



Banning Retail Sales of Wild Animals:

► A Toolkit for Animal Advocates





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Why Local Change Matters

Changing the law is one of the most powerful ways you can protect animals, and it starts with animal advocates like you fighting to make your communities a kinder place. At the city and county level, your voice is more likely to be heard, and you can make a meaningful difference. Your impact isn't limited to your own neighborhood. Local laws ripple outward, eventually changing state and federal law and ultimately protecting millions. For instance, in 2011, West Hollywood, California became the first city in the United States to ban the sale of fur, followed by Berkeley, San Francisco, and Los Angeles. Just eight years later, California enacted a statewide fur sale ban, and multiple states are poised to follow suit. Local change matters, which is why we need your help!

Introduction

Every year, wild animals including turtles, lizards, snakes, parrots, monkeys, and otters are removed from their homes in the wild or intensively bred in captivity and sold as pets. The trade in wild animals for use as pets is responsible for the suffering of millions of animals and is fueling our biodiversity crisis. Some aspects of the trade are legal, and some are illegal. But the result is the same — animal suffering.

Virtually all animals supplied to pet stores are sourced from either companies that import wild animals or mills where animals are bred with little regard for their welfare. Veterinary care is often inadequate or absent, and sanitation is poor. Some reptile and amphibian mills house thousands of animals at once. Overcrowded reptiles and amphibians are forced to fight for limited food and water, sometimes fatally injured in the process. Dead animals are just seen as the cost of doing business.

In response, local and state governments are increasingly adopting retail pet sale bans — laws that ban the sale of certain animals in pet stores. Most existing retail pet sale bans apply only to dogs, cats, and sometimes rabbits. These bans are helping shut down the puppy mill industry both by limiting demand and signaling to consumers that puppies shouldn't be purchased.

In 2006, Albuquerque, New Mexico became the first city in the United States to prohibit the sale of dogs and cats in pet stores. Fifteen years later, nearly 400 cities and counties and five states (California, Maine, Maryland, Washington, and Illinois) have enacted similar laws. But wild animals like birds, reptiles, and amphibians have largely been left out despite their continued suffering.

In 2017, Cambridge, Massachusetts passed the most sweeping retail pet sale ban in the country. The law prohibits the sale of birds, amphibians, reptiles, arachnids, and mammals like hamsters, dogs, and cats in pet stores and on city property (such as parking lots and sidewalks) unless the animal comes from a shelter or rescue. It now serves as a model for the rest of the nation.



Tips for Using the Toolkit

This toolkit aims to empower animal advocates to mobilize their communities to pass a retail pet sale ban, like the Cambridge ordinance. It has a special emphasis on wild animals – especially birds, reptiles, and amphibians. There are numerous resources and guides online that discuss [puppy](#) and cat mills. If you live in a [community with a ban on the retail sale of dogs and cats](#), use this toolkit to push your legislators to take the next step. If you live in a community without an existing ban, supplement this toolkit with one that focuses on other species.

The arguments in this toolkit focus on animals commonly sold in stores. Detailed species-specific information is beyond its scope. Though it's less common, there are stores that sell rarer wild animals such as coatimundis or monkeys. If such a store exists in your community, research those species' care needs and the health and safety risks they pose to humans. This will strengthen your arguments when speaking with legislators.

Some communities don't have any pet stores that sell animals. This shouldn't stop you from considering proposing a retail pet sale ban. Animal protection laws communicate a community's values to residents and beyond. Furthermore, sometimes local governments don't want to be "first." It can be easier to pass a retail pet sale ban if neighboring communities have already adopted one. Your community could serve as an example.

World Animal Protection helps wild animal advocates in their community and beyond. Our impact together is far greater than what any single person or organization could achieve. Please reach out to us at usprograms@worldanimalprotection.us with questions or comments so we can help you in your efforts or just to let us know about your work.

Understanding the Issue

Below are quick introductions to the main issues surrounding the retail sale of animals and the problems posed by keeping wild animals as pets. This section will help you start crafting arguments for an ordinance. Factsheets with more detailed information designed for legislators are included at the end of the toolkit.

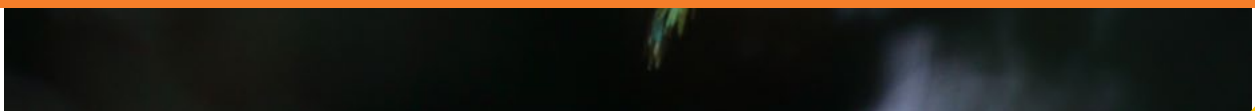
Animals Impacted

Wild animals are routinely sold as pets across the United States. Major pet store chains sell birds (including finches, parakeets, conures), arachnids (including tarantulas), crustaceans (including hermit crabs), reptiles and amphibians (including ball pythons, fancy bearded dragons, tokay geckos, green tree frogs), and various species of fish. A small minority of pet stores sell a wider range of wild animals including foxes, sugar gliders, kinkajous, coatimundis, and even monkeys. These lists only refer to animals sold in United States stores. The wildlife trade – both legal and illegal – exploits a huge range of species. Animals such as tigers, lions, and monkeys are sold online as pets both in the United States and around the world.





Quaker parakeets (also known as monk parakeets) are small green parrots in the family Psittacidae. They're native to South America, specifically areas of Argentina and neighboring countries. But self-sustaining wild populations of Quaker parrots have taken hold around the world, including in parts of the United States, because of the pet trade. Possession of this species is prohibited in multiple states due to their impact on agriculture and infrastructure like electrical lines where they like to build nests. They weigh between 3 and 5 ounces and live between 20 and 30 years. They are known for their ability to mimic human speech and sounds. Quaker parrots are very social birds and nest colonially, making it very difficult to meet their needs in captivity.



Wild Animals Require Specialized Care

It might be easier to understand why wild animals like monkeys, kinkajous, or tigers belong in the wild. But reptiles, amphibians, and birds also have complex inner lives even if their facial expressions or vocalizations are not as easily understood by humans. These animals are sentient beings who feel pain and a wide range of emotions including anxiety, fear, pleasure, and excitement.¹ For example, studies have documented that green iguanas have an emotional response to the stressful experience of being handled and that multiple crocodile species play with objects.^{2,3}

Wild animals kept as pets are unable to fully engage in their natural behaviors like exploring, living in family structures, foraging, or – for some species – even regulating their body temperature. It's not possible to create the freedom and space that these animals experience in the wild. This can cause severe psychological and physical suffering.

Birds kept as pets are generally confined to cages or rooms whereas in the wild, they can fly for miles. Frustrated, highly stressed, and isolated from members of their species, many birds exhibit stereotypic behaviors such as ripping out their own feathers, pacing, and obsessive pecking at cage bars. Yet birds are bred and sold by the tens of thousands in the United States.

