

# The Pet Trade

## Unloved, neglected, abandoned

Around the world, millions of households are shared with a 'pet'\*. All animals are beings with their own needs, desires and natural instincts.

With so many abandoned animals in desperate need of a home and hundreds of thousands of homeless animals having to be destroyed, it is a tragedy that millions more are purpose-bred or torn from the wild to be sold through the pet trade as commodities.

People often see baby animals in pet shops and decide to buy them on a whim. But they don't realise that the cute puppy might grow into a boisterous dog and the pretty kitten might scratch the furniture.

Too often, impulse buying or a pet being given as an unwanted gift can lead to the dog being left indoors all day on his or her own; the rabbit forgotten in a lonely, damp hutch; and the goldfish swimming in a bowl of filthy, toxic green water once the novelty has worn off.

Health, old age or behavioural problems can lead to pets becoming time-consuming and expensive to look after and many are abandoned. This rejection can happen soon after purchase, or even after many years of being someone's 'beloved' pet.

Elderly animals who have spent the majority of their life with a human companion suddenly find themselves confined to a cage, lonely and confused, with only a few minutes attention devoted to them by the busy shelter workers. The lucky ones will be adopted by a new carer, but far too many will live out their days at the rescue centre. Hundreds of thousands of healthy animals are euthanased because there is not enough room to keep them all alive.

## Too many being born

Pet shops often sell incorrectly sexed animals. This results in litters being born when new owners put together animals they assume are of the same sex.

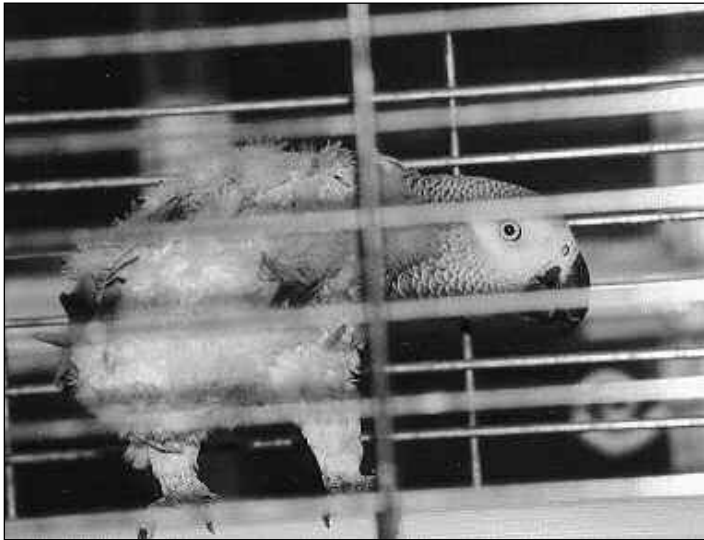
A great many pet owners deliberately let their animals breed because 'it's natural for them



to have one litter', or because the animal in question 'would make such a lovely mum'. Cats and dogs who aren't spayed or neutered wander the streets procreating. But with so many animals already in need of a home, why create more? When homes aren't found, baby animals are often left on the doorsteps of shelters. Litters of puppies have been found dumped in cardboard boxes on rubbish tips and kittens thrown into rivers in bags.

## Designer madness

Breeders produce pedigree animals to supply the market for 'designer' pets. People may want their pet to look a certain way but they are frequently unprepared for the health and welfare problems that these animals bring with them. Persian cats and pug dogs, for example, are bred to look 'cute' but their squashed faces can cause sinus and breathing problems and weeping eyes. Bulldogs, bred to look butch and stocky, also have respiratory problems and can't run properly because their legs are too short. Through genetic selection breeders have even created cats with mini legs (so that they can't scratch the furniture... but neither can they run properly) and cats with floppy backbones (making them nice and cuddly - but unable to jump). In fact, scientists have found that inherited weaknesses - causing breathing difficulties, heart problems and lameness - can be found in ALL types of pedigree dogs. Certain breeds of dog typically used to have their tails cut off, purely for cosmetic reasons. Happily, vets increasingly refuse to perform this mutilation.



Most breeders treat their animals like baby machines, forcing them to have litter after money-making litter. When the breeding animals are too old or stop having enough babies, they may be killed. Runts of the litter who don't make the grade, or those surplus to demand, are frequently disposed of - by drowning, or by some other unsavoury means.

### The killing trade in 'exotic' animals

'Exotic' animals, including primates, reptiles, ornamental fish and birds such as toucans, parrots and finches, are not suited to life in captivity. Conditions inside a tank or cage, no matter how hard the owner tries, will only ever be a poor substitute for the animal's natural environment. It is impossible to recreate the habitat in which reptiles live - nor the varied landscape across which they would roam in the wild. Snakes and lizards will often climb and tap at the glass walls of their tanks, unable to understand why they can't get out. No amount of rocks, fake scenery and heat control will be able to mimic a turtle or terrapin's natural environment. US pet industry data shows that most captive reptiles die within the first year.

Most of the beautiful parrots on sale in pet shops, markets and bird fayres will have been trapped in the wild. Capturing wild animals not only causes immense suffering, it destroys natural ecologies and habitats and has the potential to put the survival of some species at risk. Many birds don't survive the trauma of trapping and transport. Of those who are sent abroad, three quarters will die in transit, and for the survivors, all they have to look forward to is a life of misery in a cage. Birds who are caught in the wild, having known what is to soar through the skies, have their wings clipped to prevent them escaping. In the wild, parrots can live to be 50 but in captivity most will die from disease, stress or injury within their first year. Other birds begin and end their lives in captivity and will never know what it is to be truly free. No matter how big the cage or for how long the bird may occasionally be let out, it is cruel to imprison these intelligent flock animals and deny them their most basic desire: the freedom to spread their wings and fly.

### An ever-increasing 'product' range

Alarming, an increasing range of wild animal species are being sold as pets. Mongooses, ferrets, hedgehogs, wallabies, red squirrels and monkeys are being kept inside people's homes. The conditions are completely unnatural and unsuitable, they are denied the ability to exercise their basic needs, and buyers are typically given little or no advice about how to care for these animals. If abandoned, sanctuaries rarely have the expertise or accommodation available to care for them properly.

Following Animal Aid's hard hitting campaign, the UK-wide chain of DIY shops, Focus, ended the sale of all animals, including reptiles, exotic birds and fish.

### Don't breed and buy while abandoned animals die!

Even if you feel sorry for an animal in a pet shop window, you will not help the situation by buying him or her, because the pet shop will just buy in replacements. If you do want to bring an animal into your home, adopt one from a shelter.

If you are determined to have a particular 'type' of animal then contact the relevant rescues for that breed - don't go to a breeder. Never buy animals as presents - even if they are initially wanted. The novelty can, and does, wear off and the animal may be abandoned.

\*For simplicity's sake we have used the word 'pet', even though we would prefer to use the words companion animal. Equally people shouldn't 'own' pets, but in reality they are allowed to buy and sell them as commodities.

See also:

Animal Aid's report on the suffering of captive fish  
Animal Aid's report on The Reptile Trade  
Animal Aid's report on the Wild Bird Trade

