



Banning the Retail Sale of Reptiles and Amphibians



Reptiles and amphibians are intensively bred in mills or removed from their homes in the wild to be sold in the pet trade. The reptile and amphibian trade involves severe animal cruelty, endangers public health, and is worsening the biodiversity crisis.

Reptiles and Amphibians Are Sentient and Can Suffer

Humans may not easily understand reptiles and amphibians' vocalizations and behaviors, but they are sentient beings who feel pain and a wide range of emotions, including anxiety, fear, pleasure, and excitement. For example, studies have documented that green iguanas have an emotional response to the stressful experience of being handled and that multiple crocodile species engage in play.¹

Pet Stores Acquire Reptiles and Amphibians from Cruel Mills

The Animal Welfare Act excludes reptiles and amphibians, leaving them vulnerable to extreme abuse. Undercover investigations at reptile and amphibian mills, such as Reptiles by Mack, have revealed cruelty and neglect. Animals are packed into dirty plastic bins and denied water and veterinary care. Sick and severely injured animals are ignored, gassed, or frozen to death.² Reptiles by Mack is one of the largest mills in the country and supplies PetSmart and Petco.

Suffering in Captivity

Every reptile and amphibian is a wild animal, whether born in captivity or the wild. They retain the need to explore, swim, and socialize. Meeting reptiles and amphibians' physical and social needs in human homes is challenging, a truth often hidden by pet stores.

Reptiles and amphibians purchased at stores will spend their entire lives in glass tanks and aquariums that are a

fraction of their habitat in the wild.

Many species of amphibians and reptiles need supplemental heat and infrared lights to survive in captivity. Red-eared sliders bask on logs or rocks in rivers and sleep underwater at night. The terrariums offered at the pet store chains range from 20 to 75 gallons. Even a much larger 500-gallon terrarium (which costs thousands of dollars) is tiny compared to a pond or river.

People are generally unprepared for the level of care that reptiles and amphibians require. The Colorado Reptile Humane Society reports that most of the animals they receive are underweight, dehydrated, ill, or injured due to poor consumer knowledge.³

Sales Fuel the Destructive Wildlife Trade

The wildlife trade is propelling the decline – and extinction – of reptile and amphibian species. Reptiles and amphibians in the pet trade come from a mix of mills where animals are captive bred and dealers that import animals captured from the wild. Mills regularly add wild-caught animals to their inventory to maintain genetic diversity. Some reptiles marketed as captive-bred are illegally caught in the wild, laundered through reptile farms, and sold in the US.⁴

Transportation

Many animals die in transit before reaching pet stores or even the US. They are packed into small containers or crates without sufficient oxygen and unable to move. Animals suffocate, starve, or are crushed to death. Wild-caught animals may be injured during capture, subjected to stressful physical handling, and endure the trauma of

being taken from home. 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.⁵

Introduction of Non-Native Species

Many reptiles and amphibians are abandoned outside. Some animals die quickly, killed by predators, exposure, or starvation. But others will adapt and breed, altering the ecosystem and threatening the survival of native species. To protect biodiversity, some states have banned the possession of certain species, such as Florida, which prohibits tegus and green iguanas, and Massachusetts, which bans red-eared sliders.

Public Health Threat

Reptiles and amphibians are a common source of Salmonella infection in humans. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention urges families with children under five not to keep them. Reptile-connected Salmonella infections are more likely to be associated with invasive disease, more commonly lead to hospitalization, and more frequently involve infants than other Salmonella infections.⁶



Precedent for Banning the Retail Sale of Reptiles and Amphibians

- Washington DC, Cambridge, MA, and Arlington, MA, banned the sale of almost all animals, including reptiles and amphibians.⁷
- At least two additional cities banned the sale of reptiles (Ferndale, MI, and Hazel Park, MI).⁸

References

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- 2 Ameena Schelling. [This Is Where PetSmart Gets Its Animals, And It's Not Pretty](#). *The Dodo*, February 29, 2016; Russ Wiles. [PETA claims reptile abuse by PetSmart supplier in Ohio](#). *The Republic*, February 29, 2016; Kelley Chin. [20,000 exotic animals seized in Texas raid](#). *NBC News*, December 16, 2009.
- 3 Colorado Reptile Humane Society. [About Us](#). Accessed January 28, 2025.
- 4 Rachel Nuwer. [That python in the pet store? It may have been snatched from the wild](#). *New York Times*, April 9, 2018.
- 5 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.
- 6 Mermin, J. et al. [Reptiles, Amphibians, and Human Salmonella Infection: A population-based, case-control study](#). *Clinical Infectious Diseases*. 2004; 38(3) pp: S253-S261.
- 7 Kathleen Conti. [Cambridge bans retail sales of commercially bred pets](#). *The Boston Globe*, August 8, 2017; District of Columbia Municipal Regulations ([25-J DCMR 300 et seq.](#)); [Arlington, Massachusetts bylaw amendment, pet sale restrictions, retail pet sales](#).
- 8 Ferndale, Michigan Municipal Code ([Sec 5-10 Retail Pet Store Sales](#)); Hazel Park, Michigan Municipal Code ([Ordinance No. 07-24](#))

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