

WILD, WILD PETS

Many Americans have wild animals as pets. Do lions, tigers, bears, and other wild creatures belong in private homes?

Tim Harrison has always loved animals. Back in the 1970s and early 1980s, he had an assortment of pets that included lions, bears, and wolves. He cared for the animals day and night. "I thought I was doing the right thing," he told TFK.

But in 1985, Harrison traveled to Kenya, in Africa. There, on safari, he saw wild creatures as he had never seen them before. "I'm sitting there in the Jeep, and this herd of giraffes comes galloping along, as beautiful as you've ever seen," he says. In that moment, he decided that wild animals do not belong in a person's home.

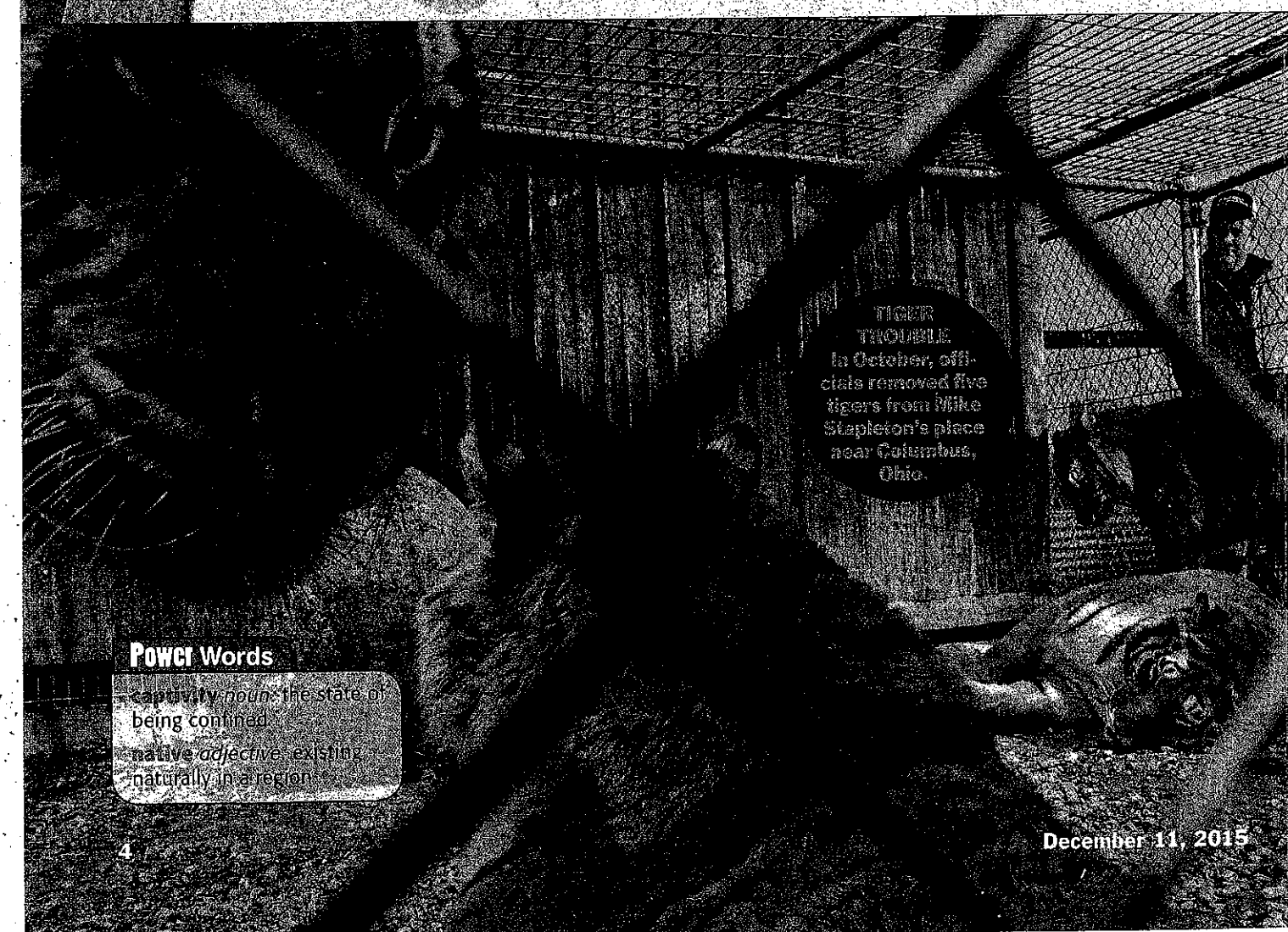
When Harrison returned home, he made the decision to part with his pets. After a life in captivity, the creatures would not have known how

to survive in the wild. So he moved them to sanctuaries—places where they would be safe and have more room to roam. Now Harrison spends his days working for Outreach for Animals. He cofounded the group to help wild animals that are kept as pets.

