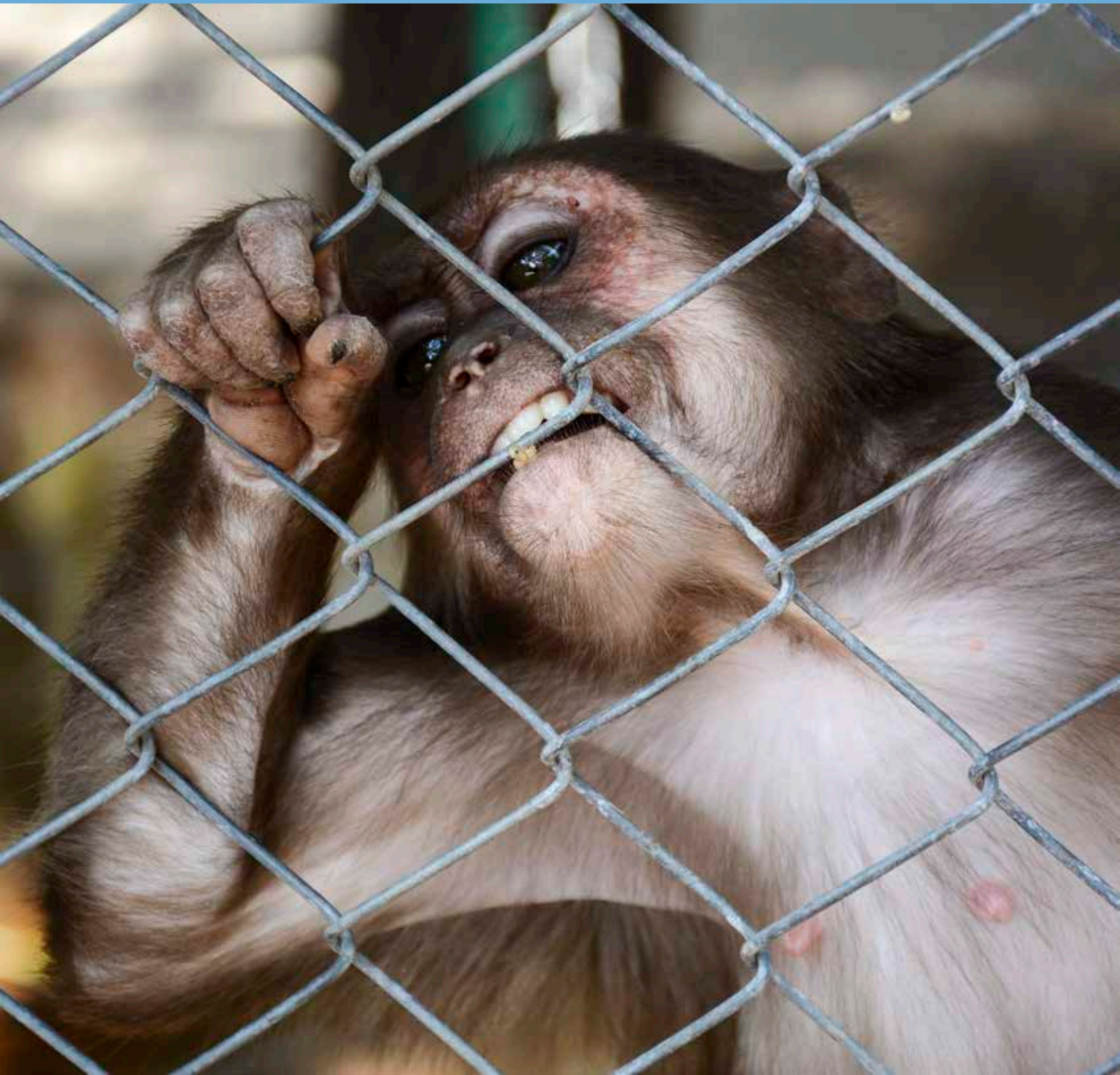




# DOWNLOADING CRUELTY:

An Investigation into the Online  
Sales of Exotic Pets in the U.S.



Report Index

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Born Free USA is a nationally recognized leader on the issue of nonhuman primates and other wild and exotic animals kept as pets, and offers legislators assistance and experience in addressing this important animal welfare and human health and safety issue. Born Free USA also runs the Born Free USA Primate Sanctuary in Texas.



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ONLINE SALES OF EXOTIC ANIMALS AS PETS FACILITATE THIS DANGEROUS AND CRUEL TRADE.

PHOTOS: (COVER) iSTOCK.COM / 13160449 (ABOVE) iSTOCK.COM / RAPIDEYE

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## Executive Summary

While the majority of the approximately 80 million pet-owning households in the U.S. have a dog or cat, a substantial and growing portion now own an exotic animal such as a monkey, snake, or fox. In fact, an estimated 15,000 primates, 10,000-20,000 big cats, 13.3 million small mammals, and 9.3 million reptiles are owned in homes across the nation as “pets.” It is shockingly easy to purchase exotic animals, and the rise of online sales has given untrained people greater access to these dangerous species. *Downloading Cruelty* provides an overview and analysis of the volume of online exotic pet sales in the U.S.

Despite claims made by exotic animal breeders, not one of these animals is “tame.” On the contrary, regardless of how they were bred and raised in captivity, they retain their wild instincts and potentially aggressive behaviors. Their needs cannot be met in captivity, and there have been hundreds of attacks on humans that demonstrate the severe dangers they pose to people around them. Exotic animals can also transmit serious and potentially deadly diseases to humans, including salmonella, monkeypox, and hepatitis. Confinement by inexperienced handlers is cruel to the animal and hazardous for humans.


Regardless of these risks, neither federal nor most state laws adequately prevent the widespread sale of exotic animals by breeders and owners, nor do they set forth requirements for species-specific information that must be shared in the transaction. Sellers are not required to disclose crucial health or behavior information. Buyers do not need to demonstrate an understanding of how to care for the animal. The fundamental lack of oversight and enforcement, coupled with ease of availability due to the wide reach of the internet, have created a scenario in which millions of dangerous animals are being bred, shipped, and purchased throughout the U.S. The public is largely unaware of the dangers this trade poses, and millions of animals are suffering and dying in the process.



HIGHLY SOCIAL SPECIES, SUCH AS PRIMATES, ARE COMMONLY ADVERTISED FOR SALE ONLINE. THE ISOLATION THAT COMES WITH LIFE AS A PET CAN CAUSE DEPRESSION, LONELINESS, BOREDOM, AND NEUROSIS.

PHOTOS: BORN FREE USA / R&D

Ad with no information on the animal's health or behavior >



1/1

Re-homing needed in New York

Ad ID: 132699

Published on: 14 hours ago

Price: 300 USD

Pet: Animals

Breed: Capuchins Monkey

Posted by: Rio

Location: United States » New York » New York

Contact me at: + [redacted] When you contact, don't forget to mention that you found this ad on Petzlover.

Description: Real African top trained ready cute Capuchin Monkeys for adoption text in only interested at.....



## Executive Summary Continued

A team of Born Free USA researchers examined 1,816 online classified ads from a three-month period across four classified ad websites.

*Downloading Cruelty* reveals that:

