

PAWS Says Goodbye to Beloved Bobcat Owen

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PAWS is sad to announce the passing of bobcat Owen. This special cat was born in 2002 and purchased as a small kitten to be a "pet." Not much is known about his early life, but it is certain that he was not fed properly, as Owen's skeleton did not develop normally. Metabolic bone disease is a common syndrome in young captive exotic animals who are fed a diet that lacks the proper vitamins and nutrients necessary for normal development. This nutritional deficiency often results in irreparable damage to developing animals, causing pain and disability throughout their lives.



In 2015, Owen was confiscated from private owners in California, where bobcat ownership is illegal. He was found in a small, filthy cage, in distress and unable to keep himself clean. When PAWS was contacted by authorities immediately after Owen's confiscation, we wholeheartedly agreed to offer him a permanent home at our sanctuary. Because of the nature of the confiscation, authorities asked us to keep his presence a secret until the legal case was resolved. He lived at our Galt sanctuary for five years in a "witness protection program" of sorts, until moving to our ARK 2000 sanctuary in the summer of 2020.

Wild animals, even when born and raised in captivity, are still at their very essence wild animals with all of their instincts, desires, and behaviors intact. When Owen first arrived at PAWS' Galt sanctuary he preferred to use a litter box for housecats, a habit to which he had become accustomed while living inside his owner's home. It wasn't long before he lost this habit and gradually became more and more like the true bobcat that he was. He had a spitfire personality and seemed to enjoy suddenly jumping at the fence while emitting a hair-raising growl to scare keeper staff.



Owen enjoyed exploring his large habitat full of fallen logs, tall grasses, oak trees, and a climbing structure with a pool. He was excellent at hiding, blending into his surroundings perfectly. When Tiger Supervisor Renae was unable to easily spot Owen in his habitat, she would call out "bobcat, bobcat" and his tail would begin to twitch, giving away his location every time. His short, fluffy tail would come to life when his favorite caregivers came to visit, and its lively twitching expressed his mood perfectly. Owen was sometimes serious and aloof, but just as often playful and kitten-like. He played with pinecones and rocks (above), tossing them in the air, rolling them down a hill, and pouncing on them delightedly. He stalked insects in the grass and leaf litter. And after a good session of play, Owen loved to curl up on a soft bed of hay inside his wooden den box, or in an extra-cozy round tub (below).



Owen's history of metabolic bone disease caused him to develop arthritis early in life, aging his body long before his time. PAWS' veterinarian, Dr. Gai, diagnosed his condition from X-rays taken during his first anesthetized physical exam, soon after he arrived in Galt, and she prescribed medications and supplements to help ease any discomfort he was experiencing as a result of his condition. When he later began to develop chronic kidney disease, another ailment that is all too common in older cats, additional medications were added to help keep him comfortable. Caregivers creatively hid his medications in favorite foods, and they enjoyed building elevated ramps, platforms, and cozy nests that were easy for him to use and which allowed him to safely and comfortably view the activities of the sanctuary.

In early October, caregivers noticed that Owen's appetite was declining, and he was not able to groom himself normally. An anesthetized examination revealed that his kidney disease had progressed, and his arthritis had also worsened, now affecting almost every joint in his body. Owen had become frail in body, but his spirit and mind were still strong. He rallied for a short time after his exam, but soon it became apparent that multiple medical conditions had taken an irreversible toll on him.

The heart-wrenching but most compassionate decision was made to perform euthanasia, to prevent him from suffering. Owen passed from this life at the age of 19, surrounded by many who loved him. His toughness, his playfulness, his piercing gaze, and his wiggling tail made indelible impressions on our hearts and he will be greatly missed by all who knew this very special bobcat.