

## PAW PROJECT

A 501(c)(3)  
nonprofit  
organization

# The Paw Project



Number 4

Winter 2006

### ABOUT DECLAWING

Declawing, also called onychectomy, is an amputation of the toe at the last joint. This removes the bone from which the nail grows. Declawing may result in permanent lameness, chronic pain, infection, and arthritis. It is illegal in many countries.

Since 2000, Paw Project vets have performed reparative surgeries on lions, servals, tigers, cougars, bobcats, lynxes, leopards, and jaguars. —all victims of declaw surgery. Their claws cannot be restored, but tendons can be reattached, giving the cats much relief from their long suffering and allowing them to leap, run, and play more as nature intended.

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## Twenty Paws Repaired in 2005

2005 was the year that declawing of exotic and native wild cats became illegal in California. The nation's first and only statewide declaw ban was signed by Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger in September 2004 and became law on January 1, 2005. The bill was sponsored by the Paw Project and introduced by Assemblyman Paul Koretz.

"I am pleased that California's big cats are now protected. Maybe we will have a chance to catch up on repairing paws in this state," says Paw Project founder, Jennifer Conrad, DVM.

"Declawing only takes about 20 minutes; however, it takes about five hours to surgically repair the toes on just two paws. The sad truth is that many of the animals the Paw Project treats have had all four paws declawed."

In 2005, the Paw Project team performed 20 paw repair surgeries on declawed big cats, including bobcats, a lynx, and several tigers.

Even though declawing these cats is now illegal in California, there are still hundreds of animals that can benefit from surgery.

Frederick, a eleven-year-old male tiger, belonged to a Hollywood animal trainer and appeared in movies before he became lame. After the trainer saw the deformities caused by declawing and watched the surgery to repair Frederick's front paws, he has vowed never again to declaw any of his cats. The story of Frederick was featured in the PBS program, California Connected (for the link to the online video, see Hot Links at the bottom of page 4).

The Paw Project's donors have made it possible for other crippled



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Paw Project director, Dr. Jennifer Conrad (above), prepares her 500 lb. patient for paw repair surgery at Animal Specialty Group Veterinary Hospital in Los Angeles. Below, Shasa, a Canadian lynx, prior to rear paw repair surgery.



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animals to have repair surgery.

Shasa, a female Siberian lynx, was rescued from a fur farm and had her front and back feet declawed before coming to live at Forever Wild, a southern California sanctuary. Shasa had all four of her feet repaired in two separate

surgeries in 2005.

"We are thankful for The Paw Project," says Joel Almquist, director of Forever Wild. "After surgery, our animals have much less pain and are more active. We're sure they will have happier and longer lives."

# Paw Project Teams with Animal General Hospital



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The Paw Project (TPP) has a sister program, Animal General Hospital (AGH). AGH's purpose is to provide veterinary medical care and supplies to animals in need.

Although the two programs are run by the same nonprofit parent organization, they operate independently for the most part. But sometimes they find common ground.

Recently, an Animal General Hospital donor made a contribution for the purchase of large water tanks to provide recreation for captive tigers and to help them cool down during hot weather.

AGH bought more than 50 six-foot diameter galvanized metal tanks for some of the feline residents of Forever Wild, P.A.W.S. Ark 2000, and Shambala, three California sanctuaries. Many of the cats were Paw Project paw repair patients.

Volunteer Brandy Ferdig delivered the tanks to Forever Wild. "It was great," she said, "The

tigers couldn't even wait for the tanks to be filled. They just hopped in and started splashing and playing."

In October, TPP/AGH was called to help another, more unusual, type of declawed animal — an iguana.

Carmen had been relinquished by her owner to a West Los Angeles shelter and was scheduled to be euthanized. TPP/AGH bailed her out with the help of Mary Cummins of Animal Advocates.

"This is another cruel example of an unfortunate animal, who depends on its claws, being thoughtlessly deprived of them," says Dr. Conrad. "It is so wrong. Claws are absolutely essential to iguanas. They're climbing animals. I can't imagine what vets are thinking when they do this."

Says Cummins, "She's a good iguana, but because she is declawed, she can't climb at all. I'm going to build her a low ramp to her basking shelf. She is truly disabled. I hope we can find her a 'special needs' home."

Above left: Blue, a former paw repair patient, chills in his new water tank. Below left: Carmen, a declawed iguana, has difficulty climbing even the most gently inclined branches. Inset photo shows her declawed foot.

