

Exotic-breed cats transferred to Arizona animal shelter

By Diana M. Alba/Sun-News reporter

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LAS CRUCES — Thirty-three exotic-breed cats that were turned over to Doña Ana County officials this month have been shipped to an animal shelter in Arizona.

The cats, Bengals and Savannahs, were transported in two waves on June 11 and June 13 to the Humane Society of the White Mountains, said Beth Vesco-Mock, director of the Animal Services Center. She said she'd been seeking potential rescue groups for the animals.

"One of their members was involved with these kinds of cats," she said. "They're the ones that came through; other rescue groups were trying to organize a rescue, but they were unable to do so."

The Humane Society of the White Mountains is based in Lakeside, Ariz., about 130 miles northeast of Phoenix.

Though it was initially reported that the cats didn't appear to have been part of a breeding operation, Vesco-Mock said she now believes they were. That's because, following an evaluation, the shelter learned that most of the females — about 10 — were pregnant. Other cats were spayed or neutered.

In all, 35 of the cats were turned over to the county on June 3 by an owner whose name hasn't been released. Two were adopted before the animals were shipped to Arizona.

Vesco-Mock said the Humane Society of the White Mountains didn't pay a fee to take the animals because it's a nonprofit animal rescue group.

Curtis Childress, county animal control supervisor, said the cats were in good health, unlike other hoarding cases the county has seen, but the owner didn't have a permit to own as many animals as she did.

Childress said animal control officials had been talking with a local rescue group the day they were relinquished by the owner, but that didn't pan out. He said the main goal was "we didn't want them to be put down."

Asked about the cats' transfer to Arizona, Childress replied: "I'm happy we've been able to get them someplace where eventually we're going to be able to find homes for them, and they're not going to be euthanized. We can't save them all, but every one we do save is a plus."

Bengals are seven generations removed from a cross with a Leopard Cat, and Savannahs are seven generations removed from a cross with a serval, a cheetah-like cat. A family member of the previous owner said the cats could sell for between \$800 and \$1,200 apiece.

They're known for their unusual markings.

Vesco-Mock said the cats generated much interest in the public when they were at the Animal Services Center, but only two were adopted, likely because "they weren't that friendly." However, she said more of the shelter's other cats were adopted because of the increased traffic.

"People want a friendly cat," she said.

Officials with the Humane Society of the White Mountains couldn't be reached for comment.

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If you adopt

What: adopting pets from the Animal Services Center of the Mesilla Valley

When:

- noon to 6 p.m. Monday through Friday
- noon to 5 p.m. Saturday and Sunday

Where: Animal Services Center of the Mesilla Valley, 3551 Bataan Memorial West, Las Cruces

Info:

- (575) 382-0018
- cat adoption fee: \$50
- dog adoption fee: \$75