

History

Dr. Michael Bleyman, a professor of zoology genetics, biochemistry, and nutrition at UNC-Chapel Hill, founded Carolina Tiger Rescue in 1973 as a captive breeding facility for carnivores that were threatened or endangered. Dr. Bleyman served as Executive Director until his death in 1996. Over the years, the 55-acre site just east of Pittsboro grew to house a population of more than 300 animals who played key roles in their native ecosystems as pollinators, seed dispersers, and pest-controlling predators. Original species included caracals, servals, kinkajous, ocelots, and binturongs. Over the years we began accepting rescues including black and spotted leopards, clouded and snow leopards, jaguars, cougars, tigers, and others. At one time, we were the most successful breeder of kinkajous and ocelots in the world. Carolina Tiger was also known worldwide for our work with binturongs. Even now you will find a link to our website on the National Geographic website.

In 1996 the Board of Directors revised the mission of Carolina Tiger, redirecting the focus to sanctuary for abandoned and rescued animals and conservation education. The captive breeding program was discontinued since Species Survival Plans (SSPs) were being developed worldwide to ensure the survival of threatened and endangered populations and other reputable organizations were fulfilling captive breeding needs. We reduced the population of animals on-site to suit the new quality of care standards adopted and the resources available. Carolina Tiger continues to work cooperatively with numerous other zoological, scientific, and educational institutions to support conservation efforts and to participate in the SSPs through gifting and loaning animals to other institutions when appropriate for breeding purposes.

Today, our mission is saving and protecting wild cats in captivity and in the wild. In January 2003 Carolina Tiger received accreditation through the USDA and in 2004, the Chatham County Animal Control Permit, paving the way to significantly expand educational programs through public tours. We began providing guided group tours for the public on weekends and school field trips through the week. It is in part through these activities, that Carolina Tiger teaches people about these animals, what is happening to them in the pet trade and in their native habitats, how that affects each of us personally, and what people can do to make a difference.