**"Never underestimate the power of a small group of committed people to change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has."**  
— Margaret Mead



## Urge WeHo to Fight for Declaw Ban

In 2003, West Hollywood, CA (WeHo) passed the nation's first local ban on declawing. The California Veterinary Medical Association (CVMA) wants to overturn the law. On November 30, the city lost a motion for summary judgment. The final decision may be decided in the court of appeals if WeHo pursues the case. The CVMA, a trade association for veterinarians, contends that the Paw Project-sponsored law is a restriction of veterinary practice and that only the state government, not local governments, may enact such laws. West Hollywood's law bans anyone, including veterinarians, from declawing any animal for

non-medical reasons. West Hollywood believes that declawing is a form of animal cruelty and maintains that the city has the right and the responsibility to prohibit cruel practices.

The CVMA wants to protect its members' ability to declaw cats despite the fact that their colleagues in many other nations consider declawing a violation of professional ethics.

Declawing is illegal or considered unethical in most of the world outside the US.

For example, in the United Kingdom, the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons officially regards declawing as "mutilation" and as an "unacceptable practice."

But do US vets sacrifice ethics for financial gain?

Vets who declaw four cats a week at \$350 per procedure can add over \$72,000 to their yearly incomes.

The CVMA suit threatens the right of a community to determine what type of activities are acceptable within its jurisdiction. The precedents set by this suit may have serious far-reaching effects for other animal welfare issues.

If you wish to let the CVMA know how you feel about their efforts to prevent the banning of cruel practices, please write them. The e-mail address for CVMA President, Eric Weigand is [info@clmntvet.com](mailto:info@clmntvet.com), and for Executive Director, Valerie Fenstermaker, the address is [vfenstermaker@cvma.net](mailto:vfenstermaker@cvma.net).



# Animal General Hospital Aids Katrina Animals

Volunteers from Animal General Hospital spent much of September and part of October in New Orleans rescuing animals after the devastation caused by hurricane Katrina. Among the dozens of animals pulled from wrecked homes and off the streets were dogs, cats, birds and fish left behind when their human families evacuated.

In the days after the hurricane struck, Animal General Hospital, along with many other animal rescue organizations, went to New Orleans to rescue animals that had been left with no access to food or water.

One day, while Animal General Hospital volunteer Sherman Baylin was attempting to coax a scrawny dog, later named Boudin, into the AGH van, others volunteers were searching St. Anthony Street for a tuxedo cat they had seen earlier. Calling for the kitty, AGH volunteers Brandy Ferdig and Gina Hanson heard an unexpected reply. A small bark, the cry of a dying dog, caught their ears. They rushed through the unlocked doorway of a house that had been evacuated 18 days earlier. There, lying on the floor of the storm-ravaged kitchen was a tiny Papillon. The dog was so weak that he couldn't lift his head, much less walk. Animal General Hospital veterinarian Dr. Jennifer Conrad tended to the helpless animal, administering IV fluids and providing medical care as the pup recuperated in a motel room. The next twelve sleepless hours were spent checking on the little Papillon and attending to his every need. Because of his long, flowing coat, the volunteers called their miniature patient Professor Longhair, after the famous New Orleans musician. By the twenty-four hour mark, the Professor was able to stand and walk a few steps. He was on the road to recovery.

Animal General Hospital volunteers were able to locate the Professor's family by his rabies tag — and then his remarkable story unfolded.

When New Orleans flooded, the dog's caretakers, Phillip and Rick, were forced to leave their home. Due to Rick's frail health, a MedEvac helicopter was called for. The two men discarded their luggage so they could take their four dogs on the chopper. At the last moment, the carrier containing the Professor broke, and the tiny dog darted back into the empty house. Rick started after him, but was held back by the crewmen. Gunfire in the area prompted the pilot to leave immediately. Rick and Phillip thought they would return in a day or two to pick up their little pup. That hope quickly evaporated after just a few minutes in the air. Rick suffered a heart attack and was airlifted to Miami for emergency care.

The story ends happily. Rick has recovered, and the family was reunited on October 8, when Alfie (the Professor's real name) was flown to Miami. The entire family has since returned to New Orleans.

**Denny Update** — Denny, a crippled, declawed lion who lives at the Performing Animal Welfare Society sanctuary in Galt, CA has not yet had paw repair surgery. Denny's plight was reported in the last Paw Project newsletter.

Radiographs taken of Denny's feet and legs show other deformities of the bone. While doctors at UC Davis decide how to treat Denny, the repair surgery planned by the Paw Project has been postponed. If you have questions, please contact us.



Top: Boudin and a very weak Alfie (lying) in van after being picked up  
Middle: Alfie recovering in motel room two days after rescue  
Bottom: AGH fed this and hundreds of other starving and abandoned cats

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The Paw Project/  
Animal General Hospital  
is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit  
animal welfare organization.

