

Keeping of exotic animals: welfare concerns



Import & keeping of exotic animals in the EU, 4-5 October 2012

Staci McLennan
Policy Officer Wildlife

Pets – a changing scope?

- Traditional pets to exotic animals



- Globalisation = flourishing exotic pet market
- Trends: role of movies & commercials
 - Finding Nemo, Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles, The Princess & the Frog, Night at the Museum, George of the Jungle
- Contradiction ??
 - Prohibit keeping of native species, allow open import of exotic animals for pets

Concerns over keeping exotic pets

- Animal welfare
- Human & animal health
- Biodiversity (Invasive species & species conservation)

- European Convention on the Protection of Pet Animals

“Keeping of wild fauna as pets should not be encouraged” Preamble

– Resolution on the Keeping of Wild Animals as Pet Animals(1995)

“...efforts shall be made to prevent the keeping of these animals in conditions which do not meet their physiological and behavioural needs”

“Convinced that this can only be achieved by taking measures to regulate the keeping...”

Welfare - Five Freedoms

- **Freedom from hunger and thirst**
 - by ready access to fresh water & diet to maintain full health & vigour
- **Freedom from discomfort**
 - by providing an appropriate environment including shelter and a comfortable resting area
- **Freedom from pain, injury or disease**
 - by prevention or rapid diagnosis and treatment
- **Freedom to express normal behaviour**
 - by providing sufficient space, proper facilities and company of the animal's own kind
- **Freedom from fear and distress**
 - by ensuring conditions and treatment which avoid mental suffering

Welfare concerns

- Issue throughout exotic pet trade supply chain
 - Capture
 - Captive breeding
 - Transport
 - Sale
 - Life in Captivity
 - Abandoned & rescued



Capture & welfare

- **Many animals are wild-caught**
 - 90% of marine ornamental fish are wild-caught (Chapman 1997; Cato & Brown 2003)
 - In 2010, UK imported more than 36,500 CITES reptiles, 42% wild-caught or ranched
- **Harmful capture methods:** environment disturbed, non-target species injured/killed, stressed and injured animals
- **High mortality rate during capture & transport**
 - EU imports, 40-60% of birds died (EFSA)
 - Greatest loss of wild-caught fish occur between capture and transportation docks (Livengood & Chapman, 2007)
 - Large numbers wild-collected amphibians and reptiles unable to be exported due to injury and death along trade chain (Natusch & Lyons 2012)

Captive breeding & welfare

- Some species are easily bred in captivity
 - 90% of freshwater ornamental fish are farmed (Andrews 1990)
- Issues
 - Collecting wild-caught can be cheaper than costs of captive breeding
 - Sourcing parental stock
 - Humane conditions
 - Inbreeding
- Legitimacy of captive-breeding concern of EU & CITES (laundering wild-caught)
 - Sudden increase in trade; erratic trade (no record of parental stock); difficult to breed species; newer facilities, claim breed species slow to mature; non-existent facilities
 - 80% of green tree python (*Morelia viridis*) Indonesia are illegal wild-caught animals (Lyons & Natusch 2011)

Victim of success?

- Bearded dragons (*Pogona vitticeps*)
- Market is saturated (pet markets, pet shops, hardware stores, etc.)
 - 5-10€ each (a “disposable” animal?)
- Shelters inundated, difficulty rehoming
 - Munich reptile shelter (*Reptilienauffangstation*)
 - *Almost daily requests*



Transport & welfare

- CITES for trade to be “*prepared and shipped as to minimize the risk of injury, damage to health or cruel treatment*” (Articles III, IV, V and VII)
 - Refers to IATA guidelines on Live Animal Regulations
- Welfare concerns
 - Co-mingling of species from different areas
 - Cramped and stressful conditions
 - Immune compromised animals
 - Opportunity to spread diseases
- Role of Internet trade
 - Albino reticulated python sent by post in UK
- Data on mortality in shipments is lacking



Sale & welfare

- Regulation on sale is left to Member States - varies
 - 11 Member States have requirements for sale of exotic pets
 - UK bans sale of animals at markets, others allow
 - Conditions at shops & markets can compromise welfare
- Examples of intermingled species spreading disease
 - Monkey pox: African rat and prairie dogs in US outbreak
 - Rabies: fruit bat sold in France and 130 people vaccinated and all animals euthanized
- Information on welfare & needs to customers
 - Only 10 EU Member States require information be supplied
 - Survey pet shops in England & Wales, just over 50% signs/leaflets; less 25% info on 5 Freedoms (RSPCA)
 - How to address internet sales?