Wild animals require specialized, oftentimes expensive, care. Different species of amphibians and reptiles need artificial heat and light to stay healthy. For example, setting up a terrarium for a semi-aquatic turtle, such as a red-eared slider, requires meeting multiple precise conditions to artificially create the habitat for a turtle to simply survive – not necessarily thrive.

Despite this, the pet industry often markets small wild animals as “beginner” pets or appropriate for small children. In reality, many wild animals demand more complex care than a dog or cat.

The red-eared slider, named for the small red stripe on the sides of their heads, is one of the most popular “pet” turtle species. Their lifespan is between 20 and 30 years, and their natural range extends from West Virginia to New Mexico. They live in freshwater habitats like swamps and streams and enjoy quiet waters with soft bottoms and ample aquatic vegetation. Red-eared sliders bask on logs or rocks for much of the day and sleep underwater at night. The terrariums offered for sale at the largest pet store chains range from 20 to 75 gallons. Even a much larger 500-gallon terrarium (which costs thousands of dollars) is a minuscule amount of space compared to a pond or stream.



The Sale of Wild “Pets” Fuels the Destructive Wildlife Trade

The wildlife trade is a multibillion-dollar industry that threatens animals both in the United States and abroad. It’s propelling the decline – and extinction – of numerous plant and animal species. Wild animals sold in stores come from a mix of mills where animals are captively bred and dealers that import animals captured in the wild. But the retail sale of any wild animal exacerbates the problem by making wild animals easily accessible and portraying them as desirable pets. And many reptiles marketed as captive-bred are actually illegally caught in the wild, laundered through reptile farms, and then legally sold in the United States.⁴

“Wildlife inspectors will open up a box and find a bunch of beat up, scarred tortoises that are 20 or 30 years old, with permits saying they were bred in captivity in 2016. But they’re forced by their supervisors to stamp ‘clear’ on the permit.”
– **Senior specialist at the United States Fish and Wildlife Service⁵**

Animals Suffer in Mills

Pet stores rely on dealers that import wild animals or on commercial breeding facilities, commonly referred to as “mills.” Both business models rely on producing many animals as cheaply as possible. As a result, animals receive inadequate veterinary care (or none at all), live in stressful, unsanitary conditions, and are usually denied any social enrichment.

Mortality rates are high and built into the business model. Prior to reaching pet stores or the US, many wild animals also die in transit. They are packed into small containers or crates, without sufficient oxygen and unable to move. Many animals suffocate, starve, or are crushed to death. Wild-caught animals may be injured during capture, are subjected to stressful physical handling, and endure the trauma of being taken from their home.

In bird mills, sometimes eggs and newborn birds are taken from their parents in order to induce reproduction in the parents. Removing babies from their parents so young is not only cruel, hand-reared birds can develop socialization problems and, if handled by inexperienced staff, may starve or be injured if hand-fed improperly.

“You can lose up to 50 or 60 ball pythons a day. It’s going to happen. Nothing you can do about it.”
– **North Carolina reptile dealer speaking about the high mortality rate in the reptile trade⁶**



Inadequate or Non-Existent Legal Protections for Animals in Mills

The Animal Welfare Act (AWA) is the chief federal animal protection law in the United States. It is administered by the US Department of Agriculture (USDA). The law regulates animals used in research and exhibition (like in circuses and zoos) and some commercial animal breeders such as puppy mills and dealers. Unfortunately, the law provides minimal protections for animals, is chronically underenforced, and excludes numerous species, including reptiles, amphibians, fish, and birds.⁷

This means that when these species are commercially bred, they do not even have the paltry protections afforded dogs, cats, and other small mammals. But even animals regulated by the Animal Welfare Act are routinely bred at mills with long track records of poor animal care with little intervention by the federal government.⁸ This lack of enforcement led to the proliferation of puppy mills across the country.

Retail Pet Sales Push Animals into Shelters

More than a million animals are killed in United States shelters annually. The retail sale of animals pushes even more animals into shelters, at taxpayers' expense. Many owners of wild animals become overwhelmed by the care that wild animals require or are unprepared for the lifelong commitment – some wild animal species live for decades. This creates a significant burden on shelters, which struggle to find appropriate homes for wild animals, and already limited municipal resources.



Ball pythons live in the grasslands and savannas of East and West Africa. Their name refers to their tendency to curl up into a tight ball when stressed. Nocturnal animals, they shelter in burrows during the day and come out at night to hunt or look for a mate. Their diet consists primarily of birds and rodents.

Sold by national pet store chains, ball pythons are in many ways the poster child of the pet trade as the most traded live animal legally exported from Africa.⁹ Ball pythons are primarily exported from the West African

countries of Benin, Togo, and Ghana and primarily imported by the United States, Europe, Canada, and China. West Africa has exported more than three million ball pythons since 1975. Misconceptions about ball pythons' care needs have made them popular pets. But they're far from "low-maintenance," and many ball pythons are abandoned outside when owners become frustrated with their needs. Learn more in World Animal Protection's report, [Suffering in silence: Uncovering the cruelty of the global trade in ball pythons.](#)



Wild Animals Kept as Pets Disrupt Ecosystems

Not every animal is relinquished to a shelter, others are abandoned outside into unfamiliar habitats not designed to support them. Some animals die quickly, killed by predators, exposure, or starvation. But other animals will adapt and breed, altering the ecosystem and threatening the survival of native species. Non-native animals can introduce new diseases and compete for resources like food and habitats.

Stories about formerly owned wild animals wreaking havoc on local ecosystems are regularly in the news. Some states have banned the possession of certain species due to their impacts, such as Florida which banned tegus and green iguanas and Massachusetts which banned red-eared sliders.

“Frankly, I wish we would have prohibited [red-eared sliders] in the pet trade 15 years ago.”
– Thomas French, former Assistant Director of MassWildlife’s Natural Heritage and Endangered Species Program¹⁰

The Wildlife Trade Threatens Public Health

The commercial exploitation of wild animals is a serious public health risk. More than 70% of emerging infectious diseases originate in wildlife.¹¹ Wild animals kept as pets are either captured from the wild or intensively bred in low-welfare conditions. Forcing animals into unnaturally close interactions with humans and animals they would not encounter in the wild coupled with the animals’ high stress increases the risk of disease.

Reptiles, amphibians, and other small mammals are a common source of *Salmonella* infection in humans.¹² *Salmonella* exists in the digestive tracts of healthy reptiles and amphibians, but it can cause severe illness or death, especially in certain populations such as pregnant individuals, young children, and the elderly. For this reason, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention urges families with children under the age of five not to keep reptiles and amphibians as pets.¹³

In an effort to decrease *Salmonella* outbreaks, the United States banned the sale of turtles smaller than 4 inches in length in 1975.¹⁴ People frequently purchased these tiny turtles as pets for children who were prone to putting them in their mouths and less likely to wash their hands after interactions.¹⁵ But *Salmonella* infections from reptiles and amphibians continue to be a problem. While turtles are a common source, captive bearded dragons, geckos, and African dwarf frogs are just a few of the species sold in stores that are also implicated in *Salmonella* outbreaks.^{16, 17}

Reptile-associated *Salmonella* infections are more likely to be associated with invasive disease, more commonly lead to hospitalization, and more frequently involve infants than do other *Salmonella* infections.
– Reptiles, Amphibians, and Human *Salmonella* Infection: A Population-Based, Case-Control Study¹⁸



Take Action: Advocating for Animals at the Local Level

Now that you have a better understanding of the issue, it's time to learn how to move your community to ban the retail sale of wild animals by working with local legislators, your neighbors, and the media.

