hart was found guilty on 56 counts of animal abuse, including 14 felonies. The infants and juveniles were taken to the Fund for Animals’ Wildlife Rehabilitation Center near San Diego. Chuck Traisi, who ran the facility at the time, said the place was a great example of why keeping exotic animals in captivity is a bad idea. “Seeing the conditions at this man’s residence – of his so-called rescue – simply serves to reinforce my belief the exotic animal industry is the most loathsome, disgusting, exploitive animal matter that I can imagine,” he said.

“Throughout the country there are a few highly respectable sanctuaries that provide the quality of life for animals such as these tigers, who have been subject to neglect,” he said. “There are too few of these sanctuaries and PAWS is one.

“That, perhaps, is a high point, knowing that these tigers are now going to spend the remainder of their days not being used or exploited.”

Stewart and Derby had always planned on having tigers at the San Andreas sanctuary, but the confiscation of the animals in Southern California sent them to the drawing board. They devised a system of remotely operated doors and gates that allow their keepers to care for and maneuver the tigers within the small groups that arrived in the Mother Lode. Stewart said the cats came here in those little groups and the animals within those groups get along. However, if those groups were put together, fights to the death could ensue.

“They’ll fence fight,” he said of the tigers today if they see each other through the chain-link fencing.

The 10-acre habitat for the tigers features individual dens for each animal and larger enclosures for the little groups that open individually onto the hillside compound, which is divided into seven spaces so the cats can venture into the bush within their groups. The tigers won’t climb the trees on the hill, but Stewart assures visitors to the sanctuary that the trees were trimmed so that there was no chance the giant felines could hop the fences.

“There are more tigers in Texas backyards than in India,” Derby said of the worldwide state of captive tigers.