



ENDCAP

www.endcaptivity.org

EXOTIC PET TRADE FACT SHEET

The trade in wild animals for pets causes suffering to millions of animals, disrupts ecosystems and drives species to extinction. The trade also provides a route for disease transmission, which poses a risk to human and animal health.

Volume of trade

Worldwide, an estimated 4 million birds, 640,000 reptiles, 40,000 primates and 350 million tropical fish are recorded in trade each year. The international trade in wild animals is estimated to be a \$6-billion industry.

There is a huge and rapidly increasing market in EU Member States for exotic pets and demand has grown as EU membership has expanded.

The EU is the largest global importer of reptiles for example. Within the EU in 2005, Germany was by far the largest importer of reptiles followed by Spain, France, the UK and Belgium.

There is concern that, following the implementation of the wild bird import ban (Commission Decision 2006/522/EC), the trade in reptiles in the EU will increase. This appears to have happened in the USA where the Wild Bird Conservation Act 1992 may have forced traders to switch from birds to reptiles.

Table 1: Recorded imports of birds, reptiles and amphibians into the EU between 2000-2005

Birds	Imported into EU 2000-2005
Psittacidae	1,268,768
Passerines	3,258,691
Other birds	174,818

Reptiles and Amphibians	Imported into EU 2000-2005
Tortoises	163,508
Lizards	1,176,203
Snakes	311,456
Amphibians	40,300

There has been a remarkable increase in the percentage of CITES¹-listed reptile imports declared as captive-bred, from 7% in 1990 to over 77% in 2000-2006. There are fewer import restrictions under CITES and the EU Wildlife Trade Regulations for captive-bred than for wild-caught animals. It is almost impossible to determine whether reptiles are captive-bred or not and reptile dealers take advantage of this to launder wild animals.

Illegal trade

Fuelled by the growing demand in the EU for exotic pets, illegal wildlife trade is believed to be escalating. It is difficult to give a reliable estimate of the size of the illegal trade but it is thought to represent at least one quarter of the total trade.

In recent years, an increasing number of birds and reptiles have been seized in new EU member states. For example, between 2000 and 2002, 248 parrots were seized in the Czech Republic and 172 in Slovakia – among them were endangered species (listed on CITES Appendix I which bans international trade). The effects on wild populations can be devastating. From 2002-2006, almost 1,000 critically endangered Egyptian Tortoises were seized in EU trade, representing around 13% of the estimated population left in the wild. Black market values can be very high – one Ploughshare tortoise can fetch up to 30,000 euros.



There is a huge and rapidly increasing market in exotic pets

Continued overleaf

EUROPE'S FORGOTTEN ANIMALS

Sales outlets

Exotic pets are traded through pet shops, garden centres, markets, via newspaper advertisements and on the internet.

One of the main arguments used against the trading of wild animals through markets is that of the risk of disease transmission between animals, and from animals to humans. The sale of exotic pets over the internet is a growing trend that is notoriously difficult, if not impossible, to properly monitor and regulate. It is feared the internet may even enable animals to be captured to order.

Legislation

Legislation associated with the wildlife trade is complex - it varies from country to country and from species to species. However, laws relating to the sale of pets present a more straightforward view of how different countries restrict the sale of exotic animals. For example, Belgium has introduced a 'positive list' for mammals kept as pets, meaning only those species listed can be sold or kept; in the UK, it is illegal to commercially sell pets in streets, markets and public places; and in Norway it is illegal to keep reptiles and amphibians as pets without a special permit, very few of which are issued.

Problems with the exotic pet trade

- **Welfare:** Many wild-trapped animals die from the stress and disease associated with capture and various stages of the trade process. Those that survive often suffer neglect or are abandoned when their owners find that they lack the necessary expertise to care for them. US pet industry data show that most reptiles die within one year in captivity.
- **Public health:** Exotic pets carry many diseases that are transmissible to humans (zoonoses). Avian influenza and reptile-related salmonellosis are probably the most notorious examples. Primates also carry diseases that are transmissible to humans – these include Hepatitis A, Tuberculosis and Herpes B. Pet retailers often fail in their responsibility to inform their customers of the health risks associated with exotic pets.
- **Environment and conservation:** Increasing demand for exotic pets fuels both the legal and illegal wildlife trades. The capture of animals for the pet trade is regularly cited as a major cause of species decline and is a significant factor driving biodiversity loss.

- **Non-native species:** The exotic pet trade represents a threat to our native European species and habitat as pet owners either lose or deliberately release exotic species into the wild. Where non-native species are able to adapt and breed, they can pose significant threats to global biodiversity and economies.

- **Livestock industries and economies:** It is estimated the damage to livestock industries caused by disease outbreaks resulting from wildlife trading has cost hundreds of billions of dollars globally.

ENDCAP opposes the trade in wild animals as pets as it is unsustainable, inhumane and puts public and animal health at risk.

ENDCAP urges the European Community to urgently review the effects of the ongoing trade in wild-caught reptiles on public health, animal health and welfare, and species conservation and to take appropriate action, where necessary, to address these issues.

¹Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species. CITES regulates trade in threatened animals and plants.



EUROPE'S FORGOTTEN ANIMALS