



Wild/Exotic Animals as Pets

Position:

Calgary Humane Society opposes the breeding and keeping of exotic or wild animals, including their hybrids, as companion animals, and to the importation and commercial trade in exotic or wild animals destined for the pet market.

Calgary Humane Society opposes the capture, transport, ownership, or breeding of wild/exotic animals except where these practices are conducted by authorized and licensed parties for the well-being of these animals or species, for example for the re-population of the species, or re-introduction of the species into its natural habitat.

Rationale:

CHS maintains that wild/exotic animals are inappropriate companion animals for a variety of reasons.

Animal welfare risks:

- Wild/Exotics are often acquired as “status” pets, without due consideration being given to their specialized needs.
- Wild/Exotics have food/housing/maintenance needs that cannot be provided by the average guardian. Few exotic pet guardians recognize the specialized needs of exotics or can provide the full Five Freedoms for their exotic pets (see above).
- Many new wild/exotic “fad” pets are introduced into the pet trade each year that are not domesticated animals but wild caught or captive bred. Many of these animals suffer from confinement or improper care.
- Relatively few veterinarians possess the training/experience to deal with the veterinary needs of wild/exotics.
- Wild/Exotic pet guardians often attempt to change the nature of their companion animal by surgically removing teeth/claws, leaving the animals potentially stressed and defenseless.
- Wild/Exotics have specialized behaviours, some of which their new guardians try to forcibly alter, with devastating effects on the animals’ well-being. Many nocturnal wild/exotics, for example, are forced to adapt to the diurnal lives of their human keepers.
- Many wild/exotics become unwanted after the novelty of the pet wears off. Few resources exist to take in these unwanted pets as most zoos, animal shelters and wildlife sanctuaries do not have the capacity to take in unwanted wild/exotic pets. The result is poor animal welfare, a high rate of euthanasia and widespread abandonment of these



Calgary Humane Society

animals. The Humane Society of the United States (HSUS) estimates that 90 percent of wild/exotic pets in the United States die “within the first two years of captivity.”

- Many wild/exotics are wild-caught, with high rates of stress, injury, disease and death during the capture/transport process. For example, the World Wildlife Fund estimated in 2003 that up to 80 percent of wild-caught birds die in the capture/transport process.

Public safety risks:

- Because they can carry exotic pathogens, wild/exotic animals present special risks to humans and other animals. For example, Centers for Disease Control statistics report over 93,000 cases of salmonella poisoning from reptiles in the United States each year, many of which are pet reptiles.
- Wild/Exotics still retain their natural predatory and defensive instincts, making them dangerous or unsuitable to living in an environment with other animals and humans. Even in play, many wild/exotics can harm another animal or human.

Environmental risks:

- Escaped or released wild/exotics may breed with local species, diluting the gene pool and introducing exotic diseases. For example, in 2003, a shipment of Gambian rats from Africa escaped and introduced the potentially fatal disease Monkey pox into North America.
- Escaped or released exotics can disturb natural indigenous ecologies. The devastating effects of releasing wild/exotic catfish, toads, red-eared slider turtles, bullfrogs, and other species into local environments, for example, are well documented.
- Many wild-caught wild/exotics are captured through partial or whole destruction of their environment. The northern coast of Borneo, for example, has been significantly damaged by collectors bleaching reefs in order to fulfill the demands of the exotic pet fish trade.