



Wild animal pets live in artificial, unnatural surroundings and are typically unable to express natural movements or behaviours.



1. What's wrong with keeping wild animals as pets?

The wild animal pet trade is a booming, multi-billion dollar industry that disrupts ecosystems, depletes wild animal populations and causes widespread animal suffering. Millions of wild-caught and captive-bred animals are bought, sold and traded around the world, including many tens of thousands here in Canada. Each time a wild animal is purchased as a pet, it provides a financial incentive for the trade to continue. If there was no profit to be had selling wild animals, it would not continue.

Very few wild animals do well in home situations. Most of them, including smaller species, have complex physical and behavioural needs that are extremely difficult and often expensive to satisfy. In home situations, their natural conditions cannot be replicated, so wild animal pets are usually kept in undersized, grossly substandard conditions where they are unable to exercise properly or to engage in natural behaviours. Many become physically debilitated, psychologically disturbed and die long before reaching the upper range of their natural lifespans.

2. Are wild animal pets dangerous?

Throughout Canada, a significant number of potentially dangerous animals are kept as pets. They include tigers, lions, cougars, wolves, bears, "giant" constricting snakes, crocodilians and venomous reptiles, to name just a few. Many of these animals are large, powerful and are equipped with sharp teeth and claws, making them capable of severely injuring or killing their handlers. Many animal owners misunderstand, ignore or dismiss the dangers these animals pose, putting themselves, their family and their neighbours at risk. Numerous human injuries and deaths have been reported across the country.

Wild animal pets also pose a significant disease risk to humans. Probably the best known is salmonella, which almost all reptiles carry as a natural component of their internal flora. However, many other diseases can also be transmitted to humans. They include well known diseases like tuberculosis and rabies, as well as newly emerging diseases, such as the monkeypox virus.

3. Why should all wild animal pet owners be penalized for the irresponsibility of a few?

Unfortunately, the irresponsibility of a few wild animal pet owners is not the problem. The real problem is that wild animals are not suitable as pets. In home situations, most of them are forced to live out their lives in biologically and behaviourally substandard conditions. They are unable to move and behave in a natural way, so they become physically diminished, bored, frustrated and prone to the development of abnormal, often self-destructive behaviours. Even if intentions are good, it is beyond the capacity of most owners to provide appropriate surroundings and care.



4. Doesn't the wild animal pet trade contribute to conservation?

No. In fact, the wild animal pet trade is a serious threat to wildlife. Many populations of fish, amphibians, reptiles, birds and mammals have been over-harvested for the commercial pet trade. In some cases, collection for the pet trade is the most significant threat faced by wild animals. As well, very few wild animal pet keepers have any connection to legitimate, conservation-based captive propagation initiatives. In fact, most breeding for the pet trade involves animals of unknown genetic history or the production of hybrids or animals with unusual or bizarre features. These animals have no conservation value.

In addition, some wild animal pets end up escaping or being abandoned by their owners. In many regions of the

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Frequently Asked Questions About Wild Animal Pets

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world, significant numbers of these animals have survived and prospered, eventually competing with or displacing native wild animals. Probably the best example is the red-eared slider turtle, the dime-store turtle that is sold by the millions around the world. They are now established throughout Canada and in many other countries. Escaped or abandoned animals can also transmit new disease and parasites to native wildlife with potentially devastating consequences.

5. If bylaws are passed, what will happen to the animals?

As long as they do not pose a threat to public health and safety or cause substantive nuisance problems, existing animals are usually protected under a "grandfathering" provision. They are allowed to live out the rest of their lives with their existing owners, but they cannot be traded, exchanged, bred or replaced once they have died. Many municipalities have the authority to enact additional regulations governing the housing, management and safety practices associated with the keeping of grandfathered wild animal pets within their boundaries.

6. Won't wild animal owners just try to hide their animals?

The idea that laws restricting or prohibiting the keeping of wild animals as pets should not be created because some people may choose to ignore those laws is misguided and does little to protect the interests of animals or humans. If laws prohibiting the keeping of wild animals as pets are enacted, most people will abide by them. Legislation must protect the common good; society cannot allow itself to be held hostage because a small number of people refuse to obey the law.

7. Don't existing laws protect wild animals?

Unfortunately, Canada's existing laws are rife with limitations that prevent them from effectively protecting many wild animals, including those kept as pets. For example, federal and provincial laws tend to be punitive, rather than preventative (so they don't prevent animal

abuse and suffering from occurring), their offences are limited, penalties are minimal and they do not contain any standards for animal housing and care


An additional problem with our laws is the fact that the pain and suffering that many wild animal pets experience may not be recognized or understood by enforcement authorities, particularly if they have not received any special training in this regard. Even gross physical distress can sometimes be difficult to recognize, especially in species that hide their distress, such as some small mammals and reptiles. As well, much of the abuse and suffering of wild animal pets occurs behind closed doors in private residences where there are no witnesses to report it.

Municipalities typically have the authority to restrict or prohibit the keeping of certain kinds of animals for nuisance, public safety and/or animal welfare reasons. Many municipalities have found that passing a wild (exotic) animal pet bylaw is the simplest, most effective way of dealing with the various problems associated with the keeping of wild animals as pets.

8. How can I help stop the wild animal pet trade?

Most importantly, do not buy a wild animal as a pet. Many thousands of dogs and cats, as well as other domesticated animals like rats, hamsters, guinea pigs and rabbits, are available for adoption at humane societies and municipal shelters across the country. If your family, friends or colleagues are looking for a pet, tell them about the problems associated with keeping wild animals and encourage them to choose a domesticated animal instead. Ask your local pet store not to sell wild animals.

Help publicize the plight of wild animals kept as pets. Consider writing a letter to the editor of your local newspaper or contacting your own city councilor to inquire about local by-law(s) that address wild animal pet issues. If you don't have a bylaw, ask your councilor to look into getting one passed.



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