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ONE CLICK AWAY:
AN INVESTIGATION INTO THE ONLINE
SALE OF EXOTIC ANIMALS AS PETS



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Eagle owl © iStock.com/Silvano Garoca



FOREWORD

When you think of a “pet”, what species instantly comes into your mind? I would suggest a dog, cat, rabbit, perhaps a goldfish. Some will, of course, include birds, but for me the idea of any flying, winged creature in a cage is an anathema. (Why, indeed, does a bird have wings?)

Yet I have discovered in this fascinating and deeply troubling document, a list of wild creatures that have entered this previously benign-sounding category, and changed the face of it forever. Forever, that is, unless we do something to prevent it growing exponentially.

Reptiles from snakes and iguanas to bearded dragons and pythons, from chameleons to tortoises and on the list goes. Birds of all kinds – from hawks to parrots, finches to owls. And then the rest – wallabies, hedgehogs, chipmunks, raccoons, African leopard cats, caracals – the fearful list winds down the page – each name arousing terrible images of inappropriate cages and pens, unfulfilling environments, bathtubs and garages, glass tanks with plastic plants, and so on.

One of the escalating problems is that one can buy a ‘pet’ online nowadays with little trouble – often with no advice on how to care for the animal, and no check as to whether the buyer has appropriate housing or sufficient knowledge to provide the specialist lifetime care that is essential.

It is not that we don’t have laws. We do, but they are in desperate need of bringing up to date to deal with changing circumstance and the unacceptable suffering of so many WILD creatures.

For me, the big question is why should any wild animal be kept as a ‘pet’? All too often they are victims of a temporary and illusory ‘fashion’ craze, having been seen in a film or TV programme or advertisement – terrapins, meerkats, owls to name a few. And primates? Really?

I hope you will read this extremely urgent report with the same sense of astonishment and horror as I did and feel compelled, as I am to do something about it.

We become deeply upset and outraged when we see or learn about the suffering of animals in other countries. And we all too often feel helpless to do anything about it. Yet the animals in this study are here in Britain. Their treatment and their place in the UK pet trade are subject to our laws. We can do something about that. And we must.

*Virginia McKenna OBE
Founder Trustee, The Born Free Foundation*



**ONE OF THE
ESCALATING
PROBLEMS IS THAT
ONE CAN BUY
A ‘PET’ ONLINE
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LITTLE TROUBLE**

COMMENT

Apparently we are no longer satisfied with ‘conventional pets’. More and more people want something a little out of the ordinary. Whether as a result of a whim, a fashion trend, a desire to stand out from the crowd, as *One Click Away* makes clear, millions of wild animals are now on the ‘wish list’. And, as this report also makes clear, the implications are dire both for the individuals and for the species concerned.

As if it was not enough to be given the awesome responsibility of properly caring for a cat, dog or horse, we now crave the monkey, the lizard, the snake, the fish, the parrot, the tortoise, the terrapin – even exotic cat species such as ocelot and caracal.

Why? Well it would be all too easy to point the finger of blame at the likes of Michael Jackson with his chimpanzee Bubbles, or Justin Bieber with his pet monkey. It would be equally facile to single out films like Finding Nemo and the subsequent surge in ownership of clown fish. Or the YouTube footage of a slow loris supposedly giggling while being tickled under the forearms which made the species, at least temporarily, the new ‘must have’ pet.

The Born Free Foundation has long-standing concerns about the trade and possession of wild animals as pets. Our global efforts include intercepting and rescuing some of the 200-300 cheetah cubs currently smuggled out of the Horn of Africa into the Middle East as status symbol pets, the perfect accessory for the back of the luxury four wheel drive.

We contend, and the evidence suggests, that this trade is inflicting gross suffering on millions of wild animals and driving species to the brink, facilitated by slack law enforcement, lack of effective legislation, increased disposable income, the ‘well why not’ attitude that increasingly pervades our society – all these combine to make the keeping of exotic pets, many ordered blindly over the internet, all the rage. And outrage is what we should feel when confronted with this abomination – outrage that we must channel and focus to turn into reality the vitally important recommendations set out by Blue Cross and Born Free in *One Click Away*.

Of course, the trade in and ownership of exotic ‘pets’ may be low down on the political agenda but it is here on our patch, on our doorstep and it is one thing we can do something about.

One Click Away should be the catalyst that initiates effective reform to the law, to enforcement, to regulation and to public attitudes. The exploitation of wild animals as ‘pets’ should not be ‘business as usual’.

Will Travers OBE
President, The Born Free Foundation



**THIS TRADE IS
INFLECTING GROSS
SUFFERING ON
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TO THE BRINK**



**THE INTERNET IS
NOW THE PLACE
PEOPLE GO TO BUY
EVERYTHING ON
THEIR WISH LISTS,
INCLUDING PETS**

COMMENT

We Brits really are a nation of animal lovers; we share our lives and homes with 65 million pets. They offer us companionship and unconditional love, and are always there to listen when we need to talk.

As one of the UK’s leading pet charities, which treats sick pets and finds new homes for unwanted animals every day, we understand how much pets mean to their owners, but at Blue Cross we’ve become increasingly concerned about the growth in the popularity of exotic pets.

Thanks to the rapid growth of the online marketplace, it has become easy to purchase more and more unusual pets at just the click of a button.

This is why we are pleased to be able to work in partnership with The Born Free Foundation to produce this *One Click Away* report, which shines a light on this hidden problem. As you read this report I am sure you will be shocked to see the wide range of species available for sale on the internet, from marmoset monkeys to reticulated pythons.

Many of the pets identified in this report are not cute and fluffy, but while they may not appear vulnerable, they have important welfare needs that must be met. It is vital that we do all we can to ensure that no pet suffers or has their welfare compromised.

We must be realistic about the internet trade in pets. Although as a charity we would love the first port of call by everyone wanting a pet, to be a rescue centre, we understand that this is unrealistic. The internet is now the place people go to buy everything on their wish lists, including pets. This is why it is important that we make the web as safe as possible for buyers, sellers, and importantly, the pets being traded.

We are proud to be a member of the Pet Advertising Advisory Group, which has done fantastic work over the last three years to start to tackle the problems with online sales by making real, tangible improvements to many of the leading UK classified sites. We know, however, there is much more to be done and we pledge to continue to work with the group and website owners to continue to improve the climate of online pet sales.

However, when it comes to exotic pets advertised for sale on the internet, we believe that the government must now step in and take action. Scotland is leading the way with the Scottish government review into the trade of exotics due to launch later this year, and we hope this report will help push Westminster and the other devolved administrations to do the same.

Sally de La Bedoyere
Chief Executive, Blue Cross

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

ONE CLICK AWAY PROVIDES AN OVERVIEW AND ANALYSIS OF THE CURRENT SCALE OF THE TRADE AND KEEPING OF EXOTIC PETS IN GREAT BRITAIN. OF THE APPROXIMATELY 65 MILLION ANIMALS KEPT AS PETS IN THE UK, A SUBSTANTIAL PROPORTION ARE EXOTIC OR WILD ANIMALS, SUCH AS LIZARDS, SNAKES, PARROTS AND PRIMATES – FOR EXAMPLE, ESTIMATES SUGGEST THAT BETWEEN 1.3 TO 7 MILLION REPTILES AND AMPHIBIANS ARE KEPT AS PETS^{1,2}.

These animals are not domesticated in the way that dogs and cats are, and as such are particularly susceptible to welfare problems when kept as pets. However, it is currently relatively easy to buy or obtain exotic pets, from pet shops or increasingly by purchasing online.

Current legislation in Great Britain relating to the sale and keeping of animals as pets does not include any direct reference to the online sale of animals. The Born Free Foundation and Blue Cross have become increasingly concerned at the scale of the exotic pet trade and the variety of species readily available for purchase, often by inexperienced members of the public. The fundamental understanding of how to meet the needs of exotic animals is frequently lacking, and it is often not possible to meet these needs in a domestic environment.

Looking at a sample of 1,796 online classified ads from a three-month period across several general selling websites, this report reveals that:

- At least 53 different types (species, hybrids etc.) of reptile, 37 types of exotic bird, 28 types of exotic mammal, and 7 types of amphibians were advertised for sale.
- Unsuitable animals, including potentially dangerous animals, were widely available for sale to the general public.
- Even basic advice on animal care and welfare is almost entirely lacking on most websites, and no checks are made as to whether animals are sold to inexperienced owners.
- Animals considered particularly vulnerable to welfare problems in captivity, such as primates, chameleons and iguanas, were advertised for sale.
- There are considerable concerns for the welfare of the individual animals advertised; some individuals for sale were kept in inappropriate environments or were reported as being in “poor health”; ads also offered animals as “swaps” or “quick sales”.
- Sellers often provided insufficient information to enable identification of the species of animal for sale.

¹ Pet Food Manufacturers' Association (2014) Pet Population 2014. Available online at www.pfma.org.uk/pet-population-2014/

² Reptile & Exotic Pet Trade Association (2014) Good Practice Guidelines for the Welfare of Privately Kept Reptiles & Amphibians.



Marmoset © Born Free Foundation



RECOMMENDATIONS

THE BORN FREE FOUNDATION AND BLUE CROSS MAKE THE FOLLOWING RECOMMENDATIONS:

REVIEW OF THE EXOTIC PET TRADE

Westminster and devolved administrations undertake a full review of the exotic pet trade. This should cover all aspects of ownership, including the breeding, trade and keeping of exotic animals across the UK.

REVIEW THE PET ANIMALS ACT 1951

There is an urgent need for the Government to review and update the Pet Animals Act 1951 to reflect the large-scale and increasing sale of animals over the internet. There needs to be greater clarity as to the criteria that must be met in order for premises to be licensed under the Pet Animals Act 1951.