Captivity & welfare

- Exotic species tend to have complex needs
 - Suitable diet, stimulating social and physical environments, appropriate temperature, humidity and lighting controls, veterinary care
- Psychological & Physical damage
 - *Stress-related behaviours*: feather plucking, self-mutilation, stereotypic behaviours (rocking, pacing)
 - *Metabolic bone disease*: inappropriate diet, lack of vitamins and sunlight
 - *Injuries*: limb and skin injuries from inappropriate housing/ diets, co-mingling with other species, poor handling
 - *Surgical procedures*: dental extraction, descented, declawing



Primate – Case Study



- Wild-caught... “Rescued from wild”
- 9 years in indoor cage with TV
- Psychological damage: stereotypical behaviour (rocking)
- Physical damage: abnormal facial bone development



nutritional bone disease
fused vertebrae
hip displasia
scoliosis
rickets



The unwanted exotic pet

- **Reasons:** outlive owner, care requirements too hard, cost too high, lose interest, nuisance (odour, noise, behaviour), adult size
- **Abandon animals**
 - 84% of invasive amphibians & reptiles in Florida attributed to pet trade (Krysko et al. 2011)
 - Welfare concern for invasive species & threatened species
- **Rehome**
 - Shelters and sanctuaries at capacity
 - Zoos and aquarium often unable to take animals
 - Limited number of specialists available for rehoming

German Experience



- German Animal Shelters (by DTschB)

- 1700 exotic animals (2005) - 3700 exotics (2009)
- Ave. 2400 live in shelter



- Reptile rescue centre (Munich)

- 365 (2001) – 1302 (2011)
- 82 dangerous animals (poisonous & giant snakes, big monitors, crocodiles & snapping turtles) (2011)
- 200-300 turtles/year; official stop in 2012 at capacity

England and Wales



- 6900 complaint, collection & rescue calls (2011)

- Involved 32,000 exotic animals
- Almost half involved reptiles
- *2600 exotic animals rescued*



- *bearded dragons & corn snakes are most common*

- Primate keeping

- 2001-2010 received 472 calls about pet primates to cruelty line
- Almost half concerned marmosets

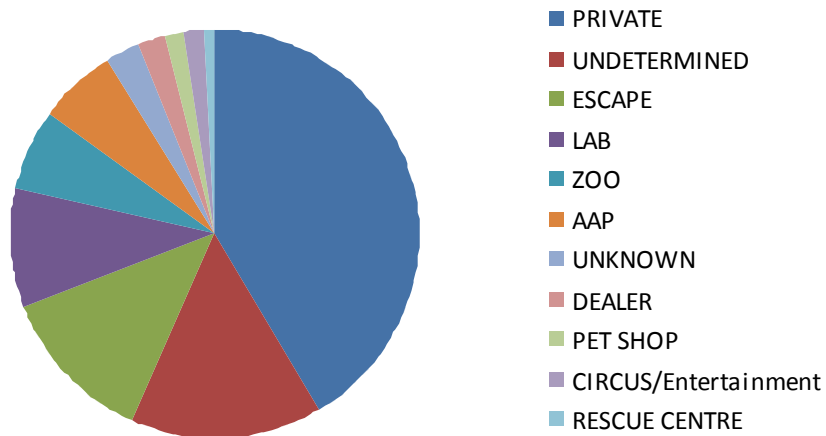


The Netherlands



- Rescue centre for primates and small mammals
- Since 2002, over 1200 animals have been rescued
- 40% from private owners

Original owner



Suitability of exotic animals as pets

- Schuppli and Fraser (2001)
 - Welfare of animal, welfare of others, welfare the environment
 - Checklist of questions and 5-tiered assessment system
- Belgian Positive List for Mammals – criteria
 - Welfare (can needs of animal be met)
 - Health or safety risk
 - Invasive risk if escaped/released
 - Knowledge on care & husbandry
 - Species conservation
 - *Precautionary approach*: when in doubt, air on side of caution for the animal

Educated buyer

- Suitability & knowledge vs. impulse purchases
 - How long will it live? how big will it grow? easy to keep? how expensive to keep? is it dangerous? can it get sick easily or make you sick? is specialised veterinary care available?
- Industry & Zoological leadership
 - Pet shops provide accurate information, screen buyers
 - Big Fish Campaign (BIAZA):
 - 4 month period received 144 requests
 - Public awareness for informed decision
 - Responsible retailers



Recommendations

- Set import, trade, sale & keeping restrictions on invasive species
 - PREVENT welfare problems
- Restrict keeping of exotic pets based on clear criteria including welfare
- Improve education for suitable matches of people to pets
- Regulate the sale of exotic pets and require training & distribution of care information

Closing

- **Exotic pets** voted as **top welfare issue** for **British government to address**. Exotic pets – the **lack of understanding** about their care needs, the **abandonment** of fashionable pets, and the **disease risk** of importing exotics to the UK.
 - *British Veterinary Association Animal Welfare Foundation Discussion Forum*
- **Keep reptiles and amphibians out of homes with children younger than 5 years old** or people with **weakened immune systems**.
 - *Austrian Agency for Health and Food Safety; Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)*
- Animal Welfare Ombudsman of the State Hessen in Germany calls for a **nation-wide prohibition of the commercial markets of reptiles**.
 - *Dr. Madeleine Martin, the Animal Welfare Ombudsman of the State Hessen in Germany*
- “Canadian Veterinary Medical Association (CVMA) **opposes keeping any native or exotic wild animal species**, or their hybrids as pets.”
 - *Canadian Veterinary Medical Association*



Funding support from the Directorate-General for the Environment of the European Commission.

EUROGROUP
FOR ANIMALS