



Cymdeithas Frenhinol er Atal Creulondeb i Anifeiliaid Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals

David Rowlands
Chair of the Petitions Committee
National Assembly for Wales
Cardiff Bay
CF99 1NA

29 November 2017

Dear Chair,

Petition P-05-743: End the Exotic Pet Trade in Wales

Thank you for your letter regarding petition P-05-743 on ending the exotic pet trade in Wales and we are delighted to reply based on the work of the RSPCA and will attempt not to duplicate the petition briefing already supplied to members by the Members Research Service.

As many of your committee members will know, the RSPCA is the oldest animal welfare organisation in the world and has a unique perspective on animal welfare issues with our role in taking private prosecutions against those that commit animal offences.

The RSPCA defines 'exotics' as wild (non-domesticated) animals kept as pets, which includes reptiles, amphibians, invertebrates, exotic mammals (such as African pygmy hedgehogs or raccoon dogs), birds and fish. The RSPCA has concerns about the trade and keeping of exotic pets, which have increased in popularity.

The RSPCA believes that animals should only be kept in captivity if good welfare can be assured. We are opposed to the trade in wild-caught animals for the exotic pet trade, as these animals are taken from the wild and often transported long distances. We are also opposed to the trade in captive-bred wild animals where there are grounds for believing that suffering may be caused as a result of breeding, holding, transportation or use of the animal.

Exotic pets are wild animals kept in captivity and so their needs (as defined under the Animal Welfare Act 2006) are essentially no different to animals of the same species living in the wild. The needs of exotics can be challenging to meet by members of the public because they are fundamentally linked to certain behaviours, diets or environmental conditions that can be difficult to replicate in a home. As a result we believe that there are some exotic pet species, such as primates and raccoon dogs, which are never suitable as pets as it is not possible to meet their needs in a typical household environment.

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Exotics are commonly found in pet shops nowadays; however it is sadly often the case that they are handed over to buyers with very little or no information about how to care for them or the commitment that is involved in keeping them healthy. Impulse buying risks people not understanding fully what they need to provide for the animal. Without proper care exotic animals can suffer from serious diseases and, in severe cases or if left untreated, they can die.

These animals often end up in our care after people realise they're not easy to care for (or once the novelty wears off). Others are rescued after they have been abandoned, escaped or been released on purpose, which then could be an invasive alien species risk to our native wildlife. Animals may become aggressive, grow very large, live for a long time or require a licence or paperwork to be legally kept or sold. Some species can be difficult for us to rehome, due to lack of suitable homes or interest.

In many cases owners are unaware that they are causing any suffering through being so poorly acquainted with the complex need of the species.

Over the last five years, the RSPCA has received, on average, 332 calls each year from Wales regarding reptiles and officers collected 498 reptiles over the five year period.

Scientifically-based expert care information for exotics can be hard to find and an inexperienced owner may not be able to tell the difference between quality and inaccurate care information. Many owners of exotic pets may also struggle to find a qualified vet who is able to provide the specialised treatment that these animals require. As with every animal, appropriate veterinary care is an essential part of ensuring the animal's welfare needs are met.

The RSPCA's campaigns are based on the latest research and thinking on animal welfare by our science teams covering companion, farm, wildlife, and exotic animals.

As the committee will be aware from receiving emails from constituents, RSPCA Cymru is actively campaigning for the end of the keeping of primates as pets. We believe that the keeping of these intelligent, sociable and complex animals in a household environment is incompatible with the primates' wild nature and that their needs cannot be adequately met in a domestic setting, leading to the primate suffering and their welfare compromised.

RSPCA Cymru concerns include:

- **Social Isolation:** Primates are highly social animals and a lack of socialisation can cause the primates to become seriously depressed, to self-mutilate, pluck their hair until bald and show abnormal behaviours such as rocking and self-hugging.
- **Early weaning:** Like humans, young primates are dependent on their mother and other family/group members for socialisation and in the wild common marmosets would remain with their parents for at least the first year. When young primates are removed early from their mother, it has severe, long-lasting harmful effects including aggression and abnormal behaviours. RSPCA Cymru research has shown that primates as young as three months are being sold online without their mother.
- **Housing:** Following RSPCA investigations, in England and Wales, primates have been found in a variety of 'homes' including parrot cages, glass-fronted cupboards, aviaries and sheds and

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have been found located under stairs, in living rooms and garages, offering little or no access to the outdoors. Poor housing can lead to more abnormal behaviours and a lack of sunlight can cause, crucially, Metabolic Bone Disease, (more commonly known in humans as rickets and osteomalacia) which can lead to fractured and/or misshapen bones.

- **Poor diet:** A lack of understanding, by owners, of the correct diet for a primate means that they are regularly fed 'human' food such as junk/fast food, sweets and chips. This diet does not adequately meet the needs of the primate and does lead to health problems, such as obesity, diabetes and malnutrition.

RSPCA Cymru's full briefing on the keeping of primates as pets can be found online at www.PoliticalAnimal.wales and is attached with this letter.

The RSPCA would urge the committee to recommend to the Cabinet Secretary for Energy, Planning and Rural Affairs to introduce a ban on the keeping of primates as pets where research has indicated that their needs cannot be met and that their welfare will suffer. If a ban is not introduced, there should be a detailed Code of Practice for ensuring the standards primates are kept in, such as the code in England but at a much enhanced level.

Local authorities already have the ability, under the Pet Animals Act 1951, to set conditions on pet shop licences, including restricting species that can be sold. Pet shops must also ensure they meet the welfare requirements of section 9 of the Animal Welfare Act. It is the RSPCA's opinion, that the inclusion of evidence-based written care information should be a mandatory licence condition on those selling pets in Wales, a move that the Society and keepers have long called for.

The RSPCA has raised our concerns over the keeping of primates as pets with the Welsh Government.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'CE Lawson'.