Gather Information About Your Community

Prepare for the campaign by learning about the animals being sold in your community, the groups working on animal issues, and recent animal legislation.

Key Questions:

1. Are there **stores selling animals in your community**? If so, which species? You can conduct your research both online and in-person. Be sure to record any unsanitary conditions or injured animals you observe in stores with dates and times. If you're asked to leave, do so without comment or protest and be polite. Keep a list of stores with location, species sold, and any other pertinent information. Finally, search online (including social media and review sites like Yelp) for complaints or negative news stories about the stores.
2. Are there **local groups working on animal protection issues** in your community? These groups are natural allies to your campaign and could help amplify your message. Keep a list of potential groups to reach out to. Even if the group isn't interested in this ordinance, you could also learn from them by asking about their successes and obstacles to help inform your work.
3. Has the **local legislature recently considered animal legislation**? Knowing whether animal legislation has been considered or adopted will give you better insight into which legislators might be interested in championing your ordinance and whether the legislature will be receptive. Note how each legislator voted on the measures as well.
4. What are the **laws in your community and state regarding the possession and sale of animals (especially wild animals)**? While some states have virtually no regulations on the private possession of wild animals, others prohibit numerous species, including species commonly sold in pet stores in other parts of the country. It's helpful to be aware of your state's laws so you don't focus your research on species that won't be relevant to your campaign. Also find out whether your [community has a retail pet sale ban](#) and the animals it covers, as well as if there are other cities in your state with a retail pet sale ban.



Moving Legislators

It's best to focus on changing laws in the community where you live and vote. While you can certainly work on legislation in other communities as part of a coalition, it's less likely legislators in a different city will be interested in taking on your proposed ordinance. There are exceptions, but generally, we recommend campaigning where you live.

Understanding the Legislative Process

The procedures for enacting legislation at the local level are slightly different in every community. Generally, the ordinance will be introduced by a city or county legislator, usually called a council member or commissioner. After the ordinance is introduced, a committee may review the bill and hold a hearing. In other communities, the full council may review it immediately. Information about the process may be available on your city's website or you could attend council meetings in-person or online (many meetings are streamed to the public and available for viewing later) to get a feel for the procedure. City clerks can also be a helpful source of information.

Larger cities may have more complex legislative procedures. It may also be harder to change policies in larger communities. For example, New York City has 51 elected council members. The legislative process and the work required to pass legislation in New York City is often closer to that of a state legislature.

Setting Up a Meeting with Your Legislator

You need to find a council member who will introduce the ordinance. Start by setting up a meeting. Use these tips:

- Call or email to schedule a meeting (either in-person or online). Explain why you're requesting the meeting and identify yourself as a constituent. Attach a factsheet and the model Cambridge ordinance included in this toolkit.
- Remember that legislators are elected to represent their constituents' interests and should be receptive to hearing your ideas and suggestions.
- Don't be concerned if you meet with a member of the legislator's staff instead of the legislator. It's the staff member's job to take notes and report back.
- Start with your personal representative. If they're not receptive or are unresponsive, identify a councilmember with a record of animal protection legislation.
- Prepare a short agenda with your speaking points to make sure you cover everything. Explain why this issue is important to you.
- If the legislator is receptive, ask for tips on moving the ordinance through the legislative process. They might be able to suggest other people you should talk to.



Meeting with a Legislator

Invite one to two other constituents who support the ordinance to join the meeting. One person should be the primary speaker while someone else takes notes. Share your strongest arguments as succinctly as possible.

Bring a copy of the Cambridge ordinance, factsheets, and information about the pet stores in your area, if relevant. Anticipate your opponents' arguments and be prepared with answers. Below are questions that you might be asked:

1. Why does the community need a retail pet sale ban?
2. How does the proposed ordinance protect animals?
3. What will the ordinance's impact be on local businesses?
4. Do existing state or federal laws already address this issue?
5. Do any neighboring communities have retail pet sale bans?
6. Who in the community supports a retail pet sale ban?

Don't shy away from tough questions or sugarcoat your answers. It's important to acknowledge that some pet stores will oppose the ordinance because this information will ultimately come out anyways.



Here are additional tips for a successful meeting:

- Be professional and polite.
- Be clear with your request – that you would like the legislator to introduce an ordinance banning the retail sale of animals. It's easier than you think to become sidetracked or speak in generalities.
- If you're asked questions that you don't know the answer to, don't try to answer them. Simply say that you will research the question and get back to them later.
- Don't make negative statements about the character or values of a specific person, group, or company, such as "they don't care about animals" or "they're just in it for the money." Stick to the facts such as the lack of protections for many types of animals sold in stores, the welfare issues involved in commercial breeding, and the impact of non-native animals on local ecosystems.

Afterward, send an email thanking the legislator for meeting with you. Answer any outstanding questions and restate any promises or commitments that the legislator made. For example, if the legislator said that they would ask a staff member to look into the issue,

reiterate that and state that you will follow up to ask if progress has been made. If the legislator opposes the ordinance or didn't express any interest in taking it on, still thank them for listening to you.



Moving the Community

Mobilizing your community in support of the ordinance is critical to its success. Legislators are more likely to be swayed if they know many of their constituents support it. Grassroots advocacy is the term used to describe organizing the public to contact their government officials on a particular issue. Below are tactics to help you reach as many people as possible.

Coalition Building

A coalition is a network of individuals and groups working toward a common goal. A strong coalition demonstrates that the ordinance has a strong backing and that different stakeholders' viewpoints are being heard. There are different kinds of coalitions. Some coalitions are formal, with a name, social media pages, and a website. Other times "coalition" could mean a loose network of groups who simply add their name to a sign-on letter you write. Coalition members might contact their members about the ordinance or lobby legislators individually. Potential coalition members include animal advocacy groups, rescue groups, public health and environmental protection organizations, animal shelters, sanctuaries, pet stores that do not sell animals, and faith-based groups.

Raising Awareness

Use social media and traditional media to educate your community about the problems with selling animals in stores and your campaign.