Unofficial Zoos

Hundreds of thousands of wild creatures are kept in backyards and basements all around the country. These privately owned wild animals are known as exotic pets. Experts estimate there are at least 5,000 tigers in private hands in the United States. "That's more tigers than there are left in the wild on the entire planet," says Adam Roberts, the CEO of the Born Free USA. The number of privately owned primates, such as monkeys and chimpanzees, is much higher, he says: 15,000 or more.

Not all of these animals are treated like family



TIGER TROUBLE
In October, officials removed five tigers from Mike Stapleton's place near Columbus, Ohio.

Power Words

- captivity** *noun* the state of being confined
- native** *adjective* existing naturally in a region



GOODBYE, BEAR John Matus bought Boo Boo as a cub. He later gave her to a wildlife sanctuary.

pets. Many are part of unofficial “zoos” that are not watched over by the Association of Zoos and Aquariums. Experts warn that visiting this type of zoo is not always safe.

Big Animals, Bigger Problems?

When it comes to keeping exotic pets, safety is one of several concerns. Another is that the animals are not always treated well, says Roberts. “They might have their teeth cut out,” he says. “They may be chained or kept in small cages.”

In some cases, when people realize they are not able to care for their full-grown exotic pets, they simply set them free. If the animal is not **native** to the environment, it can harm the ecosystem.

The laws relating to exotic-pet ownership vary from state to state (see map). Scott Shoemaker lives in Nevada. He keeps a large group of animals, including tigers,



GATOR AID Tim Harrison, right, removed this alligator from the basement of a house in Dayton, Ohio.

bobcats, lions, and a lemur. Shoemaker says taking care of these creatures is both challenging and rewarding. “You form a bond with them,” he says. “It’s a bond out of respect and love for the animal.”

Shoemaker cofounded a group called REXANO (Responsible Exotic Animal Ownership) to oppose bans on the private ownership of animals. He says that many wild animals adjust well to **captivity** and that responsible pet owners should not be restricted. To those who say exotic pets pose a safety risk, he points out that dogs can be dangerous too.

Harrison disagrees. He is planning a trip to Washington, D.C., to speak to Congress. He says his message is simple: Dogs and cats need homes. Leave the exotic animals in the wild.

—By Suzanne Zimble

Think

What are the arguments for and against owning exotic pets? Do you think this should be allowed? Explain.

EXOTIC-PET LAWS

Is it legal to keep a pet tiger? The answer depends on where you live. Look at the map to find out what the laws say in your state. If you want to make a change, write to your legislators or start a petition.

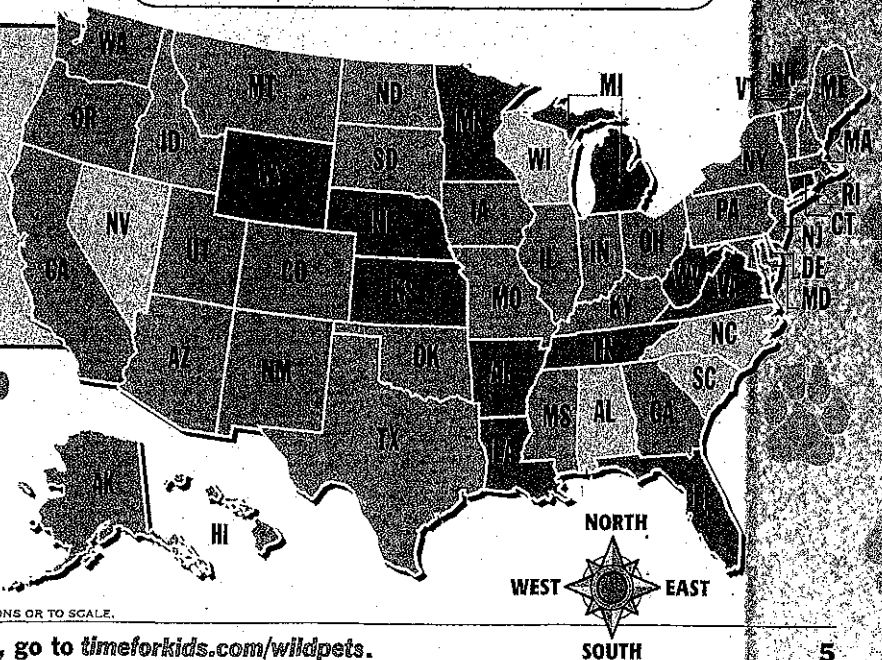
SOURCE: BORN FREE USA.

KEY

- Most exotic pets are banned.
- Some exotic pets are banned.
- A license or permit is required.
- No license or permit is required.

ALASKA AND HAWAII ARE NOT SHOWN IN THEIR ACTUAL POSITIONS OR TO SCALE.

To watch a video about exotic pets, go to timeforkids.com/wildpets.



FROM LEFT: VINCENT J. BUSI—NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC CREATIVE; LISA POWELL—DAYTON DAILY NEWS/PA

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