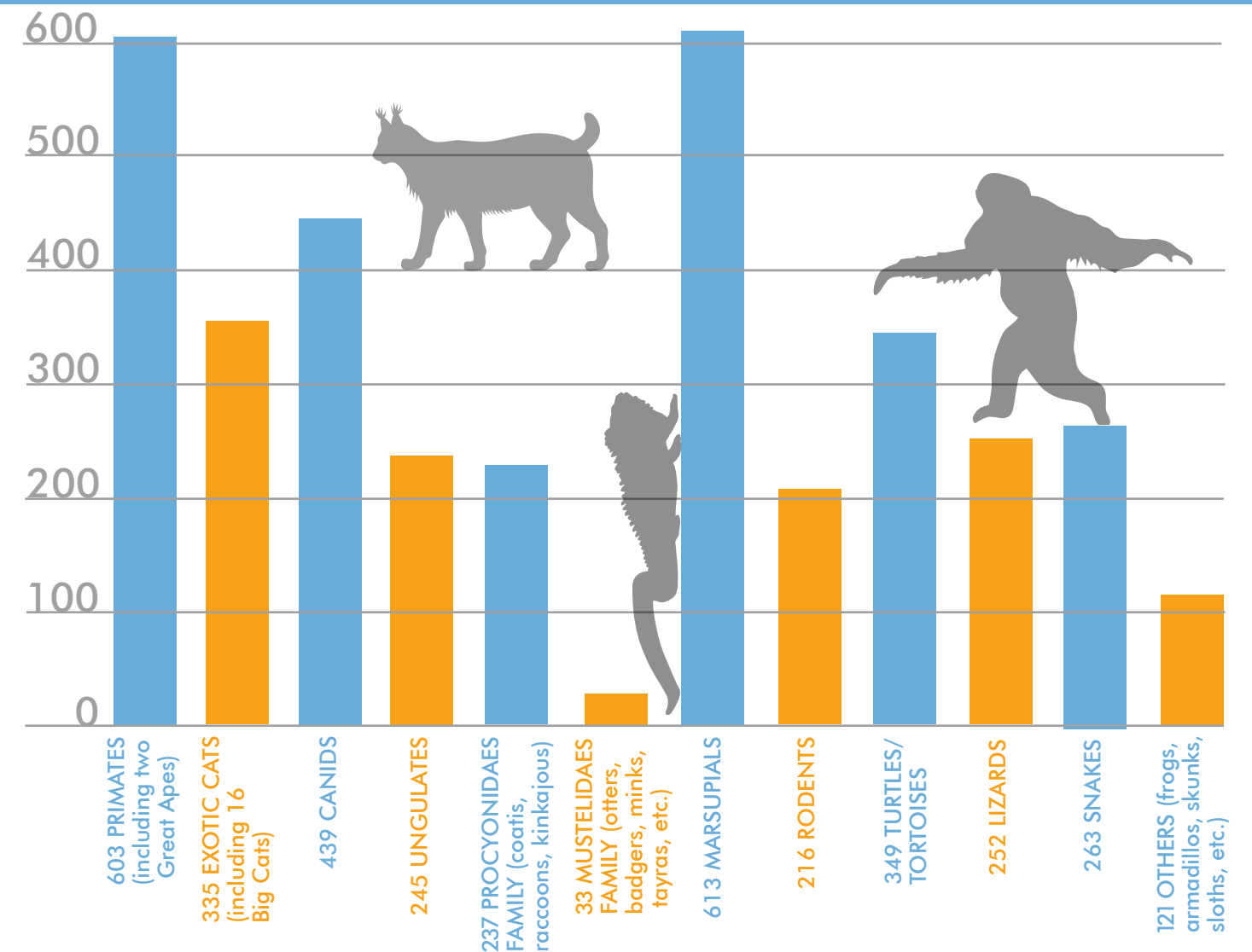
- The volume of advertised animals is shocking. At least 3,706 individual exotic animals were listed for sale during this period.
- The exotic pet trade is taking place across the entire nation and crisscrosses state lines. The locations of these ads situated sellers in 49 states and Washington, D.C. (The only state not represented was Vermont.)
- The breakdown of species for sale revealed a thriving trade in highly diverse species. 603 primates, 335 exotic cats, 439 canids, 263 snakes, and many others were listed for sale.
- Exotic pet breeders churn out babies for profit. Juvenile animals (under one year old) were the most popular, with 2,039 listed for sale.
- Advice on animal care and welfare is almost entirely lacking. Most ads did not provide the history of the animal, give information on the animal's health or behavior, or offer instructions for care.
- The welfare of most animals advertised was clearly not a priority. Some individuals for sale were kept in isolation or were reported as being injured. Ads also offered animals as "swaps" or "quick sales."
- Safety was overlooked by the sellers. Despite all of these animals being unsuitable for a home, and most posing a potential danger to humans, only nine ads warned that the animal could pose any sort of risk to the buyer.



BORN FREE USA  
MONITORED FOUR  
CLASSIFIED AD WEBSITES  
FOR THREE MONTHS AND  
DISCOVERED AT LEAST  
3,706 ANIMALS FOR SALE.

PHOTO: BORN FREE USA / R&D

Total animals and species for sale during the investigation:



The astonishing volume of animals advertised within a limited time frame and number of websites, along with the uninformative content of most ads, demonstrates how online sales of exotic pets have become a troublingly popular and unregulated free-for-all. In light of these findings, Born Free USA recommends greater accountability by the classified ad websites, and stronger state and federal laws to crack down on the online exotic pet trade.



# Terminology: Exotic Animal

An exotic animal is one who is not domesticated.

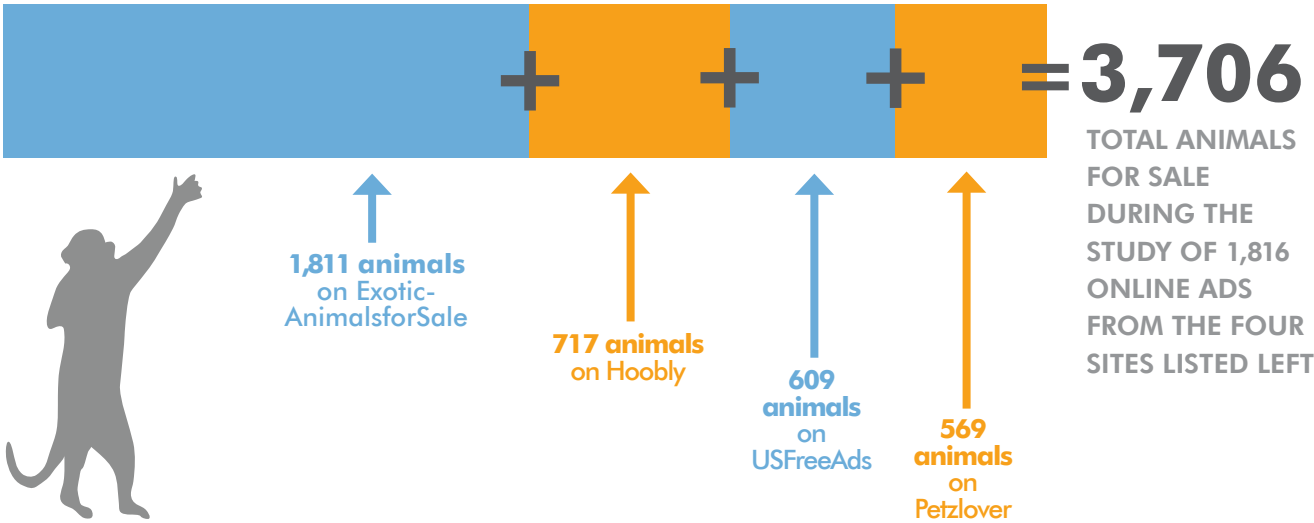
Domestication occurs over hundreds or thousands of years, when humans take a plant or animal species and, through selective breeding, gradually transform it until it is genetically and behaviorally distinct from its wild ancestors. A single wild animal may, at times, display certain “tame” behaviors when held in captivity, but these are strictly acquired and unpredictable traits that do not indicate that the wild animal is domesticated or suited to a captive lifestyle. An exotic animal is considered undomesticated whether he or she was born in the wild or in captivity.

For the purposes of this study, domesticated dogs, cats, and livestock (including llamas and alpacas) were excluded. Ferrets, rabbits, guinea pigs, certain species of rats and mice, hedgehogs, chinchillas, and birds were also excluded from the study, due to limits on the capacity to collect data.



BORN FREE USA FOUND 335 EXOTIC CATS FOR SALE IN A THREE-MONTH PERIOD, OF WHOM 16 WERE BIG CATS (INCLUDING TIGERS, LIONS, LEOPARDS, CHEETAHS, AND LIGERS: A LION/TIGER HYBRID).

