

▶ Factsheet #1

Overview: Banning the Retail Sale of Wild Animals

Wild animals such as reptiles, amphibians, and birds are intensively bred in captivity or removed from their homes in the wild and sold as pets in stores across the United States. The trade in wild animals for use as pets causes the suffering of millions of animals, endangers public health, and is a significant driver of the biodiversity crisis.

- Most animals sold in stores come from mills or dealers that import large numbers of wild animals. These businesses rely on pet stores and internet sales because consumers do not see the cruelty, neglect, and poor conditions that the animals endure.
- The bird, reptile, and amphibian breeding industries are largely unregulated, leaving animals even more vulnerable to abuse. The Animal Welfare Act explicitly excludes reptiles and amphibians and currently does not cover birds.
- The wildlife trade is a multibillion-dollar industry that is fueling the extinction or decline of numerous species.
- Abandoned wild animals, originally kept as pets, are a major contributor to the spread of invasive species, damaging local ecosystems and threatening native wildlife and plant species.
- The possession and sale of wild animals is a public health risk because it forces often stressed animals into unnatural interactions with humans and animals they would not encounter in the wild.
- The mass sale of wild animals increases the number of animals in municipal shelters that often do not have the capacity or resources to care for them. Wild animals are frequently mis-marketed as low-maintenance or “beginner pets” appropriate for children making them even more prone to being relinquished.

The number of retail pet sale bans has increased significantly since the first ordinance in Albuquerque in 2006. As of 2021, five states (California, Maryland, Maine, Washington, and Illinois) and nearly 400 cities and counties have retail pet sale bans. However, most of these laws apply to dogs, cats, and sometimes rabbits. In 2017, Cambridge, Massachusetts adopted a groundbreaking retail pet sale ban prohibiting pet stores from selling mammals, arachnids, birds, amphibians, or reptiles unless the animal comes from an animal shelter or rescue. This landmark ordinance was driven by the community’s desire to protect animals.¹

Retail pet sale bans have minimal impact on most pet stores because the bulk of revenue at stores comes from food, treats, supplies, veterinary care, and other services. Live animal purchases are a small fraction of the retail pet industry, and many stores already do not sell animals. According to the American Pet Products Association, live animal sales made up only 3% of pet-related purchases in 2016.² Stores are increasingly partnering with rescue groups and animal shelters to display animals available for adoption – helping the community place animals in need of homes and giving customers another reason to visit.

1 Kathleen Conti. *Cambridge bans retail sales of commercially bred pets*. The Boston Globe, August 8, 2017. <https://www.bostonglobe.com/business/2017/08/08/cambridge-bans-retail-sales-commercially-bred-pets/q3HC7InBjFfRbA2ktA92l/story.html>

2 PetFoodIndustry.com. 2017. *Pet industry spending topped US\$66 billion in 2016*. <https://www.petfoodindustry.com/articles/6370-pet-industry-spending-topped-us66-billion-in-2016>