IMPROVE ENFORCEMENT OF LEGISLATION

Improved enforcement of the Dangerous Wild Animals Act 1976 and EU Wildlife Trade Regulations (EC) 338/97. Sellers should be required to state if any species they are advertising require a Dangerous Wild Animals licence or an endangered species certification.

ENSURE STRICTER CRITERIA FOR SELLERS

Websites should ensure that listed adverts contain specific information. This should include greater details about the animal for sale. Sellers should not be able to sell ‘various birds’, for example. Exotic pets advertised online should, at the very least, be listed by their correct species, and sellers should state how many animals they are advertising for sale, their sex and their age. Sites offering animals for sale should list basic welfare requirements that must be met by buyers and sellers. Online sellers with a pet shop licence should be made to state this on their adverts.

TERMINOLOGY

| | |
|----------------|---|
| ANIMAL WELFARE | How an animal is physically and psychologically faring or coping, reflecting its care, environment and health. |
| CLASSIFIED ADS | Short, freely-available private advertisements. |
| EXOTIC PET | The following guidance relating to the Zoo Licensing Act 1981 (see Annexe 7), refers to an individual of a species not normally domesticated in Great Britain kept within a domestic environment, where the principle reason for ownership is for personal interest or companionship. A non-traditional companion animal or wild pet. |
| PET SHOP | In line with the definition in the Pet Animals Act 1951, “the carrying on at premises of any nature (including a private dwelling) of a business of selling animals as pets”. This may include a range of premises including garden centres, aquariums, traditional pet shops or private residences. |
| SANCTUARY | A facility offering humane and responsible animal care, with a focus on rescuing animals. We believe that a responsible sanctuary rescues and provides care for animals that have been abused, injured, abandoned or are otherwise in need; places the animals’ interests first; operates on a non-profit basis; has exceptional management and animal care; obtains all relevant permits and licences; and refrains from propagating animals in captivity. |
| TAXON | A group of one or more populations of an animal or animals considered to form a unit e.g. a genus or species. Plural = taxa. |

³ Pet Animals Act 1951. Available online at www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/Geo6/14-15/35

⁴ Ornamental Aquatic Trade Association (2014). Freedom of Information Request on Pet Shop Licensing.

⁵ Primates as pets: Government response to the Committee’s Eleventh Report of Session 2013-2014 - Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee (2014). Available online at www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201415/cmselect/cmenvfru/656/65604.htm

⁶ Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora. Available online at <https://www.cites.org/eng/disc/what.php> (Accessed 15 June 2015)

⁷ European Council Regulation 338/97 (and subsequent amendments) <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:31997R0338> (Accessed 15 June 2015)

⁸ Control of Trade in Endangered Species (Enforcement) Regulations (1997) www.legislation.gov.uk/ukxi/1997/1372/contents/made (Accessed 15 June 2015)

LEGAL PROTECTION FOR PETS

IT IS CURRENTLY LEGAL TO KEEP ANY ANIMAL AS A PET IN THE UK, PROVIDED THAT THE REQUIREMENTS OF NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL WILDLIFE LAWS AND PUBLIC PROTECTION LEGISLATION ARE MET.

The legal system in Great Britain is a complex patchwork that can be broadly captured by looking at four areas. The primary legislation in Britain that relates to the keeping and sale of animals as pets is as follows:

The **ANIMAL WELFARE ACT 2006** in England and Wales, the **ANIMAL HEALTH & WELFARE (SCOTLAND) ACT 2006** and the **WELFARE OF ANIMALS ACT (NORTHERN IRELAND) 2011** make it an offence to cause unnecessary suffering or cruelty to an animal. The Acts also require the person responsible for an animal to meet its basic needs and such persons can be prosecuted if these needs are not met or if they allow the animal to be mistreated.

The **WILDLIFE AND COUNTRYSIDE ACT 1981** protects animals, plants, and countryside in the UK. Section one of the Act makes it an offence to; injure, kill, or remove any wild bird or remove, damage or destroy a nest and any eggs. It is also an offence to kill, injure or possess, or trade any native wild animal listed on the Schedule of the Act.

International trade in wild animals and plants is regulated by the **CONVENTION ON INTERNATIONAL TRADE IN ENDANGERED SPECIES OF WILD FAUNA AND FLORA (CITES)**. The stated aim of CITES is “to ensure that international trade in specimens of wild animals and plants does not threaten their survival”⁶. It does this predominantly by listing species covered by CITES that are affected by trade, into one of three appendices. CITES is implemented in the EU by the **WILDLIFE TRADE REGULATIONS (EC) 338/97** which is supplemented by Annexes, A, B, C and D. Annexes A-D include species where trade restriction or monitoring is in place, with A and B providing the strictest control on listed species⁷. In the UK, the EU Wildlife Trade Regulations are implemented by the **CONTROL OF TRADE IN ENDANGERED SPECIES REGULATIONS (COTES)**⁸. To legally sell an animal listed on Annex A of The Regulations, an Article 10 sales certificate must be issued. Buying or selling an Annex A listed species without an Article 10 sales certificate is against the law.

The **PET ANIMALS ACT 1951** (PAA) requires the licensing by a local authority of a premises of “any nature (including a private dwelling) of a business of selling animals as pet”³. Inspections of pet shops are not mandatory although 82% of local authorities report inspecting pet shops annually⁴. In response to a 2014 inquiry, the Government stated its belief that the Pet Animals Act 1951 still “provides appropriate protection for the welfare of animals sold as pets”⁵.

The **DANGEROUS WILD ANIMALS ACT 1976** (DWAA) is primarily public protection legislation aiming to protect the public from the danger posed by the private keeping of any wild animal of species considered to be “dangerous”. The legislation only briefly touches upon animal welfare. Species listed on the Schedule to the Act require a licence from the local authority in order to be kept privately. Inspections are carried out every two years in conjunction with the renewal of a licence. Wild animals that are not listed on the Schedule do not require a Dangerous Wild Animal licence to be kept.

Most of the legislation is overseen by the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) and enforced by agencies or Local Government Authorities. It is important to note that it is not a statutory requirement for Local Authorities to enforce the Animal Welfare Act.

Although existing laws offer animals in Britain a certain level of legal protection these laws work largely independently of each other, often with little cohesion. This leads to confusion over who is ultimately responsible for enforcement.

NONE OF THE CURRENT LEGISLATION INCLUDES ANY DIRECT REFERENCE TO THE ONLINE SALE OF EXOTIC ANIMALS.

THE PRIMARY AIM OF THIS REPORT IS TO IMPROVE THE UNDERSTANDING OF THE SCALE, RANGE AND AVAILABILITY OF EXOTIC ANIMALS ONLINE AND THE POSSIBLE IMPLICATIONS THIS MAY HAVE ON ANIMAL WELFARE.



INTRODUCTION

HUMANS HAVE A COMPLEX AND LONG-STANDING RELATIONSHIP WITH ANIMALS. OVER MILLENNIA, WE HAVE CHOSEN TO ASSOCIATE MOST CLOSELY WITH A SELECT NUMBER OF SPECIES; A TINY MINORITY OF ANIMAL SPECIES. AS OUR ASSOCIATION STRENGTHENED, WE SELECTED INDIVIDUAL ANIMALS FOR PARTICULAR TRAITS THAT WE WANTED: SIZE, COLOUR, MEAT, BEHAVIOUR ETC. THIS PROCESS OF SELECTION IS KNOWN AS DOMESTICATION.

Domesticated livestock and companion animals are fundamentally different to their wild predecessors. Humans have successfully domesticated only a small minority of animals.

Unlike more “traditional” companion animals – such as dogs and cats – exotic pets retain the complex social, physical and behavioural needs of their counterparts in the wild. Many species are ill-suited to life in captivity. It is a common misconception that a captive-bred animal is “domesticated”. However, these animals have not undergone the process of domestication – the selective breeding of specific physical and behavioural traits over many generations. Even if the individual was captive-bred, it does not change the animal’s fundamental requirements.

The process of domestication occurs over thousands of years. It is believed that dogs may have been domesticated as early as 27,000-40,000 years ago⁹. Estimates for cat domestication are between 3,600-9,500 years ago¹⁰. Captive breeding of exotic animals such as reptiles, for example, has occurred over a limited number of generations. Although in some cases these animals are selectively bred in captivity to produce particular traits such as colour morphs and unique patterns, they cannot be considered truly domesticated as they still retain their basic wild characteristics.

Exotic animals have complex social, physical and behavioural needs. Each species has adapted to a specific environment, which can be costly and difficult to replicate. Individuals may be unable to adapt to their artificial surroundings, which can result in psychological stress and lead to poor welfare. If their captive environment is unsuitable it can lead to a host of serious health problems, for example reptiles are known to suffer from a range of illnesses in captivity including; rickets, metabolic bone disease

and digestive problems. A new owner may choose an exotic pet without being aware of the specific housing, temperature, humidity levels, dietary and nutritional requirements of the species they have purchased (see Annexe 1). Although we have a relatively thorough understanding of the health of more commonly kept domestic animals, even then our knowledge is still incomplete. It is therefore inevitable that there is still much we need to learn about non-domesticated species.

The Born Free Foundation and Blue Cross have become increasingly concerned about the expansion in the sale of pets online and the implications for animal health and welfare.

While exotic pets have been kept in relatively small numbers for many years, mostly as a result of imports from the wild, in recent decades there has been an apparent increase in number, range of species and availability. Public demand for increasingly exotic and unique pets continues to diversify the market (See Annexe 2). In recent years, this explosion has been exacerbated by the development of the internet, and the sale of exotic pets through online classified ads. However, despite various estimates of the number of pets kept and sold in the UK, no reliable data are available on the precise scale of the sale of exotic pets online.