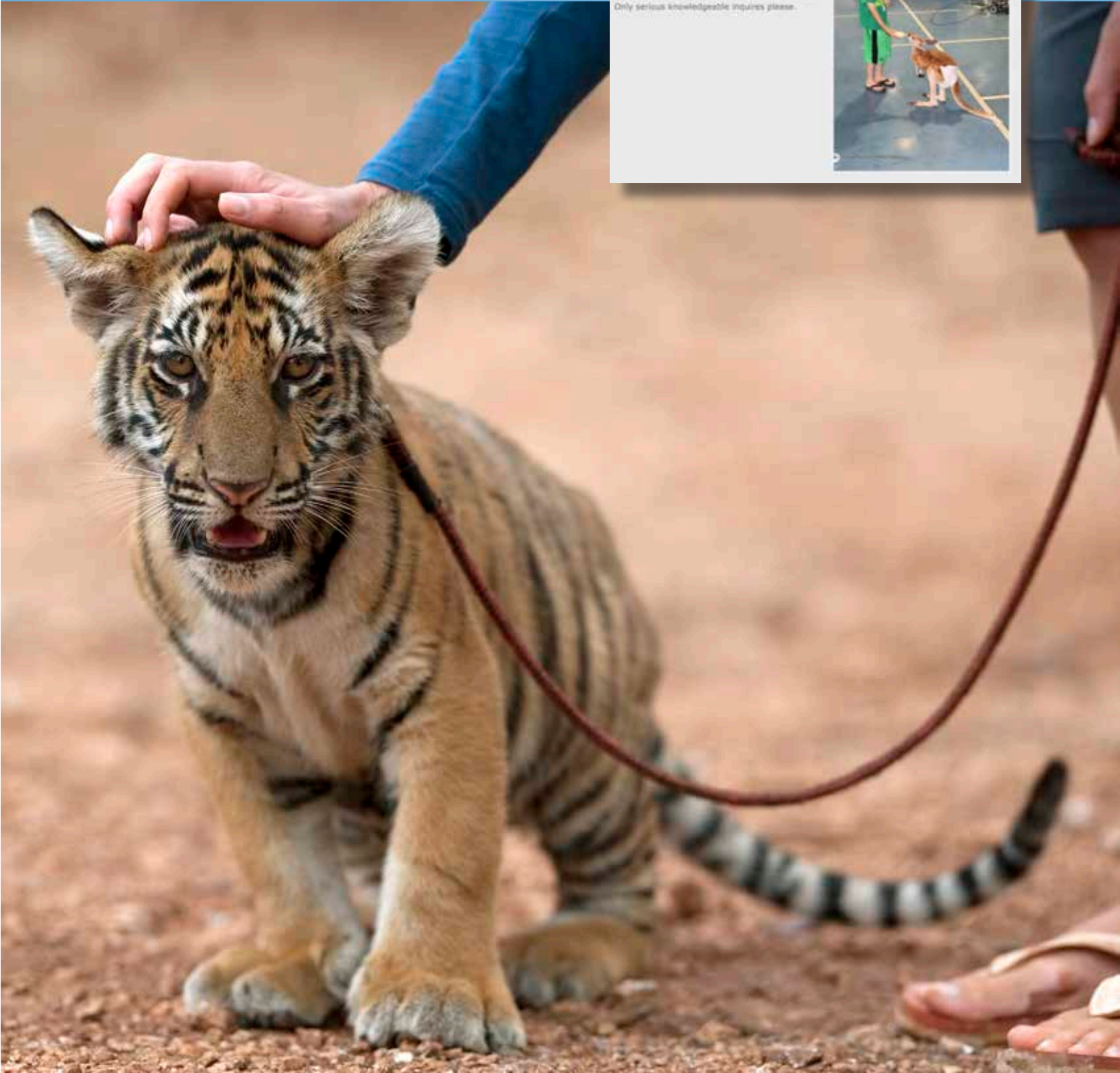
PHOTOS: (ABOVE) BORN FREE USA / R&D (RIGHT) iSTOCK.COM / WOLFGANG STEINER



This person wants to sell an 11-month-old kangaroo in diapers >

**Male red roo**  
Name: Celia Armstrong  
Posted: 6/14/2016  
Phone: [REDACTED]  
Email: Email this seller  
State: Tennessee  
Location: Nashville

This is Leo he is our 11 month old Male red roo. He has been used in education programs for the past 6 months and is a great social kangaroo. We are looking for a new home for him as he has starting to be to heavy to tote around. He has a great disposition. Please call if you are interested. [REDACTED] ask for Celia our price is firm \$600 this is a great deal for a guy so well behaved and social. Only serious knowledgeable inquires please.





## Number of Animals Involved in the Exotic Pet Trade

Although domestic animals are still the most common household pets, including an estimated 77.8 million dogs and 85.8 million cats, the trade in exotic animals still contributes significantly to this \$2.15 billion per year industry.<sup>i</sup> Estimates for the total number of exotic pets in the U.S. vary, but it is certain that the number is well into the millions.

In the U.S., it is estimated that there are 15,000 primates kept as pets,<sup>ii</sup> and that an estimated 10,000-20,000 big cats are currently owned as pets or maintained in ill-equipped roadside zoos. Exact numbers are a mystery due to the lack of consistent regulations and oversight. Without a registry in every state, and with a thriving black market trade in these pets, a precise number is unattainable. Even with this uncertainty, one thing is clear; this is a significant problem.

The American Veterinary Medical Association's 2012 survey of pet owners revealed similarly huge numbers for the smaller exotic species. According to its data, there are 2.29 million turtles, 1.15 million snakes, 1.11 million lizards, 732,000 other reptiles, and 898,000 other types of exotic animals owned as pets.<sup>iii</sup> The American Pet Products Association's 2015-2016 survey places these numbers even higher, estimating that there are around 13.3 million small mammals and 9.3 million reptiles kept as pets in the U.S.<sup>iv</sup> It is clear from these surveys, and from other species-specific data, that the exotic pet trade is growing. For instance, from 1991-2001, the estimated number of households with reptiles doubled from approximately 850,000 to 1.7 million.<sup>v</sup>

Exotic animals are acquired from both domestic and international sources. In 2005, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service reported that the legal wildlife trade in the U.S. more than doubled in the past 15 years, with more than 210 million animals imported to the U.S. for zoos, exhibitions, food, research, game ranches, and pets in 2005 alone. The imports included 203 million fish, 5.1 million amphibians,



ESTIMATES FOR THE TOTAL NUMBER OF EXOTIC PETS IN THE U.S. VARY, BUT IT IS CERTAIN THAT THE NUMBER IS WELL INTO THE MILLIONS.

PHOTO: iSTOCK.COM / ROLLING EARTH

This ad features a "very nice" monkey who is "not a pet" >



nearly 1.3 million reptiles, 259,000 birds, and 87,991

mammals.<sup>vi</sup> Official trade data from the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species reveals shocking import numbers for individual species. For example, between 2005 and 2015, more than 2.1 million ball pythons were imported into the U.S. for personal and commercial purposes.<sup>vii</sup> Countless more exotic animals are smuggled into the country as part of black market trade. For instance:

- In 2002, a man in a Palm Springs, CA airport was caught smuggling two Asian leopard cats in a backpack. Large birds of paradise came flying out of his traveling companion's luggage, which led to the discovery of other birds wrapped in women's stockings and two lesser slow lorises, a type of primate, stuffed into his underwear.<sup>viii</sup>
- In 2007, a man was caught after smuggling iguanas through Los Angeles International Airport (LAX) inside a hollow prosthetic leg.<sup>ix</sup>
- In 2008, a woman successfully snuck a drugged rhesus monkey into the U.S. by hiding him under her shirt and pretending to be pregnant.<sup>x</sup>
- In 2009, a man strapped two geckos, two monitor lizards, and 11 skinks to his chest in a money belt and tried to carry them through LAX.<sup>xi</sup>

There are no similar numbers on animals bred within the U.S. because equivalent reporting is not required. Certain species like primates and big cats, however, are almost exclusively bred within the U.S. due to restrictions on their importation.



## Role of the Internet

The internet's increasing ubiquity has provided an opportunity for individuals and small businesses to reach a wider audience. A recent report showed that internet use has nearly doubled since 2000, with 87% of respondents reporting that they used the internet in 2014.<sup>xii</sup> In addition, the American Pet Products Association's 2015-2016 National Pet Owners Survey highlights an increase in the use of social media networks and other websites to find pets and pet products.<sup>xiii</sup>

The popularity of internet shopping has significant repercussions for the trade in exotic animals as pets, because animals who were never offered at a pet store are now visible and available from breeders and dealers around the country. The ease of acquiring an exotic animal over the internet parallels the continuously-growing demand for them. However, since the buyer cannot meet the animal, and the shipping and payment options make the purchase highly convenient, the buyer is unlikely to have taken into account or understood the long-term care implications.

Many state laws regulate pet shops and require guarantees of animal health. In Connecticut, licensed pet shops must have cats and dogs examined by a veterinarian and have follow-up veterinary exams every 15 days until the animal is sold.<sup>xiv</sup> In Minnesota, pet dealers must give a written, signed information sheet to the buyers of cats and dogs including the health status, vaccination records, and owner history.<sup>xv</sup>

Despite their popularity, classified ad sites, social media sites, and other online venues are largely unregulated and offer little protection to the buyer or the animal. Online ads do not have any obligation to provide health, safety, or behavioral information, which will inevitably impact both the welfare of the animal and the owner's ability to provide long-term care.

It is time to bring legal oversight into the 21st century by addressing the central role of the internet in enabling the exotic pet trade.



PURCHASING AN ITEM  
FROM THE INTERNET  
— INCLUDING EXOTIC  
ANIMALS — IS ONLY A  
CLICK AWAY.

