



Protect Biodiversity Through Comprehensive Retail Pet Sales Bans

The wildlife trade is a multibillion-dollar industry that is fueling the extinction or decline of numerous species.¹ The US is a top importer of wildlife, and the sale of wild animals as pets is a major driver.² The US imports more than 90 million mammals, reptiles, amphibians, birds, fishes, and arachnids every year for the pet trade.³ Most wild animals kept as “pets” in the US are purchased at pet stores.⁴ **Prohibiting the retail sale of wild animals reduces demand for wild animals and protects biodiversity.**

Retail Sales Legitimize and Drive Illegal Trade

Retail sales of wild animals provide traffickers with legal cover to launder them. Many of the reptiles sold as pets in the US are illegally taken from the wild and marketed as captive bred. Tokay geckos, commonly sold in pet stores, are taken from the wild because it’s much cheaper than breeding them. Tokay geckos are trapped, transferred to warehouses, and then shipped to the US labeled “captive-bred.” As one senior specialist at the US Fish and Wildlife Service put it, “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.”⁵

Pet Stores Sales Drive Demand for Poaching

Intuitively, it seems like breeding wild animals could help address the biodiversity crisis. But the opposite is true. Selling wild animals as “pets” drives demand for wild animals overall. This demand, in turn, increases incentives to poach animals from the wild, harming individual animals, species, and the human communities that coexist with them.

Removing species from an ecosystem has cascading negative effects. For example, birds are pollinators and seed dispersers, and their loss in the wild contributes to habitat degradation and reduced biodiversity.⁶

Wild Animals Formerly Kept as Pets Harm Local Ecosystems

Abandoned or escaped 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.⁷

Non-native animals introduce disease and bacteria to animals without immunity and compete with native animals for food and habitat. For example, red-eared sliders, a species of turtle commonly sold in pet stores, outcompete native turtles, such as the western pond turtle, for food, basking spots, and habitat. Red-eared sliders can also transmit diseases that further stress already vulnerable species.⁸

A report by the Intergovernmental Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES) found that the global economic cost of invasive species exceeds \$423 billion annually, with costs quadrupling every decade over the last 50 years.⁹

High Mortality and Animal Suffering in the Supply Chain

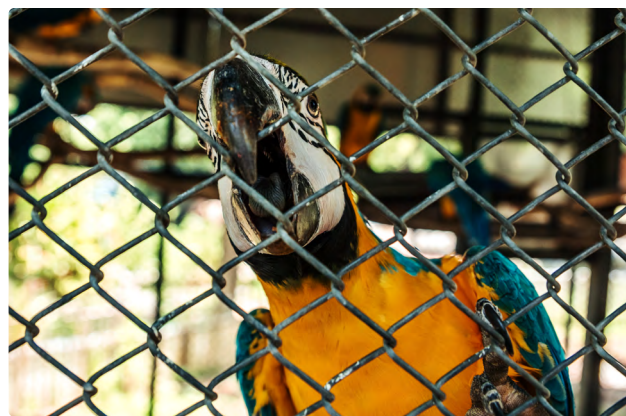
Wild-caught animals endure brutal capture techniques and stress in mills and during transit. Many animals die before reaching a pet store.

Methods of trapping parrots in the wild include chasing them into fishing nets and glue traps, which trap their wings as they land to roost or feed. Mortality rates from

trapping are difficult to estimate but range between 30 and 60%.¹⁰ One study found only 35% of reptiles taken from the wild enter the wildlife trade, indicating most animals die after being removed.¹¹

Every animal who is sold as a “pet” represents many other animals who died before reaching consumers.¹²

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.



Precedent

- Washington DC, Cambridge, Beverly and Arlington, MA, Easton, PA, and West Hollywood, CA ban the retail sale of almost all animals.¹³
- Multiple cities ban the retail sale of species other

than cats, dogs, and rabbits, such as Boston and New York City (banning the retail sale of guinea pigs) and Ferndale, Michigan (banning the sale of birds, ferrets, frogs, reptiles, rabbits, or rodents).

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