⁹ Dunham, W (2015). Dog domestication much older than previously thought. [online] Available: www.scientificamerican.com/article/dog-domestication-much-older-than-previously-known/ [17 September 2015]

¹⁰ Driscoll, CA, Macdonald, DW & O’Brien, SJ (2009). From wild animals to domestic pets, an evolutionary view of domestication. PNAS, 106: 9971-9978.

PETS IN THE UK

ESTIMATES FOR THE TOTAL NUMBER OF PETS (DOMESTICATED OR NON-DOMESTICATED) IN THE UK VARY. ONE ESTIMATE SUGGESTS A TOTAL OF 65 MILLION ANIMALS¹¹, HOWEVER WE BELIEVE THIS FIGURE MAY BE AN UNDERESTIMATE.

Although domestic animals are still the most common household pets including an estimated 10.5 million dogs and 10.3 million cats¹², there is still a large number of non-domesticated species in homes across the country. There are thought to be around 1 million caged birds and 40-45 million fish kept as pets in the UK¹³ (these numbers includes domesticated species such as budgies, canaries and goldfish (see Annexe 3). There is some disparity concerning the number of captive reptiles and amphibians; with estimates ranging from around 1.3 million; 400,000 lizards, 400,000 snakes, 300,000 tortoises and turtles, 100,000 frogs and toads, 100,000 newts/salamanders¹⁴, to in excess of seven million reptiles and amphibians being kept as pets in the UK¹⁵.

With this number there are also privately owned exotic species kept subject to the terms of the Dangerous Wild Animals Act 1976 in Great Britain. In 2014, the Born Free Foundation undertook a survey of private individuals in Great Britain licensed to keep dangerous wild animals. In total, 525 licences were identified (this figure does not represent the total number of individual animals). The survey revealed a wide range of listed species, including snow leopards, a polar bear, tigers, pumas, cheetah and tapir licensed to be kept by private owners in Britain. An (admittedly disputed) estimate places non-compliance with the DWAA in the region of 85-95%^{16,17}.

¹¹ Pet Food Manufacturers' Association (2014) Pet Population 2014. Available online at www.pfma.org.uk/pet-population-2014/

¹² Murray, JK, Browne, WJ, Roberts, MA, Whitmarsh, A & Gruffydd-Jones, TJ (2010). Number and ownership profiles of cats and dogs in the UK. *Veterinary Record*. 166 : 163-168.

¹³ Pet Food Manufacturers' Association (2014) Pet Population 2014. Available online at www.pfma.org.uk/pet-population-2014/

¹⁴ Ibid, PFMA

¹⁵ Reptile & Exotic Pet Trade Association (2014) Good Practice Guidelines for the Welfare of Privately Kept Reptiles & Amphibians.

¹⁶ Defra (2001). Effectiveness Study of the Dangerous Wild Animals Act 1976.

¹⁷ RSPCA (2014). Do you give a monkey's? The need for a ban on pet primates.

SUMMARY / KEY POINTS

- 65 million animals are kept as pets in the UK.
- Estimates suggest between 1.3-7 million reptiles and amphibians are kept as pets.
- 57% of licensed high street pet shops in Britain sell one or more exotic species.
- Exotic species such as primates, meerkats, venomous snakes and birds of prey are available to buy in high street pet shops.
- Privately owned exotic species (licensed under DWAA) include snow leopards, tigers, puma, cheetah and tapirs.



BUYING PETS FROM PET SHOPS

Traditionally, pets were most commonly sold in high street pet shops or through private breeders. In recent years, the pet shop industry has come under scrutiny for selling puppies and kittens in store. Although the practice continues, it is widely condemned by charities including Blue Cross, who are calling for a complete ban. Whilst there have been recent high profile calls to end the sale of puppies and kittens in pet shops, other species including exotics, have not received the same attention.

In 2014, the Born Free Foundation undertook surveys of licensed pet shops to try and get a better understanding of the scale of the trade and sale of exotic pets by pet shops on the high street. The information gathered indicated that there are just over 2900 licensed pet shops in England, Scotland and Wales. Of these pet shops, 57% were reported as selling one or more exotic species of which 42% sold reptiles, 22% sold amphibians, 17% sold mammals and 25% sold birds.

A huge variety of species were identified for sale at pet shops including primates, meerkats, venomous snakes and birds of prey. Reptiles in particular were found to be sold very widely. A report by the RSPCA, published in 2002, identified groups of reptiles considered to be particularly vulnerable in captivity, including chameleons, monitor lizards, crocodilians and venomous snakes¹⁸. Our survey showed that all these groups were available to buy on the high street.

Following this survey, which confirmed that primates were available to buy from high street pet shops, the Born Free Foundation commissioned an investigation to look more closely at the sale of primates. Born Free was able to identify 21 pet shops licensed to sell primates in England.

The key findings of the report revealed that:

- Pet shops are willing to sell single primates, without at least verifying with the potential purchaser that the primate would be housed with others of the same species.
- Staff at one shop did not appear to know that a marmoset was a monkey.
- Pet shops were inconsistent in their advice regarding where and how to keep primates – for example, recommending that primates could be housed in a parrot cage and a spare room or garage. There were concerns for the welfare of some primates kept in pet shops.

¹⁸ RSPCA, (2002) Far from Home – reptiles that suffer and die in captivity.

BUYING PETS ONLINE

FIGURES SUGGEST THAT PET RETAILERS ARE UNDER INCREASING PRESSURE FROM COMPETITION WITH ONLINE BUSINESSES AND THE CONVENIENCE OF INTERNET SHOPPING¹⁹.

A recent Ofcom report showed that internet use has doubled in a decade with 2014 seeing the biggest increase. The report suggested that adults spend an average of 20 hours and 30 minutes online a week²⁰.

The increase in internet usage over the last few decades has led to a diverse market for selling animals. Of particular concern for many animal charities are the classified ads, social media sites and specialist websites that offer animals for sale.

These sites are largely unregulated and offer little protection to the buyer let alone the animal. Online purchases are likely to be on impulse. A survey of UK smartphone and tablet owners showed that use of such devices was helping to drive an increase in impulse purchases²¹. In these instances the purchaser is unlikely to have taken into account or understood the long-term care implications.

According to pet shop licencing conditions, at the point of sale, a pet shop is required to provide care leaflets or similar advice to the prospective owner. Staff applicants are encouraged to hold a qualification appropriate to the species being kept in store²². Unlike pet shops, online advertisements do not have any obligation to provide this information which could impact on the future welfare of the animal.

Online ads often provide little information on the history of the animal for sale. A new owner may be unaware of any potential health or behavioural problems of their new pet. This could have further implications on both the welfare of the animal and the owner's ability to provide long term care (Annexe 4).

In 2014, the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee launched an enquiry into the keeping of primates as pets. Many in favour of a ban argued that the Pet Animals Act 1951 is out-dated and cannot provide adequate protection to exotic animals in the pet trade. In their response, the Government stated that the Pet Animals Act 1951 still *"provides appropriate protection for the welfare of animals sold as pets."* It also stated that online businesses *"must have premises where the animals are held and therefore should be licensed and subject to inspection"*²³.

However, the Born Free Foundation and Blue Cross are concerned that in light of the numbers of animals being kept and the mechanisms by which they are being sold – the Act cannot adequately protect the welfare of animals sold as pets.

KEY CONCERNS

- Increase in time spent online with adults spending an average of 20 hours 30 minutes online each week.
- Concerned by the range of websites offering exotic animals for sale – social media, private forums, classified ads and specialist websites.
- Key concerns regarding online sales; lack of advice for new owners, animals traded as commodities (i.e. "swaps"), impulse buying and lack of background information on the history of the individual.

¹⁹ Pet Business World (2012). Number of shops selling pets declines. [Online] Available: www.petbusinessworld.co.uk/news/feed/number-of-shops-selling-pets-declines-again (Accessed 17 June 2015)

²⁰ Ofcom (2015) Time spent online doubles in a decade. [Online] Available: <http://consumers.ofcom.org.uk/news/time-spent-online-doubles/?lang=en> (Accessed 18 September 2015)

²¹ Moth, D (2012) Smartphones and tablets drive an increase in impulse buying online. [online] Available: <https://econsultancy.com/blog/10788-smartphones-and-tablets-drive-an-increase-in-impulse-buying-online>

²² Chartered Institute of Environmental Health (2013). Model Conditions for Pet Vending Licensing. Available online at www.cieh.org/assets/0/72/1126/1212/1216/1218/f847c5a9-2251-43ed-bba8-4d064e0383c0.pdf

²³ Primates as pets: Government response to the Committee's Eleventh Report of Session 2013-2014 - Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee (2014). Available online at www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201415/cmselect/cmenvfru/656/65604.htm at www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201415/cmselect/cmenvfru/656/65604.htm

²⁴ Pet Advertising Advisory Group. Minimum Standards of Online Classified Advertising Websites. Available online at <http://paag.org.uk/standards/> (Accessed 17 June 2015)

²⁵ Preloved, UK Classifieds, Gumtree, Vivastreet, Loot, Pets4Homes

²⁶ Defra (2012). Zoo Licensing Act 1981: Guide to the Act's provisions. Available online at https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/69595/zoo-licensing-act-guide.pdf

The question is: can the PET ANIMALS ACT, which was brought into force over 50 years ago, be effectively enforced and applied in light of the internet age?

THE PET ADVERTISING ADVISORY GROUP

BLUE CROSS IS A MEMBER OF THE PET ADVERTISING ADVISORY GROUP (PAAG). THIS IS A GROUP MADE UP OF ANIMAL WELFARE AND VETERINARY ORGANISATIONS, THE DEPARTMENT FOR ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS (DEFRA), TRADING STANDARDS AND THE POLICE.