PHOTOS: (ABOVE) ISTOCK.COM  
/ PIXDELUXE (RIGHT) ISTOCK /  
JULIALINE

This ad features a pregnant  
animal who cannot be handled >

**Capybara** [user reviews](#)  
Name: Chris  
Posted: 5/19/2016  
Phone: [REDACTED]  
Email: [Email this seller](#)  
State: Minnesota  
Unrelated pair of capybara for sale:  
  
Female 4 years old  
Male 1.5 years  
  
\$2500 or trade for other exotics (no primates, cats or bears)  
  
Female expected to be pregnant, approachable but not handleable, recently became quarrelsome with male. Sold as-is with minor imperfections.






METHODOLOGY

Four classified ad websites (exoticanimalsforsale.net, hoobly.com, usfreeads.com, and petzlover.com) were monitored for a period of three months. Between March 23, 2016 and June 23, 2016, each website was checked at least once per week. For every relevant ad posted, data were recorded for a set of variables. These variables include:

- Date the ad was posted on the site.
- Location (state).
- Number of animals and types of species in the ad offered for sale.
- Price.
- The animal’s age(s).
- Whether the ad provides information about the animal’s history, including, but not limited to, previous owners, whether the animal was captive-bred or wild-caught, the dealer the animal was purchased from, and how long the current owner has possessed the animal.
- Whether the ad provides information about the animal’s health and/or behavior, including, but not limited to, past illnesses or injuries and problematic habits.
- Whether the ad provides information on how to care for this species of animal, including, but not limited to, food, shelter, enrichment, and special care requirements the animal may have (such as medication).
- Whether the ad specifies if this species of animal could be harmful to humans or other animals in a household.
- Whether the ad requests a rushed sale or imposes a deadline.
- Whether the ad requests a swap (one animal for another, an item for an animal, or any other sort of trade) instead of monetary payment.
- Whether the ad requests any sort of information about the buyer of the animal.

This ad says that cheetahs, lions, tigers, and ligers "make very good pets" >

lion, cheetah, tiger cubs and fennec fox for sale in Phoenix



Ad ID: 138452  
Published on: 6 days ago  
Price: 1500 USD  
Pet: Animals  
Breed: Fennec Fox  
Posted by: Neba  
Location: United States » Arizona » Phoenix  
Contact me at: Neba don't want to share contact information.

Description: We are licensed breeders of big cats, and we currently have cubs of cheetah, tiger, white lion, leopard and liger (i.e cross breed between lion and tiger) all ready for sale at very affordable prices. All our cubs are bottle-fed and raised in our home as home pets, so they are perfectly socialized and will make very good pets. We sell each cub with complete health papers from and approved vet., breeders guide manual and a 1 year health guarantee. Contact us for more info and photos

The final seven variables were scored with “yes” or “no.”

A “relevant ad” was defined as one which offered an exotic animal for sale. (See Terminology: Exotic Animal for the definition of an “exotic animal” on page 5.)

KEY FINDINGS

The results confirm the shocking quantity of exotic animals offered for sale on the internet across a wide range of species and locations. A review of 1,816 ads revealed at least 3,706 individual animals for sale across all four sites. The locations of these ads situated sellers in 49 states and Washington, D.C. (There were no listings from Vermont. See map on page 18.)

The breakdown of species for sale revealed a thriving trade in highly diverse animals. (See chart on page 4.) 603 primates, including two great apes, were listed online, along with 335 exotic cats, of whom 16 were big cats (including tigers, lions, leopards, cheetahs, and ligers: a lion/tiger hybrid). Additionally, there were ads for 613 marsupials, 439 canids, 349 turtles and tortoises, 263 snakes, 252 lizards, 245 ungulates, 237 from the raccoon family, 216 exotic rodents, 33 from the weasel family, and 121 assorted other species (including frogs, armadillos, skunks, and sloths). Juvenile animals (under one year old) were the most popular, with 2,039 listed for sale. (See chart on page 13.)

PHOTO: iSTOCK.COM / XIMAGINATION



Furthermore, the results demonstrate the severe lack of information provided to potential buyers about the care and risks associated with each species. Of the 1,816 total ads, 1,361 ads provided no history for the animal, and 1,200 provided no information about the animal’s health or behavior. The vast majority (1,635 ads) offered no instructions for the care of the animal. Only nine ads stated that the animal for sale could be harmful, and only 43 required any sort of background information about the buyer. (See chart on page 14.) These numbers clearly demonstrate the profit-driven, cavalier attitude on the part of most breeders and sellers toward the welfare and future of the exotic pets.



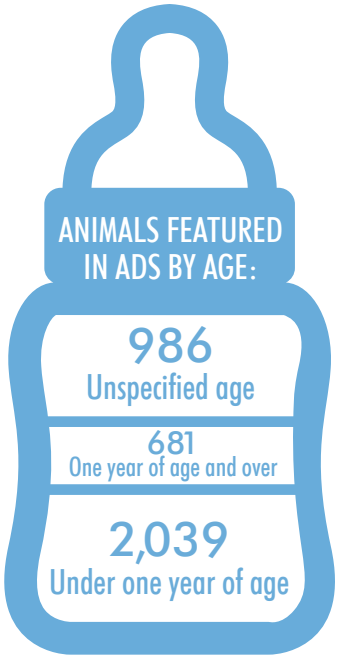
Animal Welfare

Exotic pet ownership is intertwined with heartbreaking exploitation. Wild animals kept as pets suffer terribly from the confinement, isolation, and inexperienced care.<sup>xvi</sup> Species like primates, exotic cats, and wolves are complex, intelligent, and sociable animals who cannot thrive within the confines of private ownership. At best, they are limited in their expression of natural behaviors by the circumstances of their captivity. At worst, they are abused, neglected, and mutilated by ignorant or cruel owners.



Babies are in high demand, as confirmed by the results of this study. Unscrupulous breeders churn out babies who are pulled from the nurturing care of their protective mothers shortly after birth. Removing newborn animals from their mothers is traumatic for both the mother, who mourns the loss of her young, as well as the baby, who is deprived of proper nutrition and care.

It is well-established that primates, exotic cats, and many other animals raised apart from their own species develop into mentally disturbed individuals with self-destructive and abnormal behaviors. These vulnerable newborn animals with weak immune systems are forced to endure the stressful conditions associated with transport, rough and excessive handling, and potential physical abuse from breeders or new owners attempting to keep them under control.



THE AD ON THE LEFT FEATURES BABY WHITE TIGER CUBS FOR SALE. WHITE TIGERS ARE THE RESULT OF CRUEL INBREEDING, AND THEY WON'T BE "FRIENDLY WITH HUMANS AND OTHER PETS" WHEN THEY GROW UP.

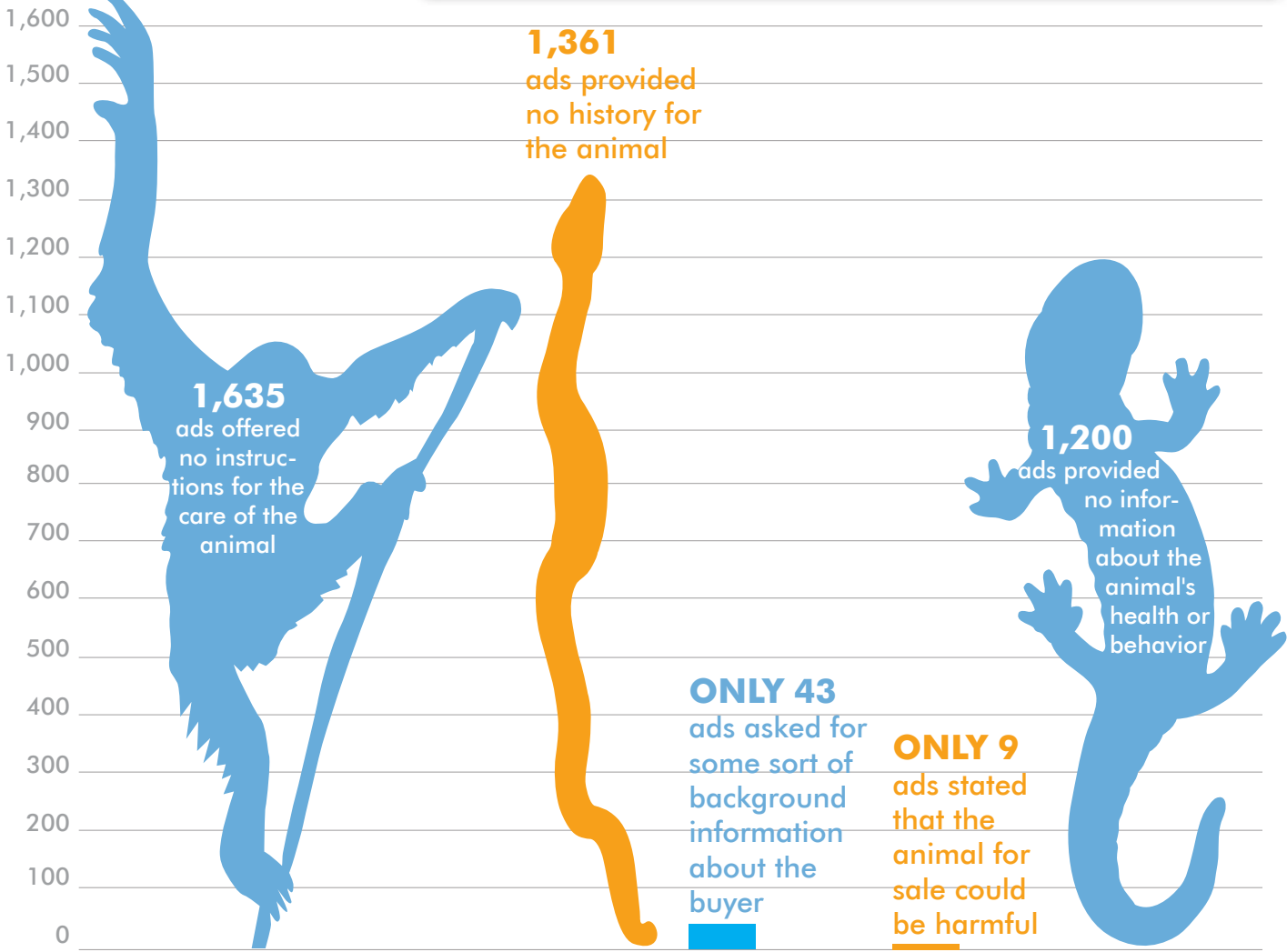
This ad features no care instructions, nor any mention of the diseases tortoises may carry >