Letters to the Editor

Letters to the editor in the local paper are a great way to raise awareness about an issue and catch the attention of local officials. These letters are short, often less than 200 words, but find your local papers' submission guidelines before starting. Always use your own words instead of copying and pasting something you read online (which can't be printed). Use the information in this toolkit to start telling your own story. Keep the letter local by connecting it to recent events in your community or the world. For example, tie the public health issues associated with the wildlife trade to the COVID-19 pandemic. If your letter is published, let us know at usprograms@worldanimalprotection.us.

Media

If the ordinance is introduced or the campaign gains steam, contact local media to let them know about it. Send a brief email to local papers that outlines the issue, the ordinance, and your campaign. When speaking with journalists, rely on the arguments laid out in this toolkit or ones that you've drafted. It can be easy to get off-topic, and that part of your conversation could end up being what's printed. This is your chance to showcase your strongest arguments, and the best way to ensure they are publicized is by staying on message. Jot down the top three arguments you want to focus on (your "talking points") and stick to them. Short, clear statements are most likely to be picked up as quotes or soundbites.

Social Media

Use social media to inform the community about your campaign, educate people about the problems with the retail sale of animals, and engage with elected officials. Asking community members to contact and tag their elected officials on Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram in support of the ordinance is another way to let legislators know that many people care about this issue. Refrain from attacking or posting negative comments about legislators. It reflects poorly on your campaign and can make people wary about working with you. As stated earlier, always stick to the policy issues.



After the Ordinance is Introduced

Lobbying Legislators

You should plan on meeting with – or at least contacting – every member of the legislature to explain why this ordinance is important. Follow the same meeting tips listed above. Be sure to bring factsheets and a copy of the proposed ordinance in addition to sending them beforehand.

Action Alerts

Once the ordinance is introduced, you need to get as many community members as possible to contact legislators in support. One of the most efficient ways to do this is to email an “action alert.” You’ve likely received an action alert from a nonprofit before. It’s simply an email that asks you to do something (like call or email a legislator) in support of a bill. Action alerts from nonprofits are usually automated – you enter your address and click a button to send a message to legislators. While you likely won’t have the ability to create an automated alert, personalized outreach to legislators carries more weight, so don’t let that deter you.

Below is a sample action alert you could use for a retail pet sale ban:

Dear Smithville Community Members,

The Smithville City Council is considering an ordinance that would protect hundreds of animals in our community from suffering. Ordinance XYZ would prohibit the retail sale of animals in pet stores, helping shut down inhumane commercial breeding facilities (also known as “mills”) and the destructive wildlife trade. We need as many Smithville residents as possible to contact the city council and tell legislators that you support Ordinance XYZ and care about protecting animals.

1. Contact councilmembers by sending an email to council@smithville.gov. Please edit the message below so they don’t all look the same.

Dear Smithville City Council,

I’m a Smithville constituent, and I encourage you to vote YES on Ordinance XYZ, banning the retail sale of animals in Smithville.

Virtually all animals sold in stores in Smithville come from commercial breeding facilities (“mills”) that churn out animals quickly without regard for their welfare or wild animal importers that contribute to the destructive wildlife trade, jeopardizing the survival of animals across the globe. Investigations into these facilities have revealed severe animal cruelty.

Additionally, the retail sale of wild animals poses serious risks to our public health and biodiversity. Reptiles and amphibians are a significant source of Salmonella infection in children, and non-native wild animals (former pets) are wreaking havoc on delicate ecosystems across the country.

Our community cares about protecting animals, and our laws should reflect that. Please vote YES on Ordinance XYZ.

2. Forward this email to other Smithville residents and ask them to take action.





Send the email to anyone you think might be supportive, as well as to coalition members for them to send to their lists. But only include people who actually live in the community. Emails or communications from people who don't live (and vote!) in the area frustrate legislators and hurt your efforts. Additionally, share the alert on social media and encourage coalition members and friends and family to do the same.

Beyond action alerts, think creatively about ways to reach people in your community such as posting on sites like Nextdoor or Facebook neighborhood groups. If you're part of an existing group that tables at community events, consider creating a flyer.

Letters of Support

Experts are an exception to the rule about only having community members contact legislators. Recruit experts, such as wildlife veterinarians, shelter directors, or staff members at an animal nonprofit, to send letters to the council. In addition to helping explain an issue, these letters signal that there is broad support for the ordinance.

Testifying

Once an ordinance is introduced, it will be discussed during at least one council meeting. Plan to testify along with other coalition members. Organize your testimony ahead of time so you and other advocates can lay out your strongest arguments and not repeat points. For example, someone can speak about the cruel breeding industry, someone else can speak about public health, and someone else can speak about the impact of abandoned wild animals on the environment.

Anticipate difficult questions and make sure they're addressed in someone's testimony. Opponents will likely argue that they only source their animals from "reputable" sources or "approved" vendors or that the industry is already regulated by the federal government. Rebuttals to these claims are available in the factsheets at the end of the toolkit.

In addition to being streamed online, some councils also allow for virtual participation or testimony which could widen the number of speakers who can participate. Check if that's an option in your community.

Conclusion

**Don't be discouraged if your efforts don't result in an ordinance.
Simply meeting with legislators and raising this issue is valuable.
It helps move the needle and lays the groundwork for future change.
Good luck, and please keep us posted on your work!**

**Have questions? Don't hesitate to reach out to us at
usprograms@worldanimalprotection.us
if you need more information or help with your activities.**





Appendices

Appendix A

Limits on Local Legislatures and Preemption Laws

The power of local governments to regulate certain issues varies by state. Generally, municipalities can only exercise powers granted to them by the state government. Additionally, the pet store and commercial dog breeding industries routinely lobby state legislatures to enact preemption laws – stripping local governments of the power to enact retail pet sale bans and protect animals and consumers from commercial breeders. Arizona and Ohio have preemption laws.

It's a good sign if you live in a state where communities have already enacted retail pet sale bans. [Learn which cities and states have retail pet sale bans](#). If you live in a state where municipalities are preempted from passing retail pet sale bans, you can still make a difference by writing letters to the editor and educating people about why animals should not be sold in pet stores. Or your local council could pass a resolution in support of a statewide retail pet sale ban. Finally, preemption laws can be overturned. Write to your state legislators and ask them to consider sponsoring a bill restoring the ability of municipalities to enact retail bans or, even better, introduce a statewide ban.

Appendix B

The Cambridge Retail Pet Sale Ban – A Model Ordinance

In 2017, Cambridge, Massachusetts enacted the below ordinance, prohibiting the retail sale of most animals. Share this language with legislators as a starting point for your community's ordinance.

A few notes on modifying this ordinance for your community. First, the Cambridge ordinance excludes fish, and you should consider including them. Second, the term "breeder animals" in 6.20.030 was likely supposed to be "feeder animals." Regardless, you could also leave some of the exemptions listed in 6.20.030 out of your ordinance.

Chapter 6.20 - RESTRICTIONS ON THE SALE OF ANIMALS IN PET SHOPS

6.20.010 - Definitions.

