

Excerpt from *Animal Adventures in North Carolina* by Jennifer Bean Bower (undedited)

Tiger World
4400 Cook Road
Rockwell, North Carolina 28138
Phone: 704-279-6363
Website: www.tigerworld.us
E-Mail: tigerworldsc@aol.com

Hours: Open year round 9:00 a.m. – 5:00 p.m. for self-guided tours. Closed on Wednesdays, Thanksgiving and Christmas Days. Advance reservations required for educational or special event tours.

Directions: From I-85 take Exit 68 (HWY 152 East). Travel four miles and turn right on Cook Road, which dead-ends at Tiger World.

A FUN AND EDUCATIONAL PLACE TO EXPERIENCE ENDANGERED SPECIES UP CLOSE AND PERSONAL – Tiger World brochure

The small town of Rockwell, North Carolina—located in eastern Rowan County—accommodates several sizable residents. These grandiose inhabitants, with their sharp teeth and brilliant coats, await visitors daily at a facility appropriately called Tiger World. Tourists searching for this animal conservation and educational center may think they have made a navigational error when turning onto Cook Road, as the residential area seems an unlikely setting for meat-eating animals. Near the end of the road, however, silhouettes of majestic creatures appear in the distance and the traveler is assured they have taken the right track.

Tiger World encompasses property that was formerly the Metrolina Wildlife Park, which closed in 2007. Many of Tiger World's current residents were already on-site when Lea Jaunakais assumed ownership of the park. Jaunakais, president and founder of Tiger World, opened the new facility—which comprises a total of thirty-one acres—in 2008. According to the article, "Home sweet den," which was written by Charles D. Perry and appeared in the January 5, 2008 edition of *The Herald*, a Rock Hill, South Carolina newspaper, Jaunakais developed a concern for tigers at the age of three, while watching a National Geographic program that showcased the destruction of tiger populations by humans. Cultivating that passion through years of study, training, work and research, Jaunakais eventually fulfilled her dream of creating and maintaining a facility that not only safeguards threatened and endangered species but also educates the public about their plight.

Within one year of opening, Tiger World rescued over ten animals, including: tigers, lions, servals, and leopards. One of those rescues, a leopard named Begara, arrived at Tiger World with a broken hind leg. She was immediately transported to a specialized veterinarian who found it necessary to amputate the limb. The procedure saved Begara's life and after several months of healing, she was able to run and jump again. Other rescues involved two tigers that were brought to the facility after the death of their owner. The tigers had been kept in a private home where they were confined to

small enclosures void of key components necessary for their health and well being. The female tiger required surgery, as her claws were overgrown and penetrating the pads of her feet. Although once in despairing environments, both tigers now run, play, swim, eat and interact with their handlers.

Tourists can view Begara and other animals at the park on an up-close and personal basis. As a matter of fact, in some instances guests can stand within five feet of a tiger—a true highlight of the facility. Tiger World houses several types of tigers, such as: white Bengals, Bengals, and Siberians. It also houses the remarkable liger. For many visitors, it may be their first time seeing a liger, as this species is not commonly exhibited at North Carolina animal facilities. A liger, which is a hybrid cross between a female tiger and a male lion, exhibits characteristics of both animals. Ligers have diffused stripes and vocalize sounds of both tigers and lions. The liger typically grows bigger than either of its parents, making it the largest of all cat species. Two ligers, Radar and Lil Wayne, are exhibited at Tiger World. Radar was brought to the facility when he required a new home, and Lil Wayne was born shortly after Jaunakais purchased the property. A tubal ligation was performed on Lil Wayne's mother, Lilly, to prevent any further pregnancies. Only on occasion does Tiger World permit its tiger to reproduce. If contacted by another licensed zoo for a tiger, the staff will determine if any of their available tigers fulfill the park's need. If not, then breeding may be scheduled. When cubs are born at the facility, the public is allowed, by advance reservation, to meet and interact with them. Although a special treat for visitors, Tiger World does not provide this experience on a regular or annual basis.

In addition to tigers, visitors may observe: baboons, monkeys, lions, jaguars, panthers, Syrian bears, lemurs, a lynx, emus and various other birds, tortoises, crocodiles, lizards, snakes, and many other animals. Bags of food—for non meat-eating residents—can be purchased at the ticket booth and is an exciting way to connect with the animals.

Tiger World is committed to educating the public about animals and offers educational tours in addition to the self-guided tours. These reservation only tours allow guests the opportunity to walk the grounds in the company of a licensed animal handler. The handler provides detailed and intriguing information about each animal, as well as, educational coloring books to younger guests. Carnivore Feeding Safaris, both informative and fascinating, are offered on Thursday evenings and also require advance reservations. Participants who opt for this unique tour will witness the primal feeding behaviors of carnivores. Staff members feed their big cats 1800 pounds of meat a week; meat that consists of butchered chicken, beef and pork.

Text panels are on display throughout Tiger World to educate tourists who take the self-guided tour, which is available without reservations during scheduled hours of operation. The panels impart knowledge regarding endangered and threatened species, such as: the declining number of animal populations in the world, how that number is due to human interference, and steps that can be taken to ensure their survival.

By allowing tourists to examine animals—particularly the tigers—from an up-close perspective, Tiger World hopes they will inspire people to learn more about, and help protect, endangered and threatened species. They also hope to instill a realization that one person's actions can make an impact in the world.

There is no doubt tourists will enjoy visiting Tiger World, as they have the chance to view, and learn about, a diverse collection of animals. They are also afforded a rare

opportunity to observe ligers. As Tiger World's brochure states, they provide "... a unique experience for young and old alike—an intimate backstage pass to the world of exotic animals."

Tip: There is a healthy population of Canadian geese at Tiger World that will beg for your food. Keep in mind; if you feed them at the beginning of your tour, you will not have any food left for the rest of the animals. Also, unless you *do* plan on feeding the geese, one bag of food per person is sufficient, as you are only allowed to feed certain animals. Pay attention when being told the layout of the facility, or you could miss seeing the white Bengal tigers.

Key: Admission Charged, Restrooms, Snacks, Picnic Tables, Souvenirs