**Africa Spurred Sacata Tortoise**  
Item ID#: 3953105      Location: Gilbert , Arizona  
Seller ID#: 1295041      Views: 78  
Price: \$400      Expires: 83 days  
Additional Info: Born: 2005. Sex: Male.

African spurred sacata tortoise  
Adult Male  
10-12 years old  
14" wide  
19" long  
  
Higley and Elliot in Gilbert pickup location  
  
Serious buyers only : text only  
I have more pictures I can send

1,816 ADS WERE REVIEWED DURING THE THREE-MONTH STUDY



## Animal Welfare Continued

As baby animals mature, they develop a new set of behaviors that are not compatible with human home life. For instance, primates are highly active and stimulated in the wild, with complex needs and goals. Without an outlet for natural behaviors, they become extremely energetic, messy, and destructive, and have a tendency to bite and scratch. Sexual maturity also introduces instincts to establish a social order, often by aggressive means.

With some species, size becomes an issue, and owners feel incapable of handling the full-grown exotic cat, six-foot snake, or 200-pound kangaroo with the deadly kick. Frustrated pet owners become weary of the resulting attacks and destruction, and relegate the animals to lives of increasing loneliness, frustration, and neglect that may include small cages, tethering, or other forms of isolated confinement. Some owners also extract teeth, fingernails, claws, scent glands, and venom to “tame” them, which are painful procedures that may have long-term health consequences.

Even without employing these appalling methods of restraint, most private citizens cannot provide the special care, housing, diet, socialization, and maintenance that exotic animals require. Animals in the wild generally have a varied diet that supplies all the nutrients necessary for the specific species. Exotic pet owners — out of ignorance or for the sake of convenience — often feed their pets a homogeneous diet. Even worse, some feed their pets like a human, including junk food that is high in fat and lacking in nutritional value. Exotic pets often become malnourished and/or overweight, and they develop health problems as a result of these deficiencies.

Isolation among highly social species, such as primates, causes depression, loneliness, boredom, and neurosis. This mental distress manifests itself in abnormal behaviors like repetitive movements called stereotypies, which include pacing, circling, rocking, spinning, and

1) THE TWO COATIMUNDIS FOR SALE HAVE BEEN MUTILATED, WITH THEIR CLAWS AND CANINE TEETH REMOVED.

2) THE OWNER IS IN A HURRY TO GET RID OF THIS KINKAJOU, BUT SAYS HE IS NOT A PET.

3) THIS AD FEATURES A “CHRISTMAS SALE.” IT MAKES TORTOISES SEEM LIKE A GOOD IDEA FOR A HOLIDAY GIFT, WHEN IN FACT THEY ARE NOT.

4) THE BABY WOLF FOR SALE IS BEING MANHANDLED AND RESTRAINED IN THE PICTURE, WHICH IS SURE TO CAUSE STRESS FOR A WILD ANIMAL.

5) THIS MARMOSET HAS AN INJURY ON HER HAND, BUT THE SELLER DOESN'T SAY IT HAS BEEN TREATED OR PROVIDE ANY INSTRUCTIONS FOR CARE.

6) THIS AD SHOWS A TODDLER TOUCHING THE BABY LEMUR FOR SALE, WHICH ONLY ADDS TO THE MYTH THAT THESE ANIMALS ARE TAME AND SAFE TO HAVE AS A FAMILY PET. THEY ARE NOT.

Some of the ads we researched >

**white nosed coati's for sale or trade**

Names: Mike - [user reviews](#)  
Posted: 4/27/2016  
Phone: [REDACTED]  
Email: [Email this seller](#)  
State: Missouri  
Location: Garden City

We have two white nosed coatiundi's that will be two years old this May. They are brother and sister and have been together all the time. The female is declawed on the front and has her upper and lower adult canines removed. She had all her shots last summer. She would be able to be bred. The male is declawed on front and has his upper adult canines removed. He has been neutered. He had all his shots last summer also. They were bottle hand raised and were tame. Though not necessarily fully tame now. They probably could be again if worked with. They tend to be nippy if they don't get what they want. 750\$ for both or will trade for a pair of tame cavy. Located 35 miles South of Kansas City



**Kinkajou male**

Names: Kinkajou  
Posted: 5/5/2016  
Phone: [REDACTED]  
State: Oregon  
Location: Klamath falls  
Zoo or sanctuary free kinkajou needs a home asap not a pet period!



**Adult Sulcata And Aldabra**

Chino Hills, California  
I have adult sulcata and aldbatra tortoise for sale at cheap christmas price... text me [REDACTED] serious buyers only



**Wolf cub**

Names: Mikhael  
Posted: 5/12/2016  
Phone: [REDACTED]  
State: Indiana  
Location: Danville


I have a very high content 4 week old female wolf cub for sale she is very beautiful and very socia and sweet! she is being sold as a pet please don't contact me if you are gonna chain her or leave her in an outside kennel she belongs inside with a very loving family price is 2000\$ please make sure u do your research on high content wolf Cubs if interested call me at [REDACTED] do not contact me with unsolicited services



**Female Geoffrey marmoset 1 year old**

Names: CCs exotic pets - [user reviews](#)  
Posted: 3/29/2016  
Website: [Ccsexoticpets.com](#)  
Email: [Email this seller](#)  
State: Indiana  
Location: Noblesville Indiana 46060

Very sweet loves the people that she accepts as her family. We run a business from our home and the strangers going in and out everyday don't bother her unless they touch her cage. We have not had her around our other marmosets but she plays with cats and dogs she loves them! We love her very much but with all the other animals and our jobs she just doesn't get out to play as much as we would like. She is intact she is 1 year 4 months old. She does have an old injury on her hand (had it when we got her) doesn't cause any issues she does lick it at times but that all had it checked by our primate vet. She just had a full exam done at the vet and he said she looks great. She is a picky eater but will eat the marmoset diet and more. She will wear a monkey collar (around the waist) and leash but we have not had diapers on her. We are asking \$3500 for her. We will NOT ship her!!! We will be at lolli brothers next week can meet with her there. Other wise pick up in our home in noblesville Indiana 46060. We are USDA licensed. Will not hold without a deposit!!! Open to trades would love a young pair or proven pair of common or black tuft marmosets (don't need to be Tame) or a Female kangaroo possibly more let me know what you have!!!



**Baby ring tail lemur**

Names: Shelby  
Posted: 6/13/2016  
Phone: [REDACTED]  
State: Illinois  
Location: Springfield

I have a 6 week old baby male ring tail lemur. He's doing great on the bottle and eating bananas. Being used in educational shows. Will be ready within a month. ILLINOIS SALES ONLY. Do not contact if your not from Illinois. No scams!