PAAG was originally formed in 2001 to look at the problems with traditional print advertising of pets in newspapers and magazines, however the growth in the internet meant that the group started to look at the problems with online classified adverts. In 2013, PAAG launched the Minimum Standards for Online Classified Advertisements, which aim to improve the quality of online pet advertising and influence behaviour of internet users to benefit animal welfare (see Annexe 5)²⁴.

The standards cover a range of animal welfare issues and aim to ensure that the websites offer both sellers and buyers a safe environment to sell or purchase pets in. The scheme has generally thought to have worked well, with many of the leading UK classified sites signed up and implementing the standards. But as was stated at the end of the official PAAG moderation period there was still more websites could and should do to improve the standard of advertising on their websites. However, whilst the standards are endorsed by Defra and have been adopted by several leading classified ad websites, they are entirely voluntary and websites are under no legal obligation to ensure the standards are met, there are a number of sites including some based offshore who have failed to work with PAAG at all and are still a haven for illegal and unethical advertisements.

The aim of the investigation was to try and get a better understanding of what animals are available to buy online and identify problems with the sale of exotics over the internet.

For the purpose of this report, volunteers looked at six sites over a period of twelve weeks²⁵. Four of these sites were signed up to the minimum standards launched by PAAG; while two were sites who had not engaged with PAAG and were outside the scheme of self-regulation. Each unique advert for the sale of



PET ADVERTISING ADVISORY GROUP

exotic bird(s), mammal(s), reptile(s) or amphibian(s) was stored in a database. Ads were carefully scrutinised to eliminate scams.

The volunteers determined whether an advert was offering an exotic animal by employing guidance relating to the Zoo Licensing Act 1981 (see Annexe 3)²⁶, and following a list of exotic species thought to be commonly advertised and kept as pets.

In many cases, it was difficult to identify the exact species of animal being offered for sale on the basis of the advert. For Example, an advert titled "turtle for sale needs gone ASAP". The description of the advert states "Sheldon the turtle" is for sale but there is no mention of what species Sheldon the turtle is. In these instances animals were grouped according to the taxon i.e. turtle.

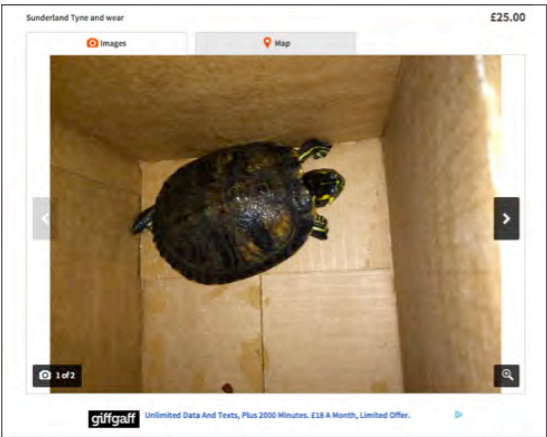
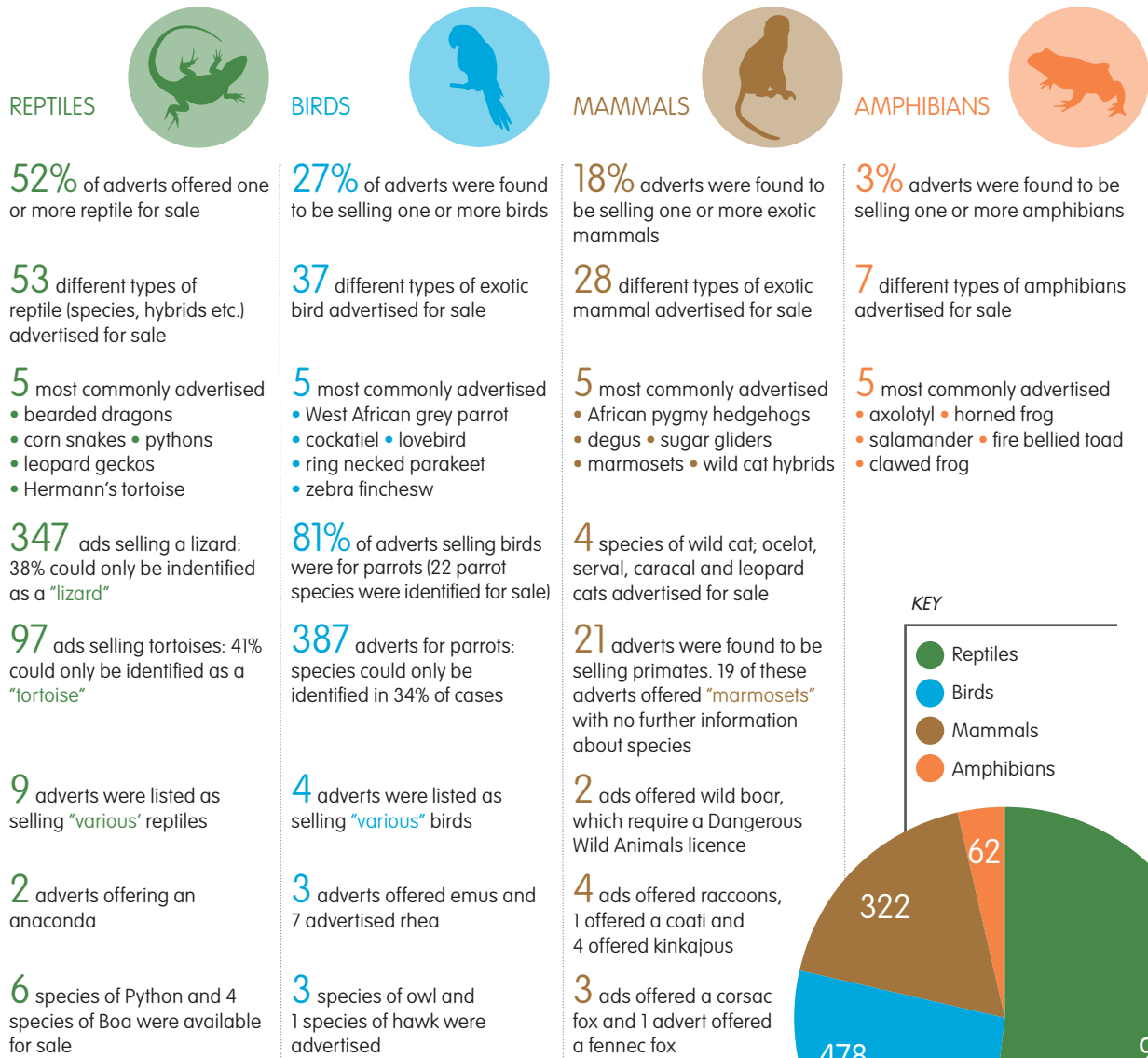


Image of "Sheldon the turtle" advert

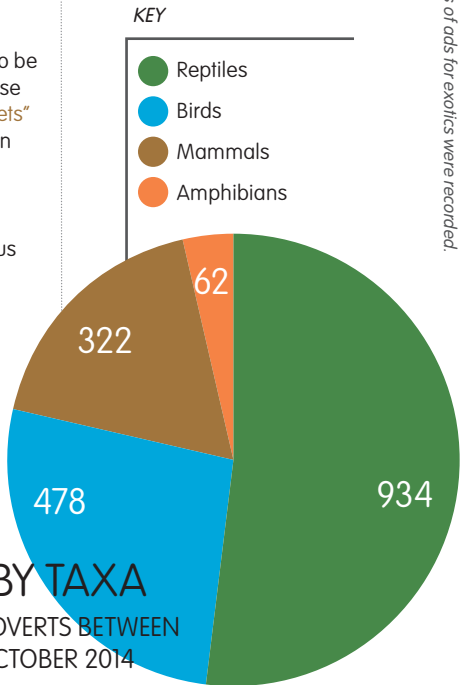
KEY FINDINGS

At any one moment across the six sites included the study, the total number of ads selling exotics is thought to be around 25,000²⁷. This study looked at a random sample of 1,796 unique adverts over three months between August and October 2014, which were found to be selling one or more exotic animal.



27 All sites were accessed on the 10/09/2015 and numbers of ads for exotics were recorded.

ADVERTS BY TAXA
1,796 UNIQUE ADVERTS BETWEEN AUGUST AND OCTOBER 2014



ADVERTS BY WEBSITE

The quality of ads varied across the sites examined. The websites that are working with PAAG to improve their standards have made further progress since our volunteers collected this data in 2014.

It is worth pointing out that over the last two years PAAG has made real progress in terms of improving the quality of classified advertising for pets in the UK, with over 130,000 illegal and unethical adverts removed from websites during the moderation period. This report however shows that despite progress made by the leading UK sites there is more that they can do to ensure their exotic pet sections are up to standard.

