



Exotic Animal
Fact Sheet #2

FUND FACTS

The Trade in Lives

The trade in exotic animals is one of the most lucrative and cruel industries in the world. Millions of animals cross borders to be exploited for profit. It is estimated that the legal trade in exotic animals generates about \$10 billion annually.¹ The United States plays an enormous role in the exotic animal trade, making up almost one-third of global trading. The United States Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) estimates that about 267 million individual living animals were imported into the United States in 2002. Drugged, blinded, beaten, starved, deprived of water, and shoved into small spaces for long periods of time, exotic animals in the wildlife trade are subjected to a lifetime of suffering.

Regulating an Uncontrollable Trade

Laws and Regulations

There are a number of laws and treaties that attempt to regulate the exotic animal trade. The Endangered Species Act, Migratory Bird Treaty Act, Lacey Act, and Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES) restrict trading of specific animals but do not attempt to regulate the trading of all wild animals. These laws are generally enforced by the FWS



Photo: US Fish and Wildlife Service

at specific ports where animals arrive from foreign countries. Enforcement within a country exporting to the United States can vary and is usually non-existent. Many countries in the business of exporting their wildlife lack the resources for adequate regulation of the trade. In the United States, there are less than 250 FWS inspectors available who inspect only about 25% of all live animal shipments.²

There are few laws regulating how animals are treated during transport and the conditions under which they are forced to live. In the United States, a dog or cat cannot be sold during the

first two months of life, permitting time for weaning from their mother, but a baby tiger, lion, or bear can be sold at the age of one day.

Illegal Trade

A flourishing illegal exotic animal trade also exists, accumulating as much as \$8 billion in profits per year. The FWS ranks exotic animals as the world's third most lucrative contraband, after drugs and arms. The International Police Organization estimates that wildlife trafficking is second only to the drug trade. Many animals are worth more, ounce for ounce, than cocaine. They

are often transported into and throughout the country hidden in tires, suitcases, tubes, small boxes, within a person's clothes, and other intensely confining places.

Poor Documentation

A common practice of dealers who trade animals illegally is to falsify or ignore documentation requirements. Investigative journalist Alan Green witnessed insufficient documentation practices when he tracked the life of one reindeer named Honker. Honker went from a game farm in Canada to an auction in Missouri to an elderly couple in Iowa to another auction and ended up at a game farm in Wisconsin where he stayed for 10 days before being killed by a hunter from Indiana. Documentation of Honker's many transactions were either inaccurate or non-existent. During a four-year investigation into the exotic animal trade, Green discovered that about 85% of all live animal transactions from one party to another are documented improperly, inaccurately, or not at all.³

Major Players

The exotic animal trade involves a number of key players including exporters, animal dealers, and industries that buy and sell animals for profit. Exporters capture animals born in the wild with poison, traps, and snares. Animals caught for their furs, feathers, skins, teeth, bones and internal organs are shot or bludgeoned to death. Parts are sometimes removed while the animal is still alive. Babies are taken



Photo: BUAV

from their mothers in the wild or left orphaned when their mothers are taken to trade.

Once immersed in the trade, most animals are victimized by middlemen known as animal dealers. Exotic animal dealers are the brokers between the larger establishments and private buyers. These brokers, along with private breeders, advertise their "merchandise" through magazines such as the *Animal Finders' Guide*, the Internet, or at live exotic animal auctions.

Zoos, which ironically claim to be champions of preserving the well-being of exotic animals, are a huge player in the exotic animal trade. Zoos have been one of the largest providers of animals to zoos sell surplus animals to

dealers who then sell them to roadside/petting zoos, circuses, hunting preserves, or medical research facilities.

Trading in Animal Cruelty

Exotic animals unfortunate enough to be exploited as trading commodities suffer immensely, beginning with the extremely long journey in cramped conditions without the bare necessities. Exotic birds travel for days in darkness with their beaks taped shut to avoid making noise in reaction to light. Primates often travel in the cargo section of passenger flights and many major airlines continue to transport primates in extremely small crates with little water or air. A Luftansa passenger flight with 110 macaques traveling from Indonesia to Florida resulted in all 110 animals dying from shock, freezing temperatures, dehydration, and lack of ventilation. During an investigation of the international trade in primates, the British Union for the Abolition of Vivisection discovered that only one in every nine primates captured in the wild survives the transport process.

Animals are commonly physically abused, surgically altered, declawed, debeaked, and restrained in attempts to tame them. The confinement of captive wild animals is usually severe. Large cats who will travel over 400 square miles in the wild are forced into cages too small to turn around in for their entire lives. Highly social animals such as wolves and

primates are deprived of the territory and group interaction they need to survive. Animals native to a specific habitat such as the desert or tropics often die when placed in a different ecosystem.

Incidents of starvation, bone deterioration, and self-mutilation due to severe boredom are often present in captive wild animals who have been neglected or abandoned. Experts estimate that due to inhumane living conditions and stress, most captive wild animals do not survive their first year in captivity.