EIN: 59-3782436  
CA Corp ID: 2604032

The Paw Project's mission is to promote the humane and ethical treatment of animals, to educate the public about the painful and crippling effects of declawing, to end the practice of declaw surgery, and to rehabilitate big cats that have been declawed.

Tax-deductible contributions to the Paw Project are used to pay for surgical facilities and supplies, educational programs, and anti-declawing efforts.

[www.lalacards.com](http://www.lalacards.com)



# Declawing: It Doesn't Save Lives

Supporters of declawing incorrectly use the argument that declawing saves lives. They maintain that cats who scratch furniture may end up in shelters where, in all likelihood, they will be euthanized. However, this claim ignores several important and well-documented points.

There is evidence that declawed cats are more likely to be abandoned to shelters and that cats have a greater chance of being relinquished because of behavioral problems caused by declawing, specifically biting

and litter box avoidance.

In a 1996 Journal of the American Veterinary Medical Association (JAVMA) article, Dr. Gary Patronek, using multivariate statistical analysis, found that declawed cats had an increased risk of relinquishment and that among relinquished cats, 52.4% of declawed cats were reported to exhibit litter box avoidance, compared to 29.1% of non-declawed cats.

Recent articles have linked declawing with a chronic pain syndrome that results in aggressive behavior. Painful paws may

also cause a cat to avoid rough litter...and the litter box. Biting and litter box avoidance are less tolerated by pet owners than scratching, increasing the chance that declawed cats will end up in shelters.

The National Council on Pet Population Study & Policy has reported house soiling (38%), followed by aggression (19%), as the most common behavioral reasons for pet relinquishment. A 2002 JAVMA article by Dr. Janet Scarlett, showed that only 3.3% of cats are relinquished for unwanted scratching.

## When in Rome, Don't Declaw

In October, the city council of Rome, Italy, passed an ordinance outlawing the declawing of cats. The new law also requires regular dog-walking and bans the use of electric-shock collars. Offenders face fines of between \$75 and \$750.

Rome joins the growing number of places where declawing is not performed. Earlier this year, Austria passed a federal

Animal Protection Act, which also bans declawing. Monica Cirinna, the Rome city councilor responsible for the animal welfare law said, "The civilization of a city can be measured by the way it looks after its animals. It is good to do whatever we can for our pets who fill our existence with their attention in exchange for a little love."



Roman cats are protected from declawing and other forms of cruelty by the city's new animal welfare law.

## Canadian Vets Oppose Declawing Big Cats

Paw Project veterinarians, Jennifer Conrad and Kirk Wendelburg were instrumental in persuading the Canadian Veterinary Medical Association to adopt a new position statement that "opposes the surgical removal of claws of non-domestic felids (cats) kept in captivity." The Canadian Animal Welfare Committee developed the position citing the findings of the

scientific paper, authored by Conrad and Wendelburg, entitled "Deleterious Effects of Onychectomy (Declawing) in Exotic Felids."

The Canadian VMA position statement finds, "Declawing of these animals can be a painful procedure, involving a lengthy healing period. Postoperative complications, including infection, hemorrhage, bone spurs, and

claw regrowth, may occur. Corrective surgery may be necessary, and declawing may result in lifelong discomfort for the animal."

"It's a real honor," says Wendelburg, "to have our research accepted by our professional colleagues." Conrad concurs, adding, "We hope this will be another step toward the end of declawing."

## Hot Links



\*Paw Project hot links are 100% soy protein

- Paw Project: [www.pawproject.org](http://www.pawproject.org) or [www.pawproject.com](http://www.pawproject.com)
- Animal General Hospital: [www.animalgeneralhospital.org](http://www.animalgeneralhospital.org)
- Canadian VMA on big cat declawing: [www.canadianveterinarians.net/ShowText.aspx?resourceID=44](http://www.canadianveterinarians.net/ShowText.aspx?resourceID=44)
- RCVS position on declawing: [www.rcvs.org.uk/Templates/PreviousNext.aspx?NodeID=89772](http://www.rcvs.org.uk/Templates/PreviousNext.aspx?NodeID=89772)
- Animal Advocates: [www.animaladvocates.us/education.htm](http://www.animaladvocates.us/education.htm)
- Forever Wild Animal Sanctuary: [www.foreverwildexotics.com](http://www.foreverwildexotics.com)
- California Connected: [www.californiaconnected.org/wp/archives/275](http://www.californiaconnected.org/wp/archives/275)
- Performing Animal Welfare Society: [www.pawsweb.org](http://www.pawsweb.org)
- Best Friends Declaw Discussion: [www.groups.yahoo.com/group/NMHP/message/1910](http://www.groups.yahoo.com/group/NMHP/message/1910)