PETS4HOMES

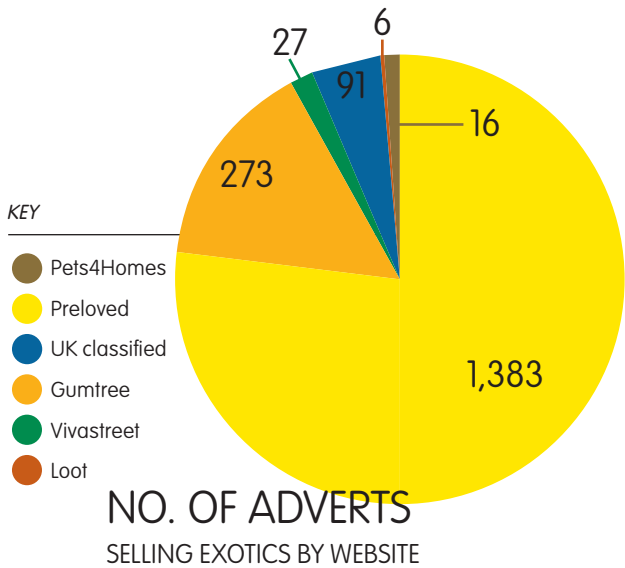
- Pets4Homes state their site receives over 4 million visitors amounting to 50 million page views²⁸.
- The site is tailored exclusively to the pet market, listing animals for sale or adoption.
- Each ad contained general advice on buying a pet online.
- The advertiser is not required to state if the animal they are offering requires an Article 10 Certificate of Dangerous Wild Animals Licence.

PRELOVED

- The Preloved website has measures in place to offer advice to potential owners.
- The site offered additional advice including; protection when buying over the internet, how to avoid scams and information on species care.
- One of the required fields on advertisements requires the seller to state if the animal requires a CITES Article 10 and, if so, to state the certificate number.
- 2 adverts offering wild boar with no mention of the owner needing a Dangerous Wild Animal Licence.
- Had the most wild cat hybrids for sale.

UK CLASSIFIED

- Non-PAAG member.
- Greater number and more varied list of exotic mammals advertised.
- Had the greatest number of primates for sale.
- One seller was based outside of the UK and was advertising chameleons for sale to be picked up from a pet market in the Netherlands. Pet Markets are banned in Great Britain (Annexe 7).



GUMTREE

- Gumtree provided no obvious advice or care information.
- CITES listed species were offered without Article 10 Certificates.
- Adverts offered animals to "swap" – contrary to the minimum standards.
- Welfare concerns in a number of ads; in one ad, the seller stated their lack of knowledge about the animal but thought the animal was in "poor health". Another advertised a Boa Constrictor in a broken vivarium and one seller wanted to sell their turtle as they were going away on holiday. However, they stated their intention to keep the tank in case they decide to buy another on their return.
- One ad offered a boa constrictor with a stated history of aggression which raises concerns for public safety (Annexe 6).

VIVASTREET

- Not a major pet seller.
- No advice on the website.
- CITES listed species sold without mention of an Article 10 Certificate.

LOOT

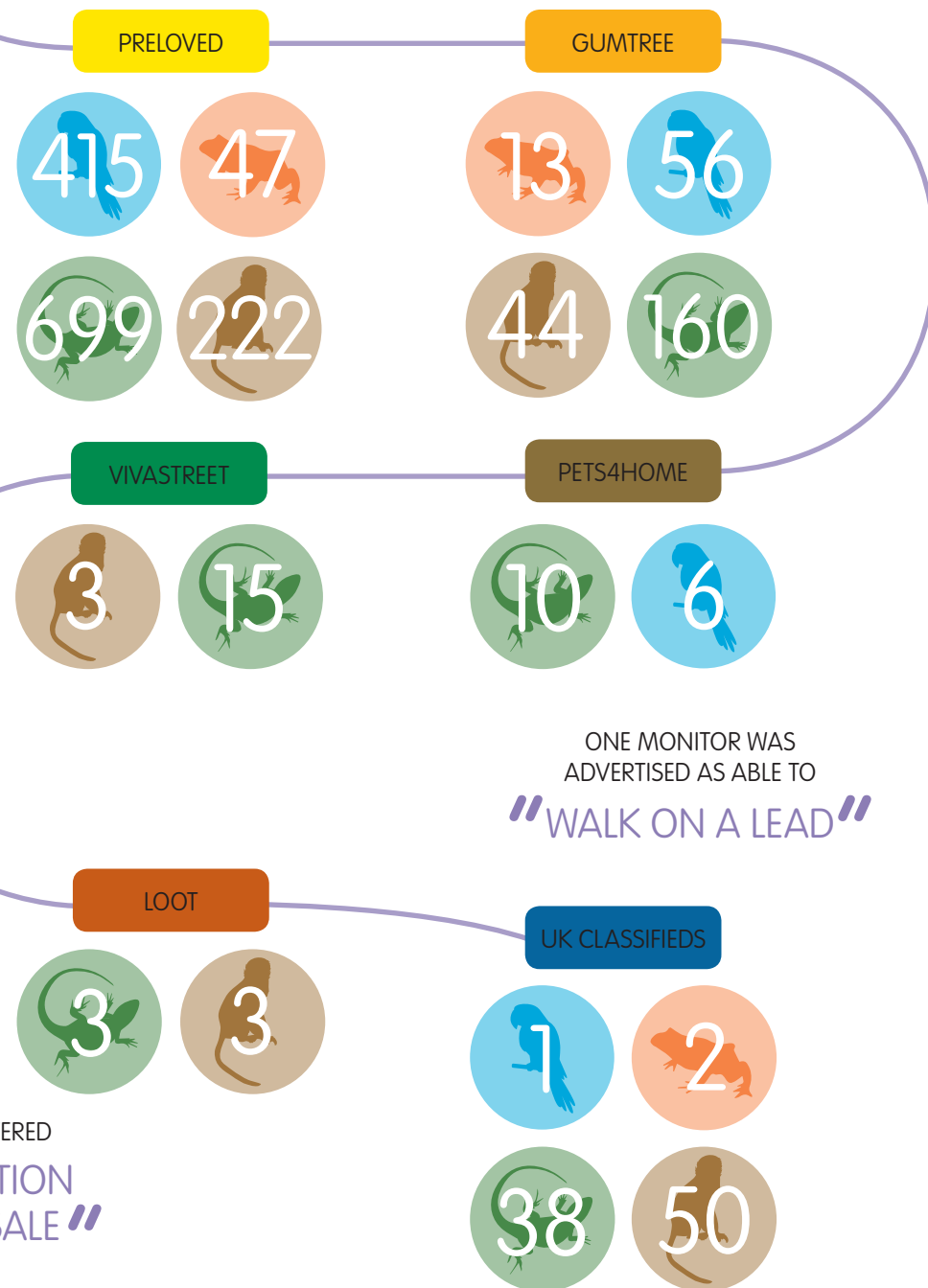
- Non-PAAG member.
- Do not have any additional advice on the website.
- No category on the website for reptiles so have to search for them.
- Not a major exotic pet seller.

²⁸ Pets4Homes. Sell Puppies, Dogs, Cats and other Pets. Available online at /www.pets4homes.co.uk/sell-pets/ (Accessed 18 September 2015)

NUMBER OF
ADVERTS BY WEBSITE
1,796 UNIQUE ADVERTS BETWEEN
AUGUST AND OCTOBER 2014

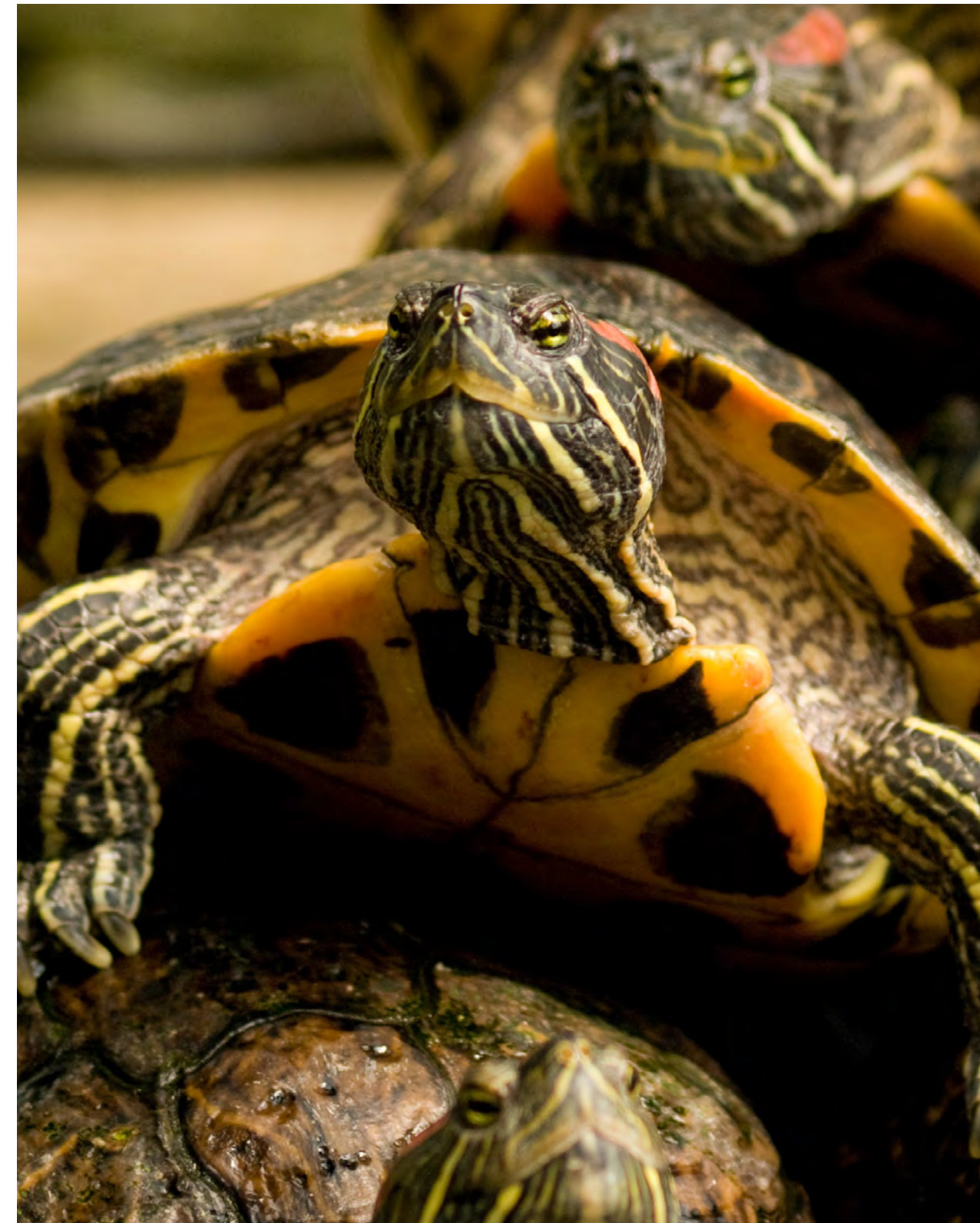
IGUANA FOR SALE DESCRIBED AS
“VIVARIUM BROKE,
KEPT IN WARDROBE”

