



*The keeping of wild animals as pets is inappropriate and results in poor animal welfare and suffering.*



Wild animals have evolved specific physical and behavioural characteristics that allow them to live in a diversity of habitats. But in captivity, only the most rudimentary aspects of their natural living conditions can be provided. The complexity and variety experienced by animals in nature does not exist in captivity.

Most wild animal pets live in conditions that are spatially limited, sterile and unchanging. They include all kinds of situations, from tigers in backyard cages to imported lizards kept in small glass aquaria. Almost everything that these animals experience is artificial and imposed. They have little opportunity to express natural movements and behaviours, their environmental conditions are often inappropriately simplistic and they are fed and managed on a fixed schedule that bears no resemblance to what they would experience in nature. As a result, many wild animal pets live lives of boredom, frustration, deprivation, stress and suffering.

All wild animals require far more than food, water and a tiny living space to remain healthy. They need room to move around and behave normally; stimulation; proper social environments; and some control over their own lives. The confinement and completely artificial conditions that wild animal pets experience are inherently cruel.

## Lack of space and stimulation

Space is a critical husbandry consideration and the general rule is the bigger the better. Unfortunately, many wild animal pets are kept in spaces that are so small they are forced into a state of almost perpetual idleness. They have nowhere to go and nothing to do. Lack of space suppresses the natural movements and behaviours of animals.

Lack of movement and exercise can lead to physical problems such as obesity; skeletal disorders; a decrease in strength and cardiovascular fitness; sores from lying or rubbing against walls and floors; and numerous other ailments.

But physical health problems are not all the animals have to deal with. Being forced to sit, lie or stand in the same small space virtually all of the time, inevitably leads to unpleasant emotional states as well, such as frustration, boredom and deprivation. Wild animals need both physical and psychological stimulation.



In an attempt to cope, many animals withdraw into themselves. They interact less with their surroundings and develop abnormal, often self-destructive behaviours, like bar-biting, rocking, head bobbing or self-mutilation (e.g., chewing off fingers and tails). Others become inactive for excessively long periods of time. These behaviours are particularly common in social animals, like wolves and monkeys, that are kept alone.

Unfortunately, the animal's attempts to cope do not address the source of the problem - being confined in a tiny, barren cage - so the situation gets progressively worse. Because the animal isn't coping successfully, it experiences poor welfare and suffering.

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## Keeping Wild Animal Pets Is Inhumane

### Lack of space and stimulation

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It is far better for an animal to have more space than it needs, than to need more space and not have it. Additionally, that space must be complex and stimulate animals to express natural movements and behaviours.

Throughout Canada, thousands of wild animal pets, ranging from large mammals, such as big cats and bears, to small animals including reptiles and amphibians, are kept in grossly undersized, substandard cages and enclosures.

### Inappropriate Environmental Conditions

Inappropriate or inadequate temperature, humidity, ventilation, light and hygiene can also have a negative effect on animals. For example, wild reptiles usually live within a specific temperature range and employ a variety of physiological and behavioural strategies to stay within that range, even when the ambient temperature fluctuates widely. But most captive reptiles are provided with relatively uniform, totally inappropriate thermal environments.

The environments provided to many wild animal pets offer no opportunity for them to seek relief from excessive heat, humidity, light, inclement weather or other problematic conditions.

### Lack of Resources

While the majority of wild animal pet keepers may be well-meaning, they typically lack the expertise, resources and time required to properly house and care for wild animals. Building appropriate facilities and providing the kind of care that truly addresses the physical and psychological needs of wild animals is beyond the ability of almost all private keepers.

According to one sanctuary, "People buy these [large cats] when they're kittens and don't have the foresight to see that in four years that kitten is going to be 500 pounds and instead of two bottles a day, it is going to need 30-50 pounds of meat a day." Another sanctuary estimated the annual expenses of maintaining a big cat at around \$8,000, including food, vet bills and medication, "a small fraction of the estimated \$94,000 it costs to set up proper handling facilities."

While not all animals have massive food bills, their needs can still be expensive to satisfy. Even small animals can cost hundreds or thousands of dollars to house and care for.

When wild animal pets don't do well or become too dangerous to handle, many keepers attempt to change the animal instead of the conditions it lives in. Rather than provide appropriate housing and care, animals may have their teeth, claws or fingernails removed or they may be castrated or altered in other ways. Of course, none of these measures address the real cause of the problems - inadequate captive conditions.

Many wild animal pet keepers do not know how to recognize signs of stress and suffering, especially in reptiles, amphibians and fish. They erroneously believe that if their animal is eating and doesn't appear physically ill, then it is okay. Unfortunately, nothing could be further from the truth.

The keeping of wild animals as pets is inappropriate and results in poor animal welfare and suffering. The needs of wild animals cannot be satisfied in home situations.



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