As used in this chapter:

- A. "Amphibian" means a member of the Amphibia class, subclass Lissamphibia.
- B. "Animal care facility" means an animal control center or animal shelter, maintained by or under contract with any state, county, or municipality, whose mission or practice is, in whole, or significant part, protecting the welfare of animals and the placement of animals in permanent homes or with animal rescue organizations.
- C. "Animal rescue organization" means any not-for-profit organization which has tax-exempt status under Section 501(c)(3) of the United States Internal Revenue Code, whose mission and practice is, in whole or in significant part, the rescue of animals and the placement of those animals in permanent homes, and which does not obtain birds, mammals, amphibians, or reptiles from a breeder or broker for payment or compensation.
- D. "Bird" means a member of the Aves class.
- E. "Breeder" means a person who maintains birds, mammals, amphibians, or reptiles for the purpose of breeding and selling their offspring.



Appendix B continued

- F. "Broker" means a person who transfers birds, mammals, amphibians, or reptiles at wholesale for resale by another.
- G. "Mammal" means a member of the class mammalia.
- H. "Offer for sale" means to sell, offer for sale or adoption, barter, auction, give away or otherwise transfer a bird, mammal, amphibian, or reptile.
- I. "Pet shop" means a retail establishment where mammals, birds, amphibians, arachnids or reptiles, are sold, exchanged, bartered or offered for sale as pet animals to the general public at retail. Such definition shall not include an animal care facility or animal rescue organization, as defined.
- J. "Reptile" means a member of the Reptilia class.

6.20.020 - Prohibition on Retail Sales.

- A. A pet shop may offer for sale only those arachnids, birds, mammals, amphibians, or reptiles that the pet shop has obtained from or displays in cooperation with:
 - 1. An animal care facility, as defined in section 6.20.010 of this chapter; or
 - 2. An animal rescue organization, as defined in section 6.20.010 of this chapter; or
 - 3. An animal sold or displayed for agricultural uses; or
 - 4. Dead animals sold or displayed as breeder animals.
- B. Each pet shop shall maintain records sufficient to document the source of each arachnid, bird, mammal, amphibian, or reptile the pet shop acquires, for at least one year following the date of acquisition. Such records shall be made available, immediately upon request, to the Director of the Animal Commission, any Animal Control Officer, Police Officer and/or Sanitation Inspector or Code Enforcement Inspector detailed with the Public Health and Inspectional Services Departments.
- C. Each pet shop offering arachnids, birds, mammals, amphibians, or reptiles for sale shall post, in a conspicuous location on the cage or enclosure of each animal, a sign listing the name of the animal care facility or animal rescue organization from which each arachnid, bird, mammal, amphibian, or reptile in the cage or enclosure was acquired.

6.20.030 - Prohibition on Sales in Public Places.

- A. It shall be unlawful for any person to offer for sale, sell, exchange, trade, barter, lease or display for a commercial purpose any arachnid, bird, mammal, amphibian, or reptile on any roadside, public right-of-way, parkway, median, park, other recreation area, flea market or other outdoor market, or commercial or retail parking lot regardless of whether such access is authorized by the property owner.



Appendix B continued

B. This section shall not apply to the following:

1. The display for adoption of arachnids, birds, mammals, amphibians, or reptiles by an animal care facility or an animal rescue organization, as defined in section 6.20.010 of this chapter; or
2. The display of arachnids, birds, mammals, amphibians, or reptiles as part of a state or county fair exhibition, 4-H program, or similar exhibitions or educational programs.
3. An animal sold or displayed for agricultural uses.
4. Dead animals sold or displayed as breeder animals.

6.20.040 - Enforcement Officials Designated.

The Director of the Animal Commission, Animal Control Officers, Police Officers and Sanitation Inspectors and Code Enforcement Inspectors detailed with the Public Health and Inspectional Services Departments shall have the authority of enforcing all sections of this chapter. All fines and penalties assessed and collected under this chapter may be enforced by issuance of non-criminal tickets pursuant to G.L. c. 40, § 21D, or as otherwise authorized by law.

6.20.050 - Violation—Penalty.

Any person who sells an arachnid, bird, mammal, amphibian, or reptile in violation of section 6.20.020 or 6.20.030 of this chapter shall be fined three hundred (\$300.00) dollars. Each animal sold or offered for sale in violation of these sections shall constitute a separate offense.

6.20.060 - Implementation.

An advisory committee will be created by the City Manager to assist Cambridge pet shops to comply with Chapter 6.20. The committee will include a representative of the Cambridge Animal Commission. The committee will also include at least one representative from Cambridge pet shops, and one representative each from the Humane Society of the United States, the Animal Rescue League of Boston, and the Massachusetts Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals. The committee will be chaired by a designee of the City Manager; will remain in effect for eighteen months after passage of the ordinance; and will issue an implementation status report to the City Council before the end of its eighteen-month term.

6.20.070 - Severability.

If any provision of this chapter or the application thereof to any person or circumstance shall for any reason be held invalid, the remainder of this chapter and the application thereof shall not be affected and shall continue to be in full force and effect.

6.20.080 - Effective Date.

The provisions of these sections shall be effective one year after passage.

(Ord. 1396, 8/7/2017)



Appendix C: Factsheets for Legislators

**The following pages
contain factsheets
for you to use!**

- ▶ **Save, print, or copy and
paste the information
in these factsheets
to share with legislators.**



► 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/q3HC7InBfjFRbA2ktA92I/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>



► Factsheet #2

Pet Stores Purchase Animals from Animal Dealers and Mills

Most domesticated animals and wild animals sold in pet stores come from mills – large-scale commercial breeding facilities – or animal dealers that import and house hundreds or thousands of wild animals.

Many people are familiar with puppy mills – dog-breeding facilities where dogs are intensively bred in poor conditions. In puppy mills, dogs are often kept in small, dirty cages, sometimes stacked on top of one another. They do not receive sufficient exercise, enrichment, or veterinary care. Stores routinely mislead consumers about where puppies come from and their health. As a result, 21 states have laws that provide some recourse for consumers who have purchased puppies who soon become ill or die – so-called “puppy lemon laws.”¹

Similar problems occur at mills for other species. Undercover investigations at reptile mills have revealed extreme cruelty and neglect.