“18 ROYAL
PYTHONS IN
NEED OF A
QUICK SALE”



ONE MONITOR WAS
ADVERTISED AS ABLE TO
“WALK ON A LEAD”

MONK PARROT OFFERED
“PRICE REDUCTION
FOR QUICK SALE”



Terapin © William Morby

NUMBER OF ANIMALS
FOR SALE ONLINE

Species requiring a
CITIES Article 10
Certificate
are highlighted
in red

Species requiring a
Dangerous Wild
Animals Licence
are highlighted
in green

| | | |
|------------------------|-----|---------------------------------|
| Reptiles (unspecified) | 9 | REPTILIA |
| Snakes (unspecified) | 57 | Squamata |
| Boa (unspecified) | 57 | Boidae |
| Yellow anaconda | 2 | Eunectes notaeus |
| Rainbow boa | 1 | Epicrates cenchria |
| Kenyan sand boa | 1 | Eryx colubrinus |
| Boa constrictor | 27 | Boa constrictor |
| Colubrid (unspecified) | 4 | Colubridae |
| Colubrid (hybrid) | 1 | Hybrid sp. |
| Taiwanese beauty snake | 1 | Orthriophis taeniurus |
| Thai bamboo rat snake | 1 | Oreocryptophis porphyraceus |
| Corn snake | 115 | Pantherophis guttatus |
| Garter snake | 2 | Thamnophis sp. |
| Western hognose snake | 2 | Heterodon nasicus |
| Pine snake | 1 | Pituophis melanoleucus |
| Kingsnake | 2 | Lampropeltis sp. |
| Milk snake | 5 | Lampropeltis triangulum |
| Californian kingsnake | 1 | Lampropeltis getula californiae |
| Eyed lizard | 1 | Timon sp. |
| Python | 96 | Pythonidae |
| Royal/ball python | 46 | Python regius |
| Burmese python | 9 | Python bivattatus |
| Reticulated python | 2 | Python reticulatus |
| Carpet python | 6 | Morelia spilota |
| Green tree python | 1 | Morelia viridis |
| Spotted python | 1 | Antaresia maculosa |
| Lizards | 131 | Squamata |
| Friiled lizard | 1 | Chlamydosaurus kingii |
| Bearded dragon | 127 | Pogona sp. |
| Rankin's dragon | 5 | Pogona henrylawsoni |

| | | |
|----------------------------|----|---------------------------|
| Pogona (hybrid) | 1 | Hybrid sp. |
| Water dragon | 3 | Physignathus sp. |
| Chinese water dragon | 1 | Physignathus cocincinus |
| Chameleon | 10 | Chamaeleonidae |
| Yemen chameleon | 5 | Chamaeleo calypttratus |
| Panther chameleon | 2 | Furcifer pardalis |
| Gargoyle gecko | 1 | Rhacodactylus auriculatus |
| Crested gecko | 8 | Correlophus ciliatus |
| Hanian cave gecko | 1 | Goniurosaurus sp. |
| Leopard gecko | 22 | Eublepharis sp. |
| Viper gecko | 1 | Teratolepis fasciata |
| African fat tailed gecko | 2 | Hemitheconyx caudicinctus |
| Iguana | 10 | Iguanidae |
| Rhinoceros iguana | 2 | Cyclura cornuta |
| Skink | 1 | Scincidae |
| Berber skink | 1 | Eumeces schneideri |
| Tegu | 1 | Tupinambis sp. |
| Monitor lizard | 3 | Varanus sp. |
| Bosc monitor | 5 | Varanus exanthematicus |
| Ackie/spiny tailed monitor | 1 | Varanus acanthurus |
| Crocodile monitor | 1 | Varanus salvadorii |
| Dwarf monitor | 1 | Varanus storri |
| Turtle | 23 | Testudines |
| Musk turtle | 8 | Sternotherus sp. |
| Diamondback Turtle | 1 | Malaclemys terrapin |
| Yellow bellied slider | 7 | Trachemys scripta scripta |
| Tortoise | 40 | Testudinidae |
| Hermann's tortoise | 23 | Testudo hermanni |
| Horsfield's tortoise | 18 | Testudo horsfieldii |
| Leopard tortoise | 6 | Stigmochelys pardalis |
| Spur thighed tortoise | 4 | Testudo graeca |
| Red footed tortoise | 2 | Chelonoidis carbonaria |
| Marginated tortoise | 1 | Testudo marginata |
| Bell's hingeback tortoise | 1 | Kinixys belliana |
| Sulcata tortoise | 1 | Geochelone sulcata |
| Egyptian tortoise | 1 | Testudo kleinmanni |
| Bird | 4 | AVES |
| Harris's Hawk | 6 | Parabuteo unicinctus |

| | | |
|------------------------------------|-----|-----------------------------------|
| Emu | 3 | Dromaius novaehollandiae |
| Pheasant (unspecified) | 15 | Phasianidae |
| Golden pheasant | 1 | Chrysolophus pictus |
| Turaco | 1 | Musophagidae |
| Passeriformes (unspecified) | 15 | Passeriformes |
| Song sparrow | 1 | Melospiza melodia |
| Zebra finch | 25 | Taeniopygia guttata |
| Grassfinch | 1 | Poephila sp. |
| Heck's finch | 1 | Poephila acuticauda |
| Gouldian finch | 2 | Erythrura gouldiae |
| Java sparrow | 3 | Lonchura oryzivora |
| Greenfinch | 1 | Carduelis sp. |
| Starling | 1 | Sturnidae |
| Parrot | 132 | Psittacidae |
| Scarlet macaw | 1 | Ara macao |
| Green winged macaw | 1 | Ara chloropterus |
| Sun conure | 1 | Aratinga solstitialis |
| Eclectus parrot | 10 | Eclectus roratus |
| Cockatiel | 47 | Nymphicus hollandicus |
| Lovebird | 40 | Agapornis sp. |
| African grey parrot | 57 | Psittacus erithacus |
| Alexandrine parakeet | 7 | Psittacula eupatria |
| Amazon parrot | 15 | Amazona sp. |
| Blue fronted amazon | 1 | Amazona aestiva |
| Orange winged amazon parrot | 1 | Amazona amazonica |
| Ring necked / rose ringed parakeet | 33 | Psittacula krameri |
| Senegal parrot | 6 | Poicephalus senegalus |
| Karariki | 14 | Cyanoramphus sp. |
| Black headed caique | 1 | Pionites melanocephalus |
| Caique | 6 | Pionites sp. |
| Pacific parrotlet | 2 | Forpus coelestis |
| Citron crested cockatoo | 1 | Cacatua sulphurea citronocristata |
| Monk parakeet / quaker parrot | 8 | Myiopsitta monachus |
| Galah | 1 | Eolophus roseicapilla |
| Golden mantled rosella | 2 | Platycercus eximius |
| European eagle owl | 1 | Bubo bubo |
| Little owl | 1 | Athene noctua |
| Barn owl | 2 | Tyto alba |

| | | |
|--------------------------|-----|----------------------------|
| Rhea | 7 | Rhea americana |
| Corsac fox | 1 | Vulpes corsac |
| Fennec fox | 3 | Vulpes zerda |
| Hybrid cat ²⁹ | 11 | Hybrid sp. |
| Caracal | 1 | Caracal caracal |
| Ocelot | 1 | Leopardus pardalis |
| Serval | 1 | Leptailurus serval |
| African leopard cat | 1 | Prionailurus bengalensis |
| Meerkat | 2 | Suricata suricatta |
| Raccoon | 4 | Procyon lotor |
| Coatimundi | 1 | Nasua sp. |
| Kinkajou | 4 | Potos flavus |
| Skunk | 5 | Mephitidae |
| Asian palm civet | 1 | Paradoxurus hermaphroditus |
| Guanaco | 1 | Lama guanicoe |
| Wild boar | 2 | Sus scrofa |
| Armadillo | 1 | Dasypodidae |
| Wallaby | 3 | Macropodidae |
| Sugar glider | 22 | Petaurus breviceps |
| Hedgehog | 106 | Erinaceidae |
| African pygmy hedgehog | 80 | Atelerix sp. |
| Marmoset | 18 | Callitrichidae |
| Geoffroy's marmoset | 1 | Callithrix geoffroyi |
| Squirrel monkey | 2 | Saimiri sp. |
| Jerboa | 3 | Dipodidae |
| Crested porcupine | 1 | Hystrix cristata |
| Acacia rat | 1 | Thallomys paedulus |
| Degu | 31 | Octodon degus |
| Chipmunk | 10 | Tamias sp. |
| Japanese squirrel | 1 | Sciurus lis |
| Frog | 21 | ANURA |
| Fire bellied toad | 2 | Bombina sp. |
| White's tree frog | 1 | Litoria caerulea |
| African dwarf frog | 1 | Hymenochirus sp. |
| Clawed frog | 2 | Xenopus sp. |
| Horned frog | 3 | Ceratophrys sp. |
| Axolotl | 27 | Ambystoma mexicanum |
| Salamander | 5 | Salamandridae |

²⁹ First generation offspring from a wild and domestic wild cat require a dangerous wild animals licence

ANNEXE 1: THE WELFARE OF EXOTIC PETS

THE AVAILABILITY OF EXOTIC SPECIES IN PET SHOPS AND ONLINE CAN GIVE THE WRONG IMPRESSION TO POTENTIAL PET OWNERS THAT THEY ARE AN EASY OR CHEAPER ALTERNATIVE TO A TRADITIONAL DOMESTIC PET. SPECIES MAY EVEN BE PROMOTED AS REQUIRING LESS TIME AND/OR RESOURCES THAN COMPANION ANIMALS SUCH AS CATS AND DOGS. THIS SENDS AN ENTIRELY MISREPRESENTATIVE MESSAGE TO CONSUMERS.