Animal Welfare Continued

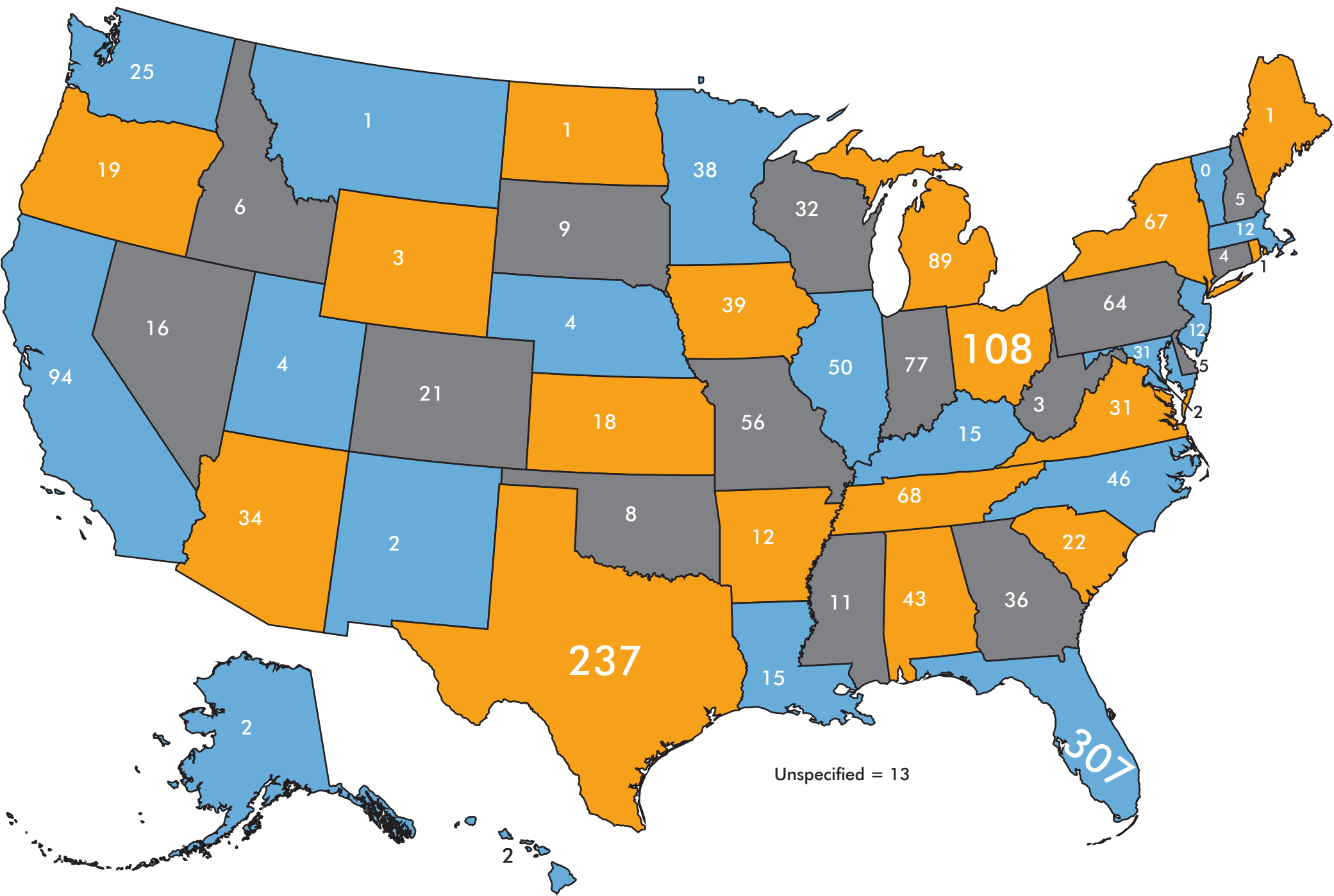
This map shows the numbers of ads by state >

clasping themselves. The repetition can also produce self-mutilation through behaviors such as biting themselves, over-grooming, and plucking their hair until bald patches form.

It is impossible for a person to provide a suitable and healthy environment for an exotic animal within the confines of a home. Exotic pets deserve to live their lives in the wild, but as a consequence of exploitative breeding and misguided ownership, they will never have that experience.

1,816 Total Ads Researched and Broken Down by State:

Alabama – 43	Michigan – 89	Texas – 237
Alaska – 2	Minnesota – 38	Utah – 4
Arizona – 34	Mississippi – 11	Virginia – 31
Arkansas – 12	Missouri – 56	Washington – 25
California – 94	Montana – 1	Washington, D.C. – 2
Colorado – 21	Nebraska – 4	West Virginia – 3
Connecticut – 4	Nevada – 16	Wisconsin – 32
Delaware – 5	New Hampshire – 5	Wyoming – 3
Florida – 307	New Jersey – 12	
Georgia – 36	New Mexico – 2	Unspecified – 13
Hawaii – 2	New York – 67	
Idaho – 6	North Carolina – 46	49 states +
Illinois – 50	North Dakota – 1	Washington, D.C.
Indiana – 77	Ohio – 108	
Iowa – 39	Oklahoma – 8	
Kansas – 18	Oregon – 19	
Kentucky – 15	Pennsylvania – 64	
Louisiana – 15	Rhode Island – 1	
Maine – 1	South Carolina – 22	
Maryland – 31	South Dakota – 9	
Massachusetts – 12	Tennessee – 68	



## Human Health and Safety

### ATTACKS

The private ownership of exotic animals is not only harmful to the animals, but can have serious consequences for humans, as well. Regardless of how they are raised, members of every single one of these species are wild animals and cannot be domesticated. As they reach sexual maturity, they become larger and more aggressive, and many will bite or attack to defend themselves and to establish dominance. This poses a serious risk to nearby people, including owners, children, neighbors, and strangers. According to the Born Free USA Exotic Animal Incidents Database, since 1990, more than 344 people have been injured by exotic pets in the U.S.<sup>xviii</sup> These incidents include:

- A six-year-old boy in St. Louis, MO was bitten on his forearm by a pet primate when the boy tried to pet the primate's companion dog at a dog event.
- Authorities shot and killed a pet monkey in Shelbyville, TN after the animal escaped and attacked a woman and a sheriff's deputy.
- Four capuchin monkeys escaped a home and attacked a citizen in Currituck County, NC, who had to be taken to the hospital for treatment. Three of the monkeys were caught and one was shot dead.
- An eight-year-old girl in Springfield, MO was attacked by a macaque monkey who was in a nearby car. The girl needed treatment for a transmittable disease.
- A man in Chapel Hill, NC was bitten by his pet king cobra and had to be hospitalized. He was in critical condition, but survived.
- A three-foot-long pet ball python in Lehigh, PA bit a four-year-old child on the chest while she was playing with the snake. The family decapitated the snake to get the animal off of the child.
- A police officer was called to pry a pet python off of a woman's arm in Mount Vernon, MO after the five-foot python bit her.
- A man suffered a compound fracture to his forearm as a result of a zebra attack as he attempted to move four zebras away from a fence he was painting on a farm.
- A three-year-old girl in Bend, OR was bitten on the neck by a serval cat.

## Human Health and Safety *Continued*

- A man in Indianapolis, IN was bitten by his pet kinkajou. The kinkajou was ill and died after the bite. The man was hospitalized and treated for blastomycosis, a fungal infection.
- A Siberian lynx attacked a pet sitter in Atlanta, GA. The woman sustained injuries to her head and was bleeding heavily when police arrived.
- An Asian jungle cat mauled a woman's two-year-old niece in Downers Grove, IL. The girl required 200 stitches.
- A bobcat hybrid bit a child at a shopping mall in Tulsa, OK after the owner took the animal with him to use the restroom.

These events demonstrate the unpredictable and hostile behavior that wild animals often exhibit, and the inherent dangers of coexisting with them.



SENATOR RICHARD BLUMENTHAL (D-CT) SITS WITH CHARLA NASH DURING THE BORN FREE USA AND HSUS PRESS CONFERENCE ON CAPITOL HILL, 7/10/14.

PHOTO: HUMANE SOCIETY OF THE UNITED STATES (HSUS) / PETE MAROVICH

One high-profile case illustrates this point particularly well: that of Charla Nash in Connecticut. In 2009, Nash left her home to assist her neighbor, Sandra Herold, when Herold's 200-pound "pet" chimpanzee escaped. The chimpanzee, Travis, had suffered the same abuses that most primates endure in captivity: his teeth were removed, he was regularly drugged, and he had no interaction with other chimpanzees. He also had a history of violent behavior, so it is unsurprising that he lashed out.

Sadly, Nash bore the brunt of his panicked hostility. He attacked her, inflicting devastating injuries, and he was killed at the scene. Meanwhile, Nash lost her hands and face — including her nose, eyes, lips, and cheekbones — and also endured significant brain trauma. She has since undergone countless hours of surgery and immeasurable pain, and is still significantly impaired.