- Animals at mills have been found packed into dirty plastic bins and denied water and veterinary care. Sick and severely injured animals may be ignored or gassed or frozen to death.^{2,3}
- In 2009, Texas authorities raided U.S. Global Exotics (USGE), an animal dealer in Arlington, Texas, resulting in one of the largest wild animal seizures in United States history.⁴
 - They seized more than 20,000 animals including reptiles, rodents, spiders, sloths, and hedgehogs.
 - Investigators found reptiles crammed into shipping crates, malnourished snakes, dead rodents, grossly overcrowded and starving prairie dogs, and rodents cannibalizing one another.
 - Scientists who later reviewed the case determined that USGE was disposing roughly 3,500 dead animals every single week.⁵ In the ensuing court case, USGE argued that the mortality rate, a more than 70% loss every six weeks, was “industry standard.”⁶ USGE supplied animals to numerous companies across the country, including PetSmart and Petco.⁷
- In Montgomery County, Maryland authorities raided Reptile Connections, another wild animal dealer. They found 1,500 animals, including ball pythons and scorpions, without adequate food, water, or space. Hundreds of animals were dead.⁸

Clifford Warwick, a reptile biologist enlisted by the Texas Department of State Health Services to assist in the USGE seizure, stated, “Pet retailers will say it’s just a one-off but USGE is what I’ve found almost everywhere.”⁹

Many animals also die in transit to pet stores or before they reach the United States.¹⁰

- To be transported, reptiles and amphibians are loaded into small containers, bags, or crates and sometimes suffocate, starve, or are crushed to death.
- Because these animals are cheap to breed or capture from the wild, high mortality rates at every step of the process are considered the cost of doing business.
- As one North Carolina reptile dealer noted about the reptile trade, “You can lose up to 50 or 60 ball pythons a day. It’s going to happen. Nothing you can do about it.”¹¹



Appendix C: Factsheet #2 continued

- 1 American Veterinary Medical Association. *Resource Guidance for Pet Purchase Protection Laws*. <https://www.avma.org/advocacy/state-local-issues/resource-guidance-pet-purchase-protection-laws>
- 2 Ameena Schelling. *This Is Where PetSmart Gets Its Animals, And It's Not Pretty*. The Dodo, February 29, 2016. <https://www.thedodo.com/petsmart-supplier-lizards-1633352619.html>
- 3 Russ Wiles. *PETA claims reptile abuse by PetSmart supplier in Ohio*. The Republic, February 29, 2016. <https://www.azcentral.com/story/money/business/2016/02/29/peta-claims-reptile-abuse-by-petsmart-supplier/80552012/>
- 4 Kelley Chin. *20,000 exotic animals seized in Texas raid*. NBC News, December 16, 2009. <https://www.nbcnews.com/id/wbna34442754>
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- 6 Ibid.
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- 8 Don Oldenburg. *Born to Be Wild*. Washington Post, July 30, 2003. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/lifestyle/2003/07/30/born-to-be-wild/0d5ed40a-0dfb-4215-a594-057e9ee824b0/>
- 9 Katarzyna Nowak. *The World Has a Chance to Make the Wild Animal Trade More Humane*.
- 10 Rachel Nuwer. *Many exotic pets suffer or die in transit, and beyond—and the U.S. government is failing to act*. National Geographic, March 2, 2021. <https://www.nationalgeographic.com/animals/article/exotic-pets-suffer-wildlife-trade>
- 11 Oldenburg. *Born to Be Wild*.



▶ Factsheet #3

Few Legal Protections for Many Animals Sold in Stores

The federal Animal Welfare Act (AWA) is the country's primary animal protection law. It regulates animals used in research or exhibited (such as in zoos or circuses), animal transporters, and commercial animal breeders. It is administered by the US Department of Agriculture (USDA).

The AWA has been consistently criticized for setting minimal welfare requirements and chronic underenforcement.

- Instead of shutting down licensees in violation of the law, the USDA frequently uses "warnings" and minor penalties instead.^{1,2}
- In 2021, the USDA's Office of Inspector General released a scathing audit report of the agency's implementation of the AWA with a focus on dog breeding facilities. It found that the Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) did not consistently address complaints or adequately document the result of its follow-up. The report concluded that "APHIS is not able to ensure the overall health and humane treatment of animals at these facilities."³

The AWA does not protect reptiles, amphibians, fish, or birds.⁴ As a result, many species of animals sold in stores are sourced from vendors that are unregulated.

- Vendors may voluntarily adhere to a pet store's internal standards but there's no enforcement mechanism.⁵ In other words, the bird, reptile, and amphibian industry is regulating itself without any guardrails.
- Opponents to retail pet sale bans often argue that these bans push people to seek certain animals from "unregulated" sources. The reality is that virtually all sources of these species are unregulated.

Severe cruelty also occurs at federally regulated commercial breeding facilities.

- Holmes Farm, a massive mill in Pennsylvania that bred thousands of small animals including hamsters, rabbits, and chinchillas, made national news for maintaining animals in poor conditions and killing animals with carbon dioxide or leaving them to die in freezers.⁶ The USDA investigation revealed numerous AWA violations, including dead animals decomposing next to live animals, filthy cages, and animals in desperate need of veterinary care.⁷ Holmes Farm supplied animals to both PetSmart and Petco.

In addition to the lack of legal protections for animals bred in mills and sold in stores, there are few welfare protections for animals being imported into the US.

- While the Lacey Act prohibits the importation of wildlife under inhumane conditions, it is underenforced, and conditions have only been stipulated for mammals and birds.⁸
- In 1995, a wildlife inspector in New York City found a shipment of dozens of dead and dying frogs packed without water. The animals were imported by Bronx Reptiles, Inc., an animal dealer that had already received three citations from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service for inhumane and improper shipment of wildlife. The government brought criminal charges, and the owner was found guilty, but the decision was reversed on appeal after he successfully argued that he didn't knowingly import animals in poor conditions.
- Likely as a result of the Bronx Reptiles case, there have not been any similar prosecutions in the last 20 years.



Appendix C: Factsheet #3 continued

- 1 Delcianna J. Winders, *Administrative License Renewal and Due Process: A Case Study*, 45 Fla. St. U. L. Rev. 439 (2019). <https://ir.law.fsu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=2608&context=lr>
- 2 Karin Brulliard and William Wan. *Caged raccoons drooled in 100-degree heat. But federal enforcement has faded*. Washington Post, August 22, 2019. https://www.washingtonpost.com/science/caged-raccoons-drooled-in-100-degree-heat-but-federal-enforcement-has-faded/2019/08/21/9abf80ec-8793-11e9-a491-25df61c78dc4_story.html
- 3 United States Department of Agriculture. 2021. *Animal Care Program Oversight of Dog Breeders*. https://www.usda.gov/sites/default/files/audit-reports/33601-0002-31_final_distribution.pdf
- 4 The USDA has failed to protect birds under the AWA for almost two decades despite its legal obligation to do so. In 2002, the AWA was amended to include birds not bred for use in research. The USDA failed to develop standards and is now under court order to draft rules for birds in the pet trade or exhibited, as well as wild-caught birds used in research.
- 5 Katheleen 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/q3HC7InBjffRbA2ktA92I/story.html>
- 6 Chris Perez. *Horrifying video shows Petco supplier killing pets*. New York Post, January 21, 2016. <https://nypost.com/2016/01/21/horrifying-video-catches-petco-supplier-gassing-freezing-pets/>
- 7 United States Department of Agriculture Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service. *Inspection Report of Martha Holmes*. January 6, 2016.
- 8 Rachel Nuwer. *Many exotic pets suffer or die in transit, and beyond—and the U.S. government is failing to act*. National Geographic, March 2, 2021. <https://www.nationalgeographic.com/animals/article/exotic-pets-suffer-wildlife-trade>



