them in, and until this story could be disproved I intended to keep the newly acquired pets. I raised two litters of pups from these foxes and still have one of the pups, but sold the breeders to Richard Valenti, a Connecticut cat fancier who intends to breed them to produce pets. I might add that the foxes use a sanitary pan just as a cat, which is more than I can say for my dogs.

Another odd animal which arrived as a "cat" is the African Meercat, really a Mongoose, which latter is illegal to possess. This little thing is the best "watchdog" that anybody could have. She will attack any stranger who puts a foot inside the door unless properly introduced by my picking her up and putting her in the intruder's hands. From then on she will not bite this particular person, not on that visit, anyway. I did not intend to keep the meercat but have become so attached to her that I just cannot let her go. The menagerie grows!

The author and photographer Ivan Sanderson was once on a television program at the same time as I, and from him I learned about many animals. His advice on the legal aspects of owning and importing these rare creatures has helped me immeasurably.

Then there was the time the airport called and told me very excitedly to get up there immediately if not sooner and get those "things" that were there for me. When I arrived I noticed a terrible smell outside the building, not to mention the terrible odor inside! There were a number of men gathered around a heavy wire crate. Believe me, if they had shipped those animals in a closed crate they would probably have died from their own smell. The minute I got that odor I knew it originated from Civets, which are not true cats but viverines. The customs men and representatives from the Dept. of Agriculture were there and although not sure, they thought the animals were mongoose. Naturally I did not want those smelly animals, so claimed I did not know what they were either. They called Mr. Ulmer who immediately asked if it was my shipment and had them put me on the telephone. I told him I didn't know what they were but that they had a horrible odor, whereupon he said "Civet Cats," and I admitted "Yes." He knew I did not want them but told me to accept the shipment and he would try to place them. Shortly after I arrived home the telephone rang and I heard the welcome news that the Rhode Island zoo would like to have my latest acquisition. It was Thursday when they arrived and I had to keep them until the following Tuesday—the less said about the intervening days, the better!

Another time a cable arrived saying that three lion cubs were on the way! I was convinced that someone was playing a joke because I have repeatedly specified **small** jungle cats and nothing but kittens in any breed. It was no joke. The three cubs **did** arrive and of course I had no cage large enough to house them, so I put them in the garage. Since every zoo already has lions no zoo was interested in them, but something had to be done. Finally I thought of someone I had met who used lions in a circus act, and after a bit of hunting I located this performer. She took all three cubs and I was very happy to see that crew depart! I might add here that lion cubs are very playful, their games consisting of grabbing you by the leg, knocking you down and similar antics. Lions are easily tamed and stay tame with their owners as a general rule, but I have **no** intention of keeping lions for the simple reason that there is no room for animals of that size here.

Over a period of twenty years many strange animals have arrived and many odd situations have occurred, some hilariously funny afterward but not so at the time they occur. I seldom sell any of my jungle animals but once in a while I find someone who impresses me as a suitable owner of a jungle cat and I allow them to have one of my unusual pets. Most of the time I do not answer mail pertaining to jungle cats but am never lacking for orders. Many ask me why I have the various animals. My only answer is that I just like them all. There are many more people with this same interest, more than anyone realizes as all are afraid that they may get into trouble if their pets are publicized. We all watch for young people with a tendency toward the same interest and if at all possible help to develop their hobby. These budding zoologists acquire odd pets and in many cases keep them secret from their immediate families. Luckily I rarely had to resort to keeping my pets a secret as my mother and father

were very interested in the wild animals, although they did not care for my reptiles. At least I was not forbidden to have them but only required to keep them under control. One thing is certain, in a hobby such as mine there is seldom a dull moment, and most of us are far too busy to find time for petty gossip about our fellow hobbyists. Also we respect each other's choice of pets and find it easy to develop an interest in another's animal collection as well as in our own preferences. The animals themselves, as mentioned in an earlier paragraph, seem to have no prejudice except as to size. At this moment the fox is running with the female domesticated cats, as is the mongoose and a small spotted cat known as **Felis Libyca Ornata**. At one time I had raccoons, skunks, pekingese dogs, Siamese cats, an ocelot and a margay all running together free in my home. The small spotted Korets live with the regular cats and have yet to have a fight. I have always thought that animals reflect the temperament of their owners and nothing has ever changed my mind.

All in all, collecting animals is a very interesting hobby, sometimes dangerous as well. All that is necessary to indulge in such a hobby is patience, tenacity and sufficient money. I can think of nothing more interesting and exciting than getting a new shipment and finding out what I am getting after it has arrived. There have been many incidents with the various animals and I have written of only a few. My collection is by no means the most unusual, as I know of one nearby fancier who owns one hundred alligators of all ages and sizes, another with a thirty five foot boa constrictor, and, last but not least, is the owner of about thirty rhesus monkeys, noted for their uncertain dispositions. All fanciers, much the same as the dyed-in-the-wool cat fancier, have the same attitude: anyone not liking my animals need not bother to come around, and this sort of hobby will continue as long as there are rare animals and people around.