

# SPCA says ...



## EXOTIC PETS

## BETTER LEFT IN THE WILD

***Be part of the solution and not part of the problem***

**THE NSPCA IS OPPOSED TO EXOTIC WILD ANIMALS BEING KEPT OR BRED AS PETS**

Getting an exotic pet might be very tempting, particularly when such a huge variety is now available.

A surge in the number of exotic animals kept as pets has led to a steep increase in welfare problems. The welfare of animals in captivity can be defined by the five freedoms. Freedom from - 1. malnutrition; 2. thermal and physical discomfort; 3. injury and disease; 4. freedom to express normal behaviour; 5. fear and stress.

**Avoid such temptations as captivity causes an unnatural life of misery for these exotic animals and birds.**

### WHAT IS AN EXOTIC ANIMAL?

Exotic animals are animals (definition includes mammals, birds, reptiles and fish) that are not indigenous (or native) to a country, in this case South Africa. The definition in this document only focuses on wild exotic animals and excludes dogs and cats.

### BUT PEOPLE KEEP DOGS AND CATS!

Wild animals are not domesticated simply by being captive-bred or hand-reared by a human "mother". (It's a different story with dogs and cats, which were domesticated thousands of years ago.)

Wild animals, although hand-reared, still maintain their wild instinct.

### WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO THE SPECIES?

**The exotic pet trade threatens the very existence of some species.**



For instance, endangered species such as Blue Cranes, Crowned Cranes and Cape Parrots would fetch high prices on the black market.

According to several independent investigations, 40%-60% of animals gathered from the wild for the pet trade (including birds and reptiles) die before being exported.

Well-informed smugglers come to South Africa to search for specific species, but will also take anything interesting that they find along the way.

Local collectors also pillage the bush to supply internal demand, as well as the overseas demand for and trade with exotic animals.

It is estimated that the illegal trade in animals and plants is the third largest illegal activity in the world, surpassed only by the arms and drug trade.



### WILD-CAUGHT ANIMALS – WHAT ARE THEIR CHANCES OF SURVIVAL?

- Some will die at the time of capture – methods can be cruel and inappropriate, resulting in injury or severe stress.
- More will die because they are not given time to recover from the trauma of capture.
- More will die due to bad transport and depot handling conditions in exporting countries.

- More will die when they are badly packaged and despatched, mainly by air to overseas countries.
- More will die when they actually get to pet shops – the animals need to rest, recover and acclimatise gradually.
- More will die early deaths in the hands of ignorant owners.

### **DAMAGE TO THE INDIGENOUS ENVIRONMENT**

When exotic animals or birds escape, or are deliberately released into the local environment because they are no longer wanted, they can cause enormous damage to indigenous species, particularly where pairs are released.



It is illegal to release a non-indigenous species into the wild in South Africa. Yet it happens.

### **ARE EXOTIC ANIMALS EASY TO KEEP?**

No. Many exotic animals come from parts of the world where their natural environment is very different from that of South Africa.

Housing for exotic animals should simulate the natural environment as much as possible. Housing requirements include the following – size, substrate, temperature, humidity, ventilation, light and water quality. This could mean spending more on the shelter and special heating systems than the purchase of the animal itself.

It is also very important to note that it is illegal to feed live prey in South Africa in terms of the Animals Protection Act, No. 71 of 1962.

**Can you really provide the conditions that an exotic pet will need? Animals suffer when they are kept in conditions that are significantly different from their natural environment.**

**In addition, exotic animals have very specific dietary requirements. Most health problems in exotic animals are**



**related to housing and nutritional problems.**

### **HOW LONG WILL AN EXOTIC ANIMAL LIVE?**

A lot longer than you may think. An iguana may live for 20 years, a snake for 30 years and a parrot upwards of 60 years depending on the species.



### **HOW BIG CAN EXOTIC ANIMALS GROW?**

Many people buy baby exotic animals without knowing how big they will grow. For instance, a rock python can grow up to 5 metres, an iguana up to 1.5 metres and a baby terrapin can grow from a tiny 2.5 cm to over 30 cm.

### **ARE EXOTIC ANIMALS DANGEROUS?**

Yes, they can be. Some animals are poisonous, and some can be very aggressive. All exotic animals need to be handled carefully.

### **CAN EXOTIC ANIMALS ENDANGER MY HEALTH?**

Exotic animals can carry dangerous diseases which can be transmitted to man. Examples include : 1) Psittacosis which is caused by *Chlamydia psittaci* in parrots can result in flu like symptoms in humans (fever, headache,



chills, muscle ache). 2) Salmonella is carried in the intestinal tracts of reptiles and is shed in faeces. Salmonella can cause diarrhoea, fever and abdominal cramps in humans.

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### **NATIONAL COUNCIL OF SPCAS**

P.O. Box 1320, ALBERTON 1450  
Tel: (011) 907-3590 - Fax: (011) 907-4013  
Website: [www.nspca.co.za](http://www.nspca.co.za)

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