► Factsheet #4

Wild “Pets” Are a Key Driver of the Destructive Wildlife Trade

The wildlife trade is a multibillion-dollar industry that is fueling the extinction or decline of numerous species.¹

- The legal and illegal trade “is estimated to affect one in four mammal and bird species globally.”²
- The United States is a top importer of wildlife, and the sale of wild animals as pets is a major driver.³
- Between 2000 and 2012, the United States imported 225 million live animals, with most animals intended for the aquarium and pet industry.⁴

The removal of animals from the wild for use as pets has already resulted in population decrease or collapse for many species.⁵

- Tens of thousands of wild animal species are not protected by international trade agreements like the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) which makes it hard to monitor the impacts of trade.
- “If you look at habitat loss, pollution, or climate change, they have a trickling effect on nature over time, but trade is governed by supply and demand. You might have had a species 10 years ago that was of little concern and off the radar, but now it is critically endangered and on the brink of extinction.” – Brett Scheffers, University of Florida conservation biologist.⁶

Spotlight on the Reptile Trade:

Reptiles comprise roughly 20% of the global live animal trade.⁷ CITES covers only 8% of the world’s 10,700 reptile species leaving most species vulnerable to exploitation.⁸ Many of the reptiles sold as pets are illegally taken from the wild but marketed as captive-bred.⁹ For example:

- Most green pythons (*Morelia viridis*) exported from Indonesia are caught illegally in the wild – decreasing local populations – and laundered through breeding farms.¹⁰
- Tokay geckos, another popular pet store species, are generally taken from the wild because it’s much cheaper than breeding them. Like green pythons, Tokay geckos are trapped in the wild, transferred to facilities that secure paperwork stating the animals are captive-bred, and finally legally shipped to the United States.¹¹
- As one senior specialist at the US Fish and Wildlife Service noted, “The infiltration of traffickers into the legal trade has been happening for many years. These animals show up here in declared shipments, and we can’t do anything about it.”¹²



Appendix C: Factsheet #4 continued

- 1 Emma R. Bush, Sandra E. Baker, and David W. Macdonald. *Global Trade in Exotic Pets 2006–2012*. Conservation Biology, 28(3). 2014. pp: 663-676. <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1111/cobi.12240>
- 2 A. Peters, P. Vetter, C. Guitart, N. Lotfinejad, and D. Pitteta. *Understanding the emerging coronavirus: what it means for health security and infection prevention*. Journal of Hospital Infection, 104(4). 2020. pp: 440-448. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC7124368/>
- 3 K. M. Smith, C. Zambrana-Torrel, A. White, M. Asmussen, C. Machalaba, S. Kennedy, K. Lopez, T. M. Wolf, P. Daszak, D. A. Travis, and W. B. Karesh. *Summarizing US Wildlife Trade with an Eye Toward Assessing the Risk of Infectious Disease Introduction*. EcoHealth, 14(1). 2017. pp: 29-39. <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s10393-017-1211-7>
- 4 Ibid.
- 5 Bush. *Global Trade in Exotic Pets 2006–2012*.
- 6 Dina Fine Maron. *More species than you think are part of wildlife trade. These may be next*. National Geographic, October 3, 2019. <https://www.nationalgeographic.com/animals/article/wildlife-trade-species>
- 7 Maylynn Engler and Rob Parry-Jones. *Opportunity or threat: The role of the European Union in global wildlife trade*. TRAFFIC Europe. 2007. https://www.traffic.org/site/assets/files/3604/opportunity_or_threat_eu_imports.pdf
- 8 Rachel Nuwer. *The vast majority of animals in the wildlife trade are not protected*. National Geographic, December 14, 2018. <https://www.nationalgeographic.com/animals/article/animals-dying-without-protection>
- 9 Rachel Nuwer. *That Python in the Pet Store? It May Have Been Snatched From the Wild*. New York Times, April 9, 2018. <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/04/09/science/illegal-wildlife-reptiles-amphibians.html>
- 10 Jessica A. Lyons and Daniel J.D. Natusch. *Wildlife laundering through breeding farms: Illegal harvest, population declines and a means of regulating the trade of green pythons (Morelia viridis) from Indonesia*. Biological Conservation, 144(12). 2011. pp: 3073-3081. <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0006320711003685>
- 11 Nuwer. *That Python in the Pet Store? It May Have Been Snatched From the Wild*.
- 12 Ibid.



► Factsheet #5

Wild Animals Formerly Kept as Pets Are Harming Local Ecosystems

Wild animals formerly kept as pets are now a major cause of the spread of non-native species and have already resulted in the establishment of several hundred invasive animal species.¹ Stories about the release or escape of wild animals are regularly in the news, ranging from goldfish to kinkajous to ball pythons.^{2,3,4}

This creates a welfare issue – with some animals killed by predators, starvation, or exposure – and can be devastating for ecosystems. Non-native animals introduce disease and bacteria to animals without immunity to these pathogens and compete with native animals for food and habitat. More than 200 species of imported fishes have been introduced to the wild in the United States, and nearly half of those species established breeding populations.⁵

Globally, non-native species are responsible for \$1.4 trillion in damage and control expenses and cost the United States an estimated \$120 billion annually.^{6,7} As a result, many states regulate or ban numerous species commonly sold in large retail stores. For example:

- Florida banned the possession and sale of green iguanas in 2020.⁸ The endangered Miami blue butterfly is struggling in the Florida Keys because green iguanas eat the plants where the butterflies lay their eggs.⁹
- Massachusetts banned the possession of red-eared sliders in 2014 because they were released so often, harming local turtle populations.^{10,11} For similar reasons, the sale and/or possession of red-eared sliders is banned in multiple states, including Oregon and Florida.
- Pennsylvania, Georgia, California, and other states banned the possession of the Quaker parakeet (also called the monk parakeet) due to concerns about the damage they can cause to electrical lines, utility poles, and agriculture.¹²

1 Julie L Lockwood, Dustin J Welbourne, Christina M Romagosa, Phillip Cassey, Nicholas E Mandrak, Angela Strecker, Brian Leung, Oliver C Stringham, Bradley Udell, Diane J Episcopo-Sturgeon, Michael F Tlusty, James Sinclair, Michael R Springborn, Elizabeth F Pienaar, Andrew L Rhyne, and Reuben Keller. *When pets become pests: the role of the exotic pet trade in producing invasive vertebrate animals*. *Frontiers in Ecology and the Environment*, 17(6). 2019. pp: 223-230. <https://esajournals.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1002/fee.2059>