It was beyond the scope of this report to outline specific welfare problems associated with exotic pet keeping. Of paramount concern is the potential number of new owners who may choose an exotic pet without being aware of the specific housing, temperature, humidity, lighting, dietary and nutritional requirements of the species they have purchased. As well as resulting in serious health issues this can also result in the abandoning or relinquishing of the pet.

Inexperienced owners may be unable to recognise symptoms of illness or suffering. By the time treatment is sought for the animal – if at all – it may be too late.

Certain exotic species may require specialised care that often cannot be provided by vets in general practice. The Code of professional conduct for Veterinary Surgeons states that “Veterinary surgeons must keep within their own area of competence and refer cases responsibly³⁰. Vets may have to refer their patient to a specialist. The British Veterinary Zoological Society publishes a list of recognised exotic animal specialists³¹.

Blue Cross as a charity provide free veterinary care to clients on means tested benefits who are unable to pay for private vet care. We treated over 37,000 pets last year. As a charity however we only treat a limited number of exotic species, this is because we recognise the complicated nature of treating exotic pets and the specialist expertise that is required.

As a charity we wouldn’t encourage clients to keep exotic pets and would always advise of our concerns around the possibility of meeting the welfare needs within the home environment.

Below is the list of species we will treat:

- Degus
- Small cage birds (that are normally kept in the home)
- Terrapins
- Turtles
- Tortoises

Other species including exotic mammals, reptiles or amphibians are only treated at the discretion of a senior vet in our team.



Degu © Martin Phelps

³⁰ Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons. Code of Professional Conduct for Veterinary Surgeons. Available online at: <http://www.rcvs.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/code-of-professional-conduct-for-veterinary-surgeons/>

³¹ British Veterinary Zoological Society. RCVS recognised specialists in zoo and wildlife medicine and exotic animal medicine. Available online at www.bvzs.org/images/uploads/BVZS_Specialist_list_2015.pdf

David Catlow, Head of Clinical Services at Blue Cross

“Many exotic animal species have very specialised husbandry and welfare needs that are very rarely satisfied in captivity. As a result many exotic pets are kept in totally inappropriate conditions and frequently suffer or even die unnecessarily. We would encourage people not to keep exotic animals as pets.”

CASE STUDIES



African pygmy hedgehog © Blue Cross

A BADLY NEGLECTED AFRICAN PYGMY HEDGEHOG was disposed of like rubbish in a wet cardboard box near the rubbish chute of a block of flats in Southwark.

The African pygmy hedgehog, named Hedgy, was brought to the Blue Cross hospital in Victoria after she was found by a passer-by. She had lost most of her spines and her skin was covered in sores.

Blue Cross vets clipped Hedgy’s claws, washed her eyes with warm water, cleaned the scabs and pus from her ear canals and nurses gave her regular skin treatment baths. Hedgy was later rehomed to a specialist hedgehog organisation.



Bearded dragon © Blue Cross

TWO BEARDED DRAGONS WERE FOUND abandoned in a London cemetery. The first reptile, nicknamed Teddy, was found wandering in Margravine Cemetery in west London and brought straight to the nearby Blue Cross animal hospital in Hammersmith. Vets were very worried about Teddy’s temperature as the mercury had dropped as low as 10 degrees Celsius the previous night.

Just days later, a second bearded dragon – Elliot – was found in the cemetery and also brought to Blue Cross, by PC David Pullan of the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea Parks Police.



ANNEXE 2:TRENDS IN PET KEEPING

“FASHIONABLE PETS” – THE WEIRD AND WONDERFUL

THERE ARE MANY FACTORS FOR A PROSPECTIVE OWNER TO TAKE INTO CONSIDERATION WHEN CHOOSING A PET. AS THE PET MARKET INCREASINGLY DIVERSIFIES, THE RANGE OF ANIMALS AVAILABLE BECOMES GREATER AND THE REASONS FOR CHOOSING AN ANIMAL MAY BE AFFECTED BY A MULTITUDE OF FACTORS. A NEW PET MAY END UP CHOSEN WITHOUT ANY CONSIDERATION OF ITS SUITABILITY.

The media is often instrumental in influencing the public and creating a demand for certain species or breeds of animal. Inevitably trends eventually change, leaving animals “out of fashion” once more, often leaving animal charities responsible for dealing with the fallout.

For example, after the release of popular TV series *Game of Thrones* and the *Twilight* films, the Blue Cross saw a significant spike in the number of huskies and similar breeds being handed over for rehoming with a rise of 700% in the past 5 years. The release of the *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtle* film and series saw a substantial increase in the popularity of terrapins. Many ex-pet terrapins were eventually dumped or abandoned in local ponds. Despite the British climate, terrapins have thrived in ponds across the country, which has impacted heavily on native pond life. For example, in 2007, as many as 150 terrapins were trapped and removed from Hampstead Heath³².

Similarly the *Harry Potter* franchise sparked a boost in the sale of owls as pets. In the aftermath of the craze, many owls were abandoned or set free when owners were no longer able to provide the specialist care an owl needs in captivity.

There is also a demand in the UK for increasingly “different” and “unusual” animals. Snakes such as corn snakes (*Pantherophis guttatus*) and ball pythons (*Python regius*) are selectively bred to produce colour morphs, altering the colour and patterns of a snake’s skin.

Crossbreeding occurs with exotic animals and between domestic and wild animals. Bengal (Asian leopard cat x domestic cat) and savannah (serval x domestic cat) cats are popular hybrids because of their interesting colour variations. To create a wild-cat hybrid, the breeder must own at least one wild parent.

Currently African pygmy hedgehogs, also referred to as a “domesticated hedgehog”, are in high demand. This species is a hybrid (white-bellied hedgehog x Algerian hedgehog) and maintains much of its wild behaviour.

The ready availability of reptiles in the pet trade has increased the desire for enthusiasts to look for more unusual species which often require a lot of care in order to maintain even a basic level of welfare in captivity. Because there is a market for these species, they are available for any member of the public to buy, which could have serious welfare implications.

We are concerned that these trends see animals bought as commodities with little research done by prospective owners into the specialist requirements such an animal might need.

³² Milmo, C (2010) Look out! Abandoned turtles about. [online] Available www.independent.co.uk/environment/nature/look-out-abandoned-terrapins-about-1863903.html [Accessed 18 September 2015]

ANNEXE 3: ANIMALS CONSIDERED NORMALLY DOMESTICATED OR NOT NORMALLY DOMESTICATED IN GREAT BRITAIN³³

ANIMALS CONSIDERED NORMALLY DOMESTICATED OR NOT NORMALLY DOMESTICATED

Species normally domesticated in Great Britain and therefore not “wild animals” for the purposes of the ZLA.

Species not normally domesticated in Great Britain and therefore to be considered “wild animals” for the purposes of the ZLA.

1. True domestic breeds of species that have been kept in this country for so long, and in such large numbers, that their status as – normally domesticated in Great Britain is clearly justified (exotic domestic breeds of the same species as those listed here are included, eg. Vietnamese pot-bellied pigs).

Examples: horses/ponies, donkeys, cattle, sheep, goats, pigs, dogs, cats, ferrets, rabbits, pigeons/doves, chickens, turkeys, ducks, geese.

2. True domestic breeds, and selectively bred wild species, introduced to this country relatively recently, but now so commonly kept outside zoological collections as to justify regarding them as – normally domesticated in Great Britain.

Examples: guinea pigs, hamsters, gerbils, rats, mice, chinchillas, budgerigars, canaries, guinea fowl, peafowl, goldfish, koi carp, golden orfe, llamas, alpacas.

3. True domestic breeds of species introduced to this country relatively recently, and kept in relatively low numbers, and that therefore should be regarded as – not normally domesticated in Great Britain (exotic domestic breeds of species in list 1 are included in that list).

Examples: camels, water buffalo, Ankole cattle, yak, reindeer.

4. Wild species, commercially farmed or widely bred by hobbyists (including some species which have been selectively bred and therefore may be considered domestic), but where this is so recent as to render the species – not normally domesticated in Great Britain.

Examples: deer, ostriches, wild boar, American bison, aquarium and pond fish (excluding those in 2.), cage and aviary birds (excluding those in 2.), waterfowl (excluding those in 1.), giant African land snails.

5. True wild species, where domesticity is not seriously suggested.

Examples: All species not listed in 1. to 4.

³³ Defra (2012). Zoo Licensing Act 1981: Guide to the Act’s provisions. Available online at www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/69595/zoo-licensing-act-guide.pdf

ANNEXE 4: SANCTUARIES AND RESCUE OF EXOTIC PETS

THE REHOMING SECTOR FOR PETS IN THE UK IS REACHING SATURATION POINT WITH MANY CHARITIES STRUGGLING TO BALANCE THE NUMBERS OF ANIMALS COMING IN WITH THE NUMBER GOING OUT. THIS PUTS ANIMALS AT SERIOUS RISK.