Human Risks Safety

Exotic animals are genetically programmed to be wild. No amount of caging, declawing, defanging, chaining, or beating will change that. There have been thousands of documented human injuries and fatalities as a result of the public's false trust that a wild animal has been domesticated. Due to inappropriate care, a traumatic environment, and the very nature of the animals involved, exotic animals held in captivity often act out in aggressive and dangerous ways that result in severe consequences for humans.

Health

Most people are unaware of the possible risks of disease transmission from exotic animals. Almost all reptiles, including turtles, carry salmonella and show no symptoms. The Centers for

Disease Control (CDC) estimate that captive reptiles and amphibians cause approximately 93,000 salmonella cases each year.⁴ Up to 90 percent of macaque monkeys are infected with the Herpes-B virus, which is fatal to most humans who contract it. Other diseases such as Ebola, SARS, monkey pox, and tuberculosis can be transmitted to humans from exotic pets. Outbreaks of infectious diseases have prompted the FDA, CDC, and Interior Department to inform Congress about the growing problem of exotic animals held in captivity in the United States.

Animal Conservation

More and more animals are at risk of becoming endangered or extinct in the wild. The exotic animal trade compounds this risk by stealing wild animals from their habitat. Nearly half of the endangered vertebrate animals have come dangerously close to extinction due, in large part, to the trade in wildlife. For critically endangered species, such as tigers, elephants, rhinoceros, and Asian bears, the trade in exotic species is the single largest threat to their survival.⁵

The End of the Road: An Animal's Last Stop

Victims of the exotic animal trade are almost guaranteed an unfortunate future. Traded animals usually end up at hunting ranches, medical research laboratories, roadside and petting zoos, circuses, breeding mills, pet stores, and slaughterhouses. Treated as entertainment props and breeding machines, some animals spend their lives in isolation, living in small cages and traveling long distances. Their nutritional and veterinary needs are often ignored and their living conditions are appalling.

Exotic animals who become "pets" face the same prospects – a lonely life in a miserable environment. Exotic animals, mostly primates, who end up in medical labs spend their entire lives in small cages and are subject to invasive and cruel experiments causing pain, loneliness, and despair. Those who face the ultimate miserable fate are sold to game farms where hunters can pay a fee to kill them in a cage or at close range. Others meet a violent death so their skins, fur, teeth, feathers, bones, and gall bladders can be sold as a fashion trend or medicinal myth. ✂



Photo: BUAV



Photo: US Fish and Wildlife Service

What You Can Do

- DO NOT visit or otherwise support roadside zoos, petting zoos, circuses, traveling animal acts, and other animal exhibits that exploit exotic animals. Encourage your friends and family to not patronize these places as well.
- DO NOT buy or wear merchandise made from exotic animal skins, furs, teeth, feathers, bones and other body parts. Encourage your friends and family to not buy or wear merchandise exploiting wild animals.
- DO NOT BUY EXOTIC ANIMALS. If you are looking to add a companion animal to your family, visit your local shelter and adopt one of the many dogs, cats, and rabbits who are in need of a good home.
- Alert the media whenever wild animals are promoted as trendy “pets,” sources of entertainment, fashion trends, or hunting victims. Voice your concern that wild animals suffer tremendously in these settings.
- Support legislation that would ban the sale and trade in exotic animals in your state and nationwide. Visit our web site at <http://action.fund.org> for more information.
- Educate your friends, family, and neighbors about the health risks, public safety issues, and animal welfare concerns related to exotic animals.
- Ask your state wildlife agency and local health board to implement strict policies against the sale and possession of exotic animals.

- Take action! Ask your city or county council to introduce an ordinance prohibiting the ownership and sale of dangerous exotic animals in your community. Contact The Fund for a model ordinance.

For more information about the trade in exotic animals, we recommend the following resources:

- Green, Alan and The Center for Public Integrity. *Animal Underworld: Inside America's Black Market for Rare and Exotic Species*. New York: Public Affairs, 1999.
- Humane Society of the United States. *Wildlife Trade*. <http://www.hsus.org/ace/12094>
- Wagener, Amy and Curtis Runyon. *Wild Markets: International Trade in Wildlife is on the Rise*. World Resources Institute.
- Franke, Joseph and Teresa Telecky. *Reptiles As Pets: An Examination of the Trade in Live Reptiles in the United States*. Humane Society of the United States, 2001.
- The Captive Wild Animal Protection Coalition: www.cwapc.org
- The Animal Protection Institute: www.api4animals.org

¹ Wagener, Amy and Curtis Runyon. *Wild Markets: International Trade in Wildlife is on the Rise*. World Resources Institute (WRI). June 2003.

² Humane Society of the United States. *Live Cargo*. 2003.

³ SATYA. *Following the Paper Trail: Exposing the Trade of Exotic Animals*. June 2000.

⁴ McConnaughey, Janet. (AP) *The Nando Times*. December 9, 2001. www.nandotimes.com

⁵ Wagener. *Wild Markets*. WRI