2 Clara Hill. 2021. *Football-sized goldfish take over lake after decades of people dumping unwanted pet fish*. *The Independent*, July 13, 2021. <https://www.independent.co.uk/climate-change/news/goldfish-minnesota-football-lake-twitter-b1882576.html>

3 Matthew Wolfe. *Giant lizards, hissing ducks, and pythons: Florida has an invasive species problem*. *National Geographic*, April 27, 2021. <https://www.nationalgeographic.com/animals/article/florida-has-invasive-species-problem>

4 Mark Price. *Python caught near Georgia home, leading to concerns of invasive species spreading*. *The Telegraph*, August 28, 2010. <https://www.macon.com/news/state/georgia/article245322660.html>

5 Katherine F. Smith, Michael D. Behrens, Lisa M. Max, and Peter Daszak. *U.S. drowning in unidentified fishes: Scope, implications, and regulation of live fish import*. *Conservation Letters*, 1 (2). 2008. pp: 103-109. <https://conbio.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1111/j.1755-263X.2008.00014.x>



Appendix C: Factsheet #5 continued

- 6 David Pimentel, S. McNair, J. Janecka, J. Wightman, C. Simmonds, C. O'Connell, E. Wong, L. Russel, J. Zern, T. Aquino, and T. Tsomondo. *Economic and environmental threats of alien plant, animal, and microbe invasions*. Agriculture, Ecosystems and Environment, 84 (2000). 2000. pp: 1-20. <https://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/viewdoc/download?doi=10.1.1.487.5799&rep=rep1&type=pdf>
- 7 David Pimentel, Rodolfo Zuniga, and Doug Morrison. *Update on the environmental and economic costs associated with alien-invasive species in the United States*. Ecological Economics, 52(3). 2005. pp: 273-288. <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0921800904003027>
- 8 Jim Turner. *Florida bans commercial breeding of tegu lizards and green iguanas*. The Sun Sentinel, February 26, 2021. <https://www.sun-sentinel.com/news/environment/fl-ne-nf-florida-bans-breeding-tegu-lizard-iguanas-20210226-xdn3kf7e3vbsjgqxw3rqcl7gae-story.html>
- 9 Texas Invasive Species Institute. *Green Iguana*. <http://www.tsusinvasives.org/home/database/iguana-iguana>
- 10 Commonwealth of Massachusetts Division of Fisheries & Wildlife. 2014. *Notice of Changes In the Law Relative to Wildlife that May be Sold By Licensed Pet Shops or Kept as Pets in Massachusetts*. <https://www.mass.gov/doc/new-requirements-for-exotic-animals-sold-in-pet-shops-0/download?ga=2.46190951.1959560627.1628271591-1703539856.1627507466>
- 11 Rachel Nuwer. *Illegal Traders Have Turned Baby Red-Eared Sliders Into a Health and Environmental Threat*. Newsweek Magazine, June 1, 2015. <https://www.newsweek.com/illegal-animal-traders-have-turned-baby-red-eared-sliders-health-and-337903>
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► Factsheet #6

Keeping Wild Animals as Pets Endangers Public Health

COVID-19 underscored the link between disease and wildlife exploitation. In 2020, the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES) declared that we are now living in the “era of pandemics.”¹ The public health risk created by the wildlife trade, particularly demand for wild animals as pets, cannot be overstated.

- The wild animal trade moves animals out of their natural range and forces them into close proximity with humans and other species they would never come into contact with in the wild.
- Whether wild-caught or captive-bred, animals are often highly-stressed and held in unsanitary conditions without veterinary care making them more susceptible to contracting and transmitting disease.²
- These factors create the perfect conditions for disease mutation and transmission.

Approximately 70% of emerging infectious diseases originate in wildlife, and most pandemics and epidemics are zoonotic – including HIV, Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS), and the Ebola Virus Disease.^{3,4} Federal health laws are designed to protect against established diseases, regulating the importation of species with known public health risks. They do not safeguard against emerging diseases. Zoonotic pandemics are preventable, but it requires changing the way the United States imports and breeds wild animals.

Spotlight on *Salmonella*:

Keeping wild animals as pets also exacerbates the spread of well-studied infections.

- Pet reptiles and amphibians are a significant source of *Salmonella* infection in humans.⁵ *Salmonella* exists in the digestive tracts of healthy reptiles and amphibians, but it can cause severe illness or death in humans, particularly young children and persons over 65. It’s shed in animals’ droppings and is spread to humans who touch the animal or anything in their habitat.
- In 1975, the Food and Drug Administration banned the sale of turtles with shells smaller than four inches in length to reduce *Salmonella* outbreaks.⁶ Federal investigators at the time determined that 14% of all *Salmonella* cases stemmed from interactions with baby turtles. People frequently purchased these cheap and attractive-looking animals as pets for children who were prone to putting them in their mouths.⁷
- *Salmonella* infections from pet reptiles and amphibians cause 74,000 infections in the US every year.⁸
- Turtles are a common source but interactions with captive bearded dragons, geckos, and African dwarf frogs, all popular pet store species, are just a few of the species implicated in *Salmonella* outbreaks.^{9,10}
- Overuse of antibiotics at turtle hatcheries has also led to antibiotic-resistant strains of *Salmonella*, increasing the risk to humans.¹¹

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention advises against keeping reptiles and amphibians in homes with children under the age of five.¹² *Salmonella* infections stemming from reptiles are more likely to result in hospitalization and more frequently involve infants than *Salmonella* infections associated with contaminated food.¹³ Yet these animals are often marketed to children and families as “beginner pets.”



Appendix C: Factsheet #6 continued

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► Factsheet #7

Retail Pet Sales Increase the Burden on Shelters

Local governments are responsible for caring for and euthanizing animals in municipal shelters. Nearly a million cats and dogs are euthanized in United States shelters every year.¹ The retail sale of animals expands the number of animals flowing into the community, increasing the already considerable burden on municipal resources and taxpayers who must pay for the cost of their care in shelters. MSPCA-Angell, a shelter in Boston, reported that one in four people surrendering a small animal or a bird purchased them at a pet store.²

The influx of reptiles at shelters has also steadily climbed in some places due to increased accessibility. Salt Lake County Animal Services spokeswoman stated, “We see more reptiles than hamsters.” And a Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) adoption coordinator noted, “We mostly see animals that are easy to purchase but hard to care for...green iguanas, ball pythons, and pond turtles.”³

Wild animals who require complex care or have long lifespans are particularly at risk of being surrendered.

- Cockatiels can live up to 25 years while red-eared sliders can live up to 40.
- Forty-seven percent of first-time buyers spend a few hours – or none at all – researching prior to buying a wild animal, and 43% bought their first wild animal on a whim.⁴
- Many families see an animal in the store and purchase them without understanding the expensive and time-consuming care the animal will require.
- Despite the care wild animals require, they are often mislabeled or marketed as “beginner” or “easy to keep” animals.⁵

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