The psychological anguish that Travis experienced in captivity resulted in a shocking tragedy. Nash's story, along with the other incidents, is a testament to the fact that exotic animals do not belong as pets.



DISEASES

Compounding the risk of physical injury to the public, exotic animals can potentially transmit dangerous viral diseases to humans.

Zoonotic diseases found in primates pose a unique risk to humans due to the genetic similarity between the two species. Viruses such as yellow fever, Ebola, dengue, herpesvirus simiae (herpes B), simian immunodeficiency viruses (SIVs, the primate form of HIV), viral hepatitis, and pox viruses are all transmissible and potentially dangerous to humans.<sup>xxiii</sup> 80%-90% of all macaque monkeys are infected with herpes B,<sup>xix</sup> a virus that is harmless to macaques but can result in severe brain damage or death in humans who contract it.<sup>xx</sup> The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) asserts that the increase in macaque monkeys in the pet trade may constitute an emerging infectious disease threat in the U.S., and concludes that “this risk makes macaques unsuitable as pets.”<sup>xxi</sup> Bacterial zoonotic diseases are also easily transmitted when monkeys come into contact with humans, including the bacteria responsible for tuberculosis and ones that can cause severe gastrointestinal distress.<sup>xxii</sup>

However, primates are not the only exotic animals who can transmit dangerous diseases to humans. An outbreak of monkeypox in 2003 was traced back to the sale of several thousand prairie dogs as pets from businesses in Texas. Contact with the infected prairie dogs resulted in 71 cases of monkeypox and an investigation by the U.S. Department of Agriculture across 15 states. The CDC prohibited the capture, sale, and interstate transport of prairie dogs, but this order was rescinded in 2008.<sup>xxiii</sup> Monkeypox, which produces fever, rash, chills, and aches, can be fatal in humans.<sup>xxiv</sup>

Reptiles, who are among the most common exotic pets, are capable of infecting humans, as well. Studies have shown that at least



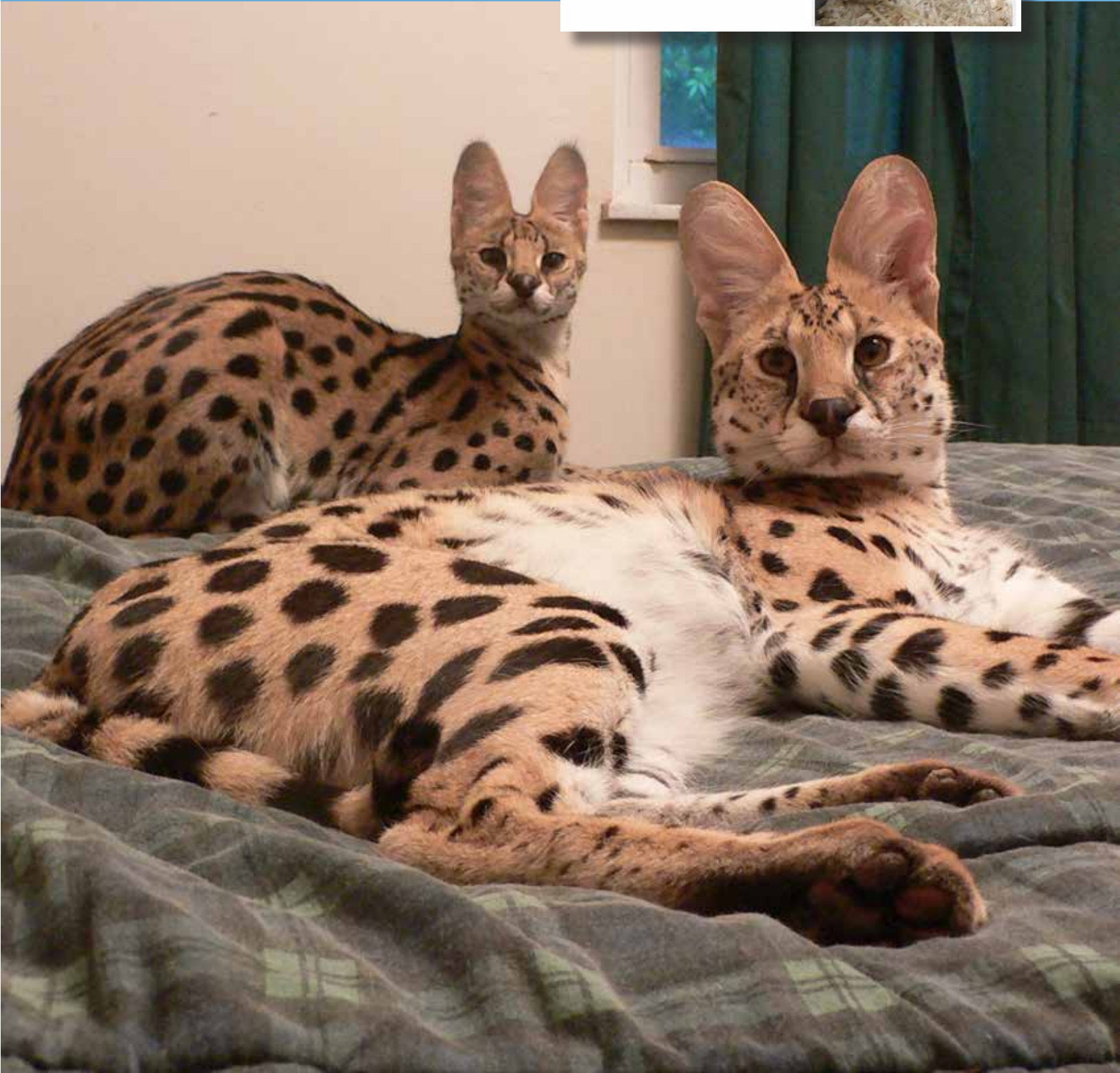
RACCOONS, KINKAJOUS, COATIMUNDIS, AND SKUNKS CAN CARRY RACCOON ROUNDWORMS, WHICH, WHEN TRANSMITTED TO HUMANS, CAN RESULT IN POTENTIALLY FATAL PARASITE CYSTS IN THE BRAIN, EYE, OR OTHER ORGANS.

PHOTOS: BORN FREE USA / R&D

Prairie dogs can transmit monkeypox to humans >

Prairie Dogs

Name: Panhandle Exotics  
Posted: 5/19/2016  
Website: [www.PanhandleExotics.com](http://www.PanhandleExotics.com)  
Phone:   
State: Florida  
Location: Pensacola  
Baby prairie dogs ready now! Just \$199.95 Pickup at our store in Pensacola, FL or we can ship to your nearest airport at buyers expense.  
Financing is available if needed. Takes about 60 seconds for an answer, to apply online or for more information go to [www.PanhandleExotics.com](http://www.PanhandleExotics.com)





# Human Health and Safety Continued

50%–90% of snakes, turtles, and lizards are carriers of salmonella, a bacteria. As the popularity of pet reptiles has grown, the impact on public health has been clear.<sup>xxv</sup> The CDC estimates that around 6% of human infections with salmonella in the U.S. each year (or 74,000) are associated with having handled a reptile,<sup>xxvi</sup> and cautions that “even minimal indirect contact with reptiles can result in illness.”<sup>xxvii</sup> As iguana ownership has increased, the number of human cases of salmonella infections, especially in very young children, has risen dramatically in parallel.<sup>xxviii</sup> Frogs and toads are also frequent carriers of salmonella and have been linked to outbreaks,<sup>xxix</sup> and turtles are even more notoriously linked with the bacteria. During the 1970s, small pet turtles were a major source of salmonella infections in the U.S.,<sup>xxx</sup> resulting in a 1975 ban by the Food and Drug Administration on sales of turtles smaller than four inches.<sup>xxxi</sup> These measures prevented an estimated 100,000 annual cases of salmonella infections among children,<sup>xxxii</sup> but outbreaks continue to occur due to the ongoing popularity of these pets.<sup>xxxiii</sup>

Other species commonly owned as exotic pets pose similar risks. Hantavirus, a virus which can cause acute respiratory problems or death, is carried by rodents and has sickened at least 317 Americans and killed at least 93 since 1996.<sup>xxxiv</sup> Humans can also catch tularemia, a potentially fatal infectious disease, from rodents. More than 600 people have contracted tularemia since 2000, and at least three people have died.<sup>xxxv</sup> “Rat bite fever” is another risk posed by pet rodents. It has a mortality rate of 10% if left untreated, and children now account for more than 50% of the cases in the U.S. due to the growing popularity of rodents as pets.<sup>xxxvi</sup> In addition, raccoons, kinkajous, coatimundis, and skunks can carry raccoon roundworms, which, when transmitted to humans, can result in potentially fatal parasite cysts in the brain, eye, or other organs.<sup>xxxvii</sup>

Sharing a living space with a wild animal creates an opportunity for contracting otherwise avoidable diseases. Close contact between humans and exotic animals is an unnecessary and egregious risk for public health, yet the dangers are mostly overlooked by buyers seeking novelty pets. Given the high probability that the next outbreak of an uncommon disease among humans — even the next global pandemic — will originate with wild animals,<sup>xxxviii</sup> it is common sense to keep them out of homes and communities.

