

## Putting an end to the practice of breeding exotic felids with domestic cats in the UK

### Introduction

We have launched our **SERVIVAL** campaign to ban the breeding of exotic felids with domestic cats within the UK. Of particular concern is the breeding of Servals, exotic felids native to Africa, with domestic cats to produce the Savannah cat.

Motivated by the 'designer pet' trade, fuelled by social media, the breeding of exotic felids and domestic cats (known as F1 hybrids) should have no place in the 21st century. It is no less cruel than breeding a wolf with a poodle.

This practice is also an escalating problem - evidenced by the dramatic rise in rescues of F1 hybrid cats in 2021. We have a moral responsibility to treat animals with dignity and not as commodities to be corrupted for pleasure or commercial gain.

Urgent legislative action to make this form of hybridisation illegal will prevent the suffering of individual animals caught up in this trade and mitigate against future threats to wild populations of exotic felids.

The Wildheart Animal Sanctuary has over 40 years of experience caring for exotic felids. We see first-hand the physical and psychological damage inflicted on animals at the hands of humans.

### Fact and Figures

- There are **259 small and medium exotic cats or F1 hybrids registered as pets in the UK\***. A large number of these cats are used for breeding, producing hybrids such as the Savannah cat.
- The Savannah cat breed was only recognised in 2001 and since then there has been a surge in its popularity as a **trophy pet**, with F1 hybrids fetching **up to £20,000 per kitten**.
- The practice of hybridisation often leads to poor welfare and horrendous conditions for the animals involved. This is evidenced by a **2000% increase in rescued exotic felids at our partner organisation Animal Advocacy & Protection (AAP) over the last two years\*\***.
- The popularity of the Savannah cat is booming with **unregulated adverts for hybrid kittens appearing across popular selling sites, chat rooms and social media channels** including Facebook.
- The Wildheart Trust is providing a forever home for two rescued Serval kittens from the pet trade that were found **locked in tiny rooms suffering from deformed and broken legs**.

\* data from Born Free  
\*\* data from AAP



The Serval, an exotic felid native to Africa, is illegal to own in the UK without a Dangerous Wild Animals (DWA) license. Licensing requirements are under-regulated.



First-generation or F1 Savannah cats are illegal to own without a DWA license. It is unlikely that the average cat owner can obtain such a license. Pictured is one of the rescued Servals, to be homed at the Wildheart Animal Sanctuary.

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## In context: The UK regulatory landscape

The **UK is trailing other countries** in regard to regulating hybrid exotic felids, with many banning Savannah hybrids as they are deemed **a danger to domestic wildlife and the public**.

Current UK legislation does not regulate the hybridisation of exotic felids with domestic cats, nor does it sufficiently regulate the advertising or selling of kittens from such breeding. Additionally, there are insufficient laws regarding husbandry for these animals, allowing them to be kept in sub-standard accommodation by unqualified personnel.

### The Kept Animals Bill

Sponsored by DEFRA, The Animal Welfare (Kept Animals) Bill is a secondary piece of legislation which makes provisions regarding the welfare of certain kept animals that are in, imported into, or exported from Great Britain. The five overarching animal welfare issues addressed by the Bill are:

- Keeping primates as pets
- Dogs attacking or worrying livestock
- Export of livestock
- Importation of dogs, cats and ferrets
- Zoos

Measures on primates aim to prevent these animals being kept as pets. Where primates are kept in captivity, the Bill would introduce new licensing requirements to ensure that their welfare needs are being met. **We ask that the proposed measures also extend to felines.**

**On Monday, 25th October 2021, the bill had its second reading in the House of Commons.**

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## Our legislative objective

At the Wildheart Trust, we fully endorse the UK Government's ambition to become a world leader in animal welfare standards. As part of this ambition, we are delighted to see that the current Animal Welfare (Kept Animals) Bill before the House of Commons will set an extremely high bar for animal welfare practices in the UK.

From our many decades of experience, we firmly believe that a failure to implement an outright ban of this breeding process, or neglecting to toughen up the existing Kept Animals Bill to tackle this issue, would jeopardise the Government's ambition to become a world leader in animal welfare standards.

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## This campaign is endorsed by



*The Wildheart Trust's mission is 'to inspire and empower people to take positive action to protect our planet and the animals we share it with'. It is a registered charity which is dedicated to realising its global ambitions to make a meaningful impact on the health of the natural world while actively improving the well-being of animals in human care. The Trust runs the Wildheart Animal Sanctuary and provides governance for its conservation aims.*