

A survey of the legal market in non-domesticated animals in captivity, in the Czech Republic

Aims:

The aim of the survey was to ascertain what conditions are provided for non-domesticated animals sold as pets in shops, and whether these conditions meet their specific needs. A further aim was to discover whether shop assistants are capable of advising customers competently about how to keep these animals as pets.

Methods:

The *Nadace na ochranu zvířat* (Animal Protection Trust) carried out a survey in 142 pet shops in 52 towns throughout the Czech Republic during a six-month period in 2005.

Findings:

A large proportion of mammals, reptiles and birds are kept in unsuitable conditions. In 46% of cases the containers for mammals were so small that almost any form of natural movement was impossible. In 52% of cases, these contained only bedding, although mammals need equipment for climbing and shelter. In 53% of cases the supply of water – the most basic health requirement – was absent or was extremely dirty. In 40% of cases very social species were kept in containers on their own, which causes them a great deal of stress.

Birds suffered from insufficient equipment in their cages and unsuitable perches in 64% of cases. In 30% of cases, cages were very dirty, which is a basic failing of care. The great majority of birds did not receive a sufficiently varied diet. Large species of parrot often suffered from loneliness and boredom, which lead to feathering, psychological damage and to potential problems for their future owners.

In 94% of terraria (vivaria) for reptiles there was no thermometer, which is essential for maintaining suitable conditions. In 81% of terraria there was no source of UV radiation, which is important for the proper growth and development of reptiles. In 70% of cases there was a failure to provide a sufficiently large water vessel for those species that need to bathe. The young of dangerous species, such as the spectacled caiman or the savannah monitor, which can grow to lengths of several metres in adulthood, were freely available for sale. Keeping these species is very difficult and potentially dangerous for inexperienced owners, meaning that the animal will suffer in the vast majority of cases.

Recommendations:

- Existing laws related to the trade in non-domesticated animals should be more strictly observed. Particularly, the law on the protection of animals against ill-treatment, the trade licensing law (including the regulation stipulating compulsory training for those trading in animals) and CITES.
- Conditions outlining appropriate standards of care for each individual species should be more clearly defined in law and monitored effectively in pet shops. Species for which suitable conditions cannot be provided in shops should not be sold there – for example, large parrots, primates, coatis, racoons, prairie dogs, crocodiles, and monitors.
- The competence of sales staff to advise customers properly is essential for the health and welfare of any animals sold. Only if customers receive proper and correct information can they act responsibly in their choice of animals and their subsequent care of them. We therefore consider the training of staff selling animals and the provision of information to customers to be extremely important.
- To establish a ban on the import into the EU of birds captured in the wild. This trade can be shown to threaten the existence of some species, and the process of capturing transporting and caring for wild caught birds leads to the suffering and death of a large proportion of them. The danger of spreading disease is significant. We are not aware of a single rational argument for the capture and transport of birds except for the profit of the traders involved. We consider it very important to support this ban, which has already been introduced in the USA with very positive results.