Over the last five years, the number of unwanted and abandoned animals brought to the Blue Cross has increased by over 24%.

Cats Protection found that, compared to July-September 2009, the same period in 2012 saw a 55% fall in adoption enquiries and a 34% increase in the number of calls to give up a cat or report a stray³⁴.

On top of the increase in traditional companion animals needing a home, charities are now dealing with an influx of unwanted exotic animals. In 2013, the RSPCA received 3,980 calls regarding 8,300 reptiles. This was a 4% increase in the number of calls from 2012. In 2014 they were called to collect 1,642 unwanted reptiles³⁵. This figure does not include animals taken in to a rescue centre by their owner or abandoned animals.

The majority of rehoming charities, including the RSPCA and Blue Cross, do not have the sufficient facilities or infrastructure in place to deal with the specialist requirements exotic animals need at the scale required. Blue Cross outsource exotic animals in need of a new home to the RSPCA and other specialist organisations. The RSPCA have a dedicated reptile rescue centre which was built in 2007 in response to the influx of abandoned, neglected and stray reptiles the RSPCA was receiving. This centre cannot deal with the high numbers of reptiles in need of rehoming and the RSPCA relies on external facilities to provide the specialised housing necessary to cater for them on site. It is also difficult to rehome some of the more unusual exotics that are brought in. These animals can be a significant drain on a charity’s resources.



Leopard tortoise @ A Backles

³⁴ Cats Protection (2012). Unwanted cat numbers reach all time high. [online] Available www.cats.org.uk/news/unwanted-cat-numbers-hit-all-time-high [Accessed 18 September 2015]

³⁵ RSPCA (2014). Science Group Review. Available online at www.science.rspca.org.uk/sciencegroup/home [Accessed 18 September 2015]

ANNEXE 5: PET ADVERTISING ADVISORY GROUP MINIMUM STANDARDS FOR ONLINE CLASSIFIED ADVERTISING WEBSITES³⁶

WEBSITES MUST:

- 1

run automated checks for ‘blacklisted’ words/terms such as banned breeds and filter for misleading or inappropriate adverts.
- 2

require all vendors to include a recent photograph of the animal that they are advertising and monitor for suspicious usage of images.
- 3

require that all adverts display the age of the animal advertised. No pet should be advertised for transfer to a new owner before it is weaned and no longer dependent on its parents.
- 4

permanently ban vendors – on a three strikes and you’re out basis – who attempt to post illegal adverts, and take down illegal/inappropriate adverts within 12 working hours of notification.
- 5

ensure that every view item page includes prominent links to PAAG advice on buying and selling a pet (and specific advice for commonly advertised species), including “pop ups”.
- 6

label clearly on each ad whether it is a private sale, commercial sale or from a rescue/rehoming centre.
- 7

not include adverts for farmed animals or adverts specifying that the animal is to be used for working, hunting, or guarding in the pet section.
- 8

monitor for multiple mobile/telephone numbers and email addresses in private sales and investigate and potentially ban frequent/repeat breeders. ‘Frequent’ is defined as the same vendor offering a third different animal in a twelve month period.
- 9

ban adverts of live vertebrate animals as food.
- 10

ban adverts offering stud animals, animals in season or animals ‘for rent’ or ‘loan’ in pet section. Note that adverts offering horses or donkeys for loan are acceptable.
- 11

ban adverts offering pregnant animals for sale.
- 12

ensure that no pets are advertised for swapping with other pets, services or goods.
- 13

ensure that species scheduled by the Dangerous Wild Animals Act are clearly marked as such and make clear to vendors that it is an offence to offer a species covered by EU Wildlife Trade Regulations Annex A and listed by CITES for sale without a valid Article 10 Certificate. Non-human primates should not be offered for sale.
- 14

exclude any advert where there is a reasonable concern for the health and welfare of the animal involved.
- 15

provide a clearly visible function for purchasers to report illegal or inappropriate adverts
- 16

ensure that no live vertebrates are advertised for sale as deliverable through the postal system, national or international.
- 17

require all vendors to state the country of residence from which the animal is being sold.
- 18

require all commercial vendors to provide Local Authority licence information when submitting an advertisement.

³⁶ Pet Advertising Advisory Group. Minimum Standards of Online Classified Advertising Websites. Available online at www.paag.org.uk/standards/ (Accessed 17 June 2015)

ANNEXE 6: HUMAN HEALTH AND SAFETY

ANIMALS SOLD ONLINE MAY INCLUDE THOSE CONSIDERED DANGEROUS THAT REQUIRE A LICENCE UNDER THE DANGEROUS WILD ANIMALS ACT 1976. EVEN IF THE SPECIES DOES NOT REQUIRE A LICENCE, SOME ANIMALS MAY STILL BE CAPABLE OF CAUSING PAIN OR INJURY. ADVERTS ARE NOT REQUIRED TO STATE WHETHER AN ANIMAL COULD CAUSE HARM. EQUALLY THERE IS NO GUARANTEE THAT THE ANIMAL THE BUYER HAS SEEN ADVERTISED ON THE WEBSITE IS THE ONE THEY WILL RECEIVE.

According to figures released by the Health and Social Care Information Centre (HSCIC) earlier this year, 75 people were admitted to hospitals in England alone as a result of injuries where the person was bitten or crushed by a reptile. Of these, three people were attacked by a crocodile or an alligator³⁸. These figures only represent the injuries that require hospital treatment or were accurately documented at the time of admission. It is likely that more injuries remain unaccounted for.

As well as physical injury, there are a number of diseases and illnesses associated with exotic animals. Salmonella can be transmitted to humans through exposure to reptiles or amphibians. In 2004 it was estimated that 74,000 cases of salmonella infections annually in the US could be attributed to exposure to reptiles or amphibians³⁹. Salmonella can be especially dangerous to children. A study in the UK found that over a quarter of the Salmonella cases in children under 5 years of age had exposure to reptiles⁴⁰.

The US Government formally stated that the trade in pet terrapins is a “significant” and “major” threat to the public. Because of this risk, the US decided to ban the trade in terrapins with a shell less than four inches in 1975⁴¹.

Other taxa can also pass on disease. Psittacosis is a respiratory infection of birds found in many species, particularly those belonging to the parrot family. The disease can cause pneumonia and other severe health problems in humans. Human infection is usually due to exposure to infected pet birds⁴².

Whilst owners may have a basic understanding of the potential diseases or parasites that could be transmitted from a domesticated pet, they may be

unaware of the potential health risks associated with an exotic animal.

CASE STUDY

In 2007 a buyer bought – what he believed to be – a royal python online, he later discovered he had actually bought a reticulated python³⁷. Reticulated pythons are the world’s longest snake and can be extremely dangerous.



Python © LAV

³⁷ BBC News (2007). ‘Man-eating’ python bought online. [Online] Available www.news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/scotland/edinburgh_and_east/6895947.stm [Accessed 16 September 2015].

³⁸ Charlton, C (2015). Three patients a year are admitted to UK hospitals with crocodile bites – while 75 were bitten or crushed by other reptiles. [online] Available www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2969556/Three-patients-year-admitted-UK-hospitals-CROCODILE-bites-75-bitten-crushed-reptiles.html [Accessed 16 September 2015]

³⁹ Mermin, J, Hutwagner, L, Vugia, D, Shallow, S, Daily, P, Bender, J, Koehler, Marcus, R, Angulo, FJ

(2004) Reptiles, amphibians, and human Salmonella infection: a population-based, case-control study. Clin Infect Dis. 38: 253-61.

⁴⁰ Murphy, D & Oshin, F (2014) Reptile-associated salmonellosis in children aged under 5 years in South West England. Arch Dis Child 0:1-2

⁴¹ Franke, J & Telecky, M (2001) Reptiles as Pets: An Examination of the trade in live reptiles in the United States. Humane Society of the United States.

⁴² Public Health England (2013). Health Protection – guidance, Psittacosis. Available www.gov.uk/psittacosis [Accessed 12/06/2015]

ANNEXE 7: PET MARKETS

THE PET ANIMALS ACT 1951 MAKES IT AN OFFENCE TO “SELL ANIMALS AS PETS IN ANY PART OF A STREET, ROAD OR PUBLIC PLACE, OR AT A STALL” IN GREAT BRITAIN⁴³. HOWEVER, ANIMALS ARE STILL AVAILABLE TO BUY AT SUCH MARKETS IN GERMANY AND OTHER EUROPEAN COUNTRIES.

Various pet shops in the UK exhibit at or advertise coach trips to European markets on their website. This raises concerns that unknown numbers of animals are entering the UK pet trade from overseas markets each year.

Pet markets present a wide range of welfare problems. As with classified ads, traders have no obligation to provide a prospective owner with welfare advice. Animals may be subjected to repeated transportation and handling and are often kept in inadequate temporary enclosures such as plastic containers. During transport and display at the market, reptiles may be confined in these small containers for extended periods of time. This confinement and change in environment may be very stressful and other factors, such as access to food and water or opportunities to hide may also present welfare concerns.

Animals such as reptiles and amphibians are dependent on a thermal source to regulate their body temperature. Thermal needs may differ depending on the species but are unlikely to be sufficiently met without a heat source such as a heat map or lamp.



Top: Exotics animals sold in take away lunch boxes
Main: A typical pet market in Europe

⁴³ Pet Animals Act 1951. Available online at <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/Geo6/14-15/35>



Axolotl © iStock.com/kazakovmaksim