“TAKING AN ANIMAL FROM THE WILD AND PUTTING IT [SIC] IN YOUR CHILD’S BEDROOM IS JUST NOT A GOOD IDEA,” SAID PAUL ARGUIN, A CDC EXPERT ON EXOTIC ANIMAL IMPORTS. “WE JUST DON’T KNOW A LOT ABOUT THE DISEASES THESE ANIMALS CARRY.”

- “DISEASE THREAT FROM EXOTIC PETS COULD RIVAL TERRORIST ATTACK,” FOX NEWS, 2006

This lemur had his teeth removed and “he is not good with kids” >



## COMMUNITY RESOURCES

Private ownership of exotic animals not only threatens public safety, but can also strain the resources of the local community and of rescue organizations. When animals escape or are abandoned by their owners, other people have to deal with the consequences. Neighbors come face-to-face with escaped primates, exotic cats, and other animals who are frightened, erratic, and aggressive. Local police departments, which are poorly equipped to respond to wild animals, are forced to make difficult decisions about how to handle unpredictable situations.

One high-profile instance occurred in Zanesville, Ohio in 2011, when a man released 56 exotic animals from his private farm. These included three primates, of which one baboon was killed and the other two trapped by law enforcement. Muskingum County Sheriff Matt Lutz later explained that the police department had no choice in killing many of the animals, as they were “mature, very big, [and] aggressive” with “high potential” for being dangerous to humans. The incident cost the department \$8,000 in overtime and was deeply traumatic for the police officers and the local citizens. Sheriff Lutz commented that, “It’s just terrible. These killings were senseless. It was nonsense. It was crazy.”<sup>xxxix</sup> No police department should be forced to deal with wildlife in such a dangerous and tragic scenario. It is an undue burden on those who already sacrifice so much to keep communities safe.

Nonprofit organizations must also deal with the consequences of primate ownership, because sanctuaries and rehabilitation facilities become the dumping grounds for unwanted animals. With limited resources, sanctuaries are strained further by each new animal who has nowhere else to go. The Born Free USA Primate Sanctuary, located in south Texas, is a prime example of the difficulties of providing lifetime care to an ever-growing population of discarded pet primates. Many of the primates at the sanctuary were surrendered or rescued from private ownership, and still bear the physical and emotional scars of those circumstances.

For instance, Carly is a female snow monkey who arrived at the Born Free USA Primate Sanctuary in early 2005.<sup>xl</sup> As a former pet, Carly led a particularly sad and lonely existence until animal control officers confiscated her from her owner in Nevada. Carly was kept in a garage with no fresh air, no sunshine, no climbing structure, and no social interaction with others of her species. Her barren



## Human Health and Safety Continued

metal cage was covered with her waste, rotten food, and dirty blankets. Carly had been severely neglected and was not given an adequate diet, being fed primarily junk food. She arrived at the sanctuary slightly overweight, her muscles weak from lack of exercise. She exhibited abnormal behavior such as repetitive rocking back and forth. Carly is now doing much better, and has bonded with two snow monkeys from similar backgrounds.

Khy, a four-year-old male snow monkey who arrived at the Born Free USA Primate Sanctuary in August 2009, is another primate who was sold as a pet.<sup>xli</sup> He was purchased as an infant, but as he matured, he began to display unpredictable behavior by throwing “tantrums” and threatening his owner. She could not handle his energy and aggression, and surrendered him to our sanctuary. Initially, Khy had to be kept in his own enclosure to observe other monkeys as they displayed normal behavior before he could be released to interact with the group. Fortunately for Khy, he was integrated at a young age and so has adapted well, making several friends with other young primates.

While these primates will live out the rest of their lives in a natural and social setting, every sanctuary and rehabilitation facility has a limit on space, finances, and manpower. They simply cannot handle the burden of taking every exotic animal who is discarded. The only solution is to reduce the number of animals in the exotic pet trade.



ABOVE IS CARLY, “BEFORE,”  
NEGLECTED IN HER CAGE.

PHOTO: BORN FREE USA



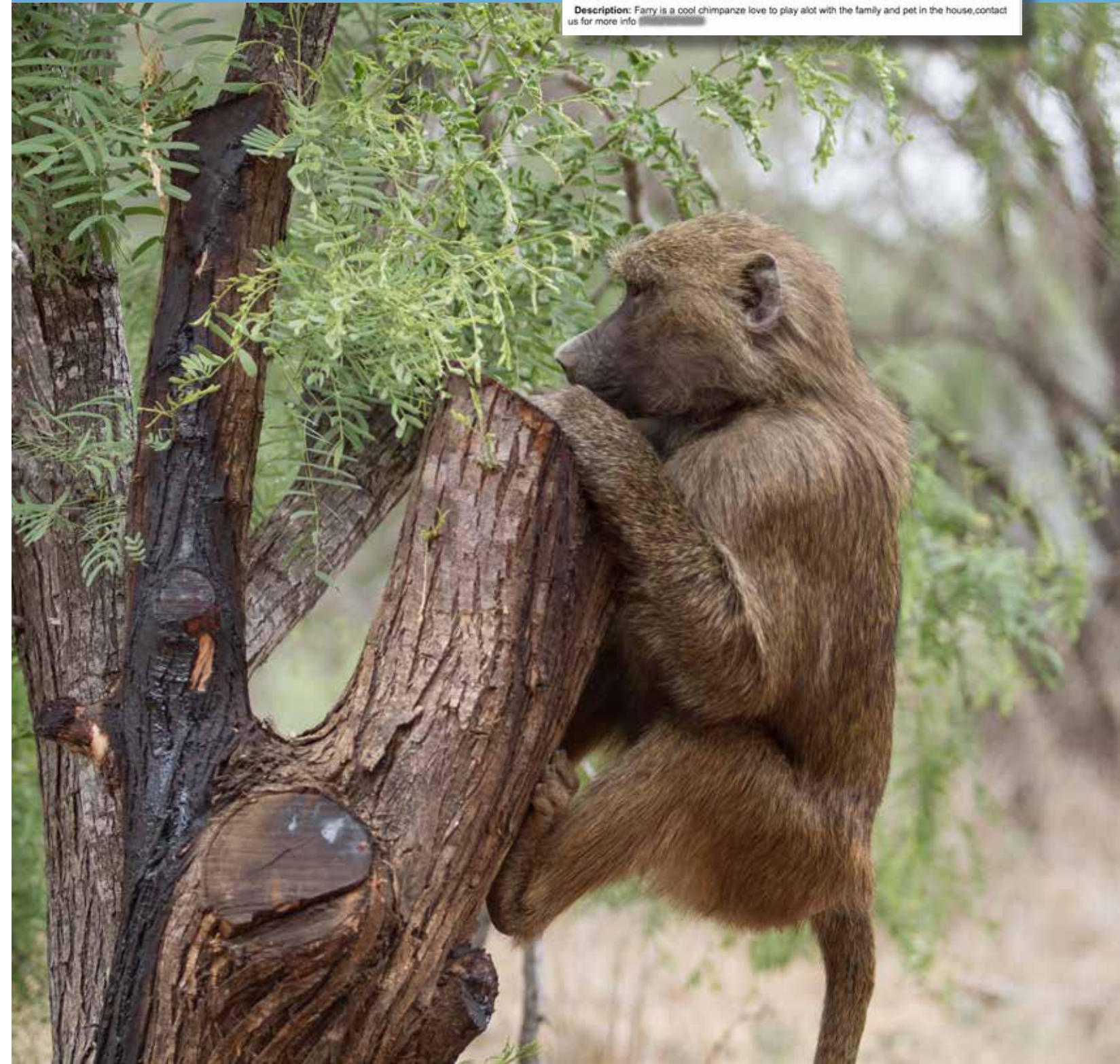
ABOVE IS CARLY TODAY,  
DOING MUCH BETTER  
AT THE BORN FREE USA  
PRIMATE SANCTUARY.

PHOTO: BORN FREE USA /  
MEGAN KNAUSS

TO THE RIGHT IS BUDDY  
HOLLY, A RESCUED  
BABOON AND FORMER PET  
WHO IS NOW A RESIDENT  
OF THE BORN FREE USA  
PRIMATE SANCTUARY.

PHOTO: BORN FREE USA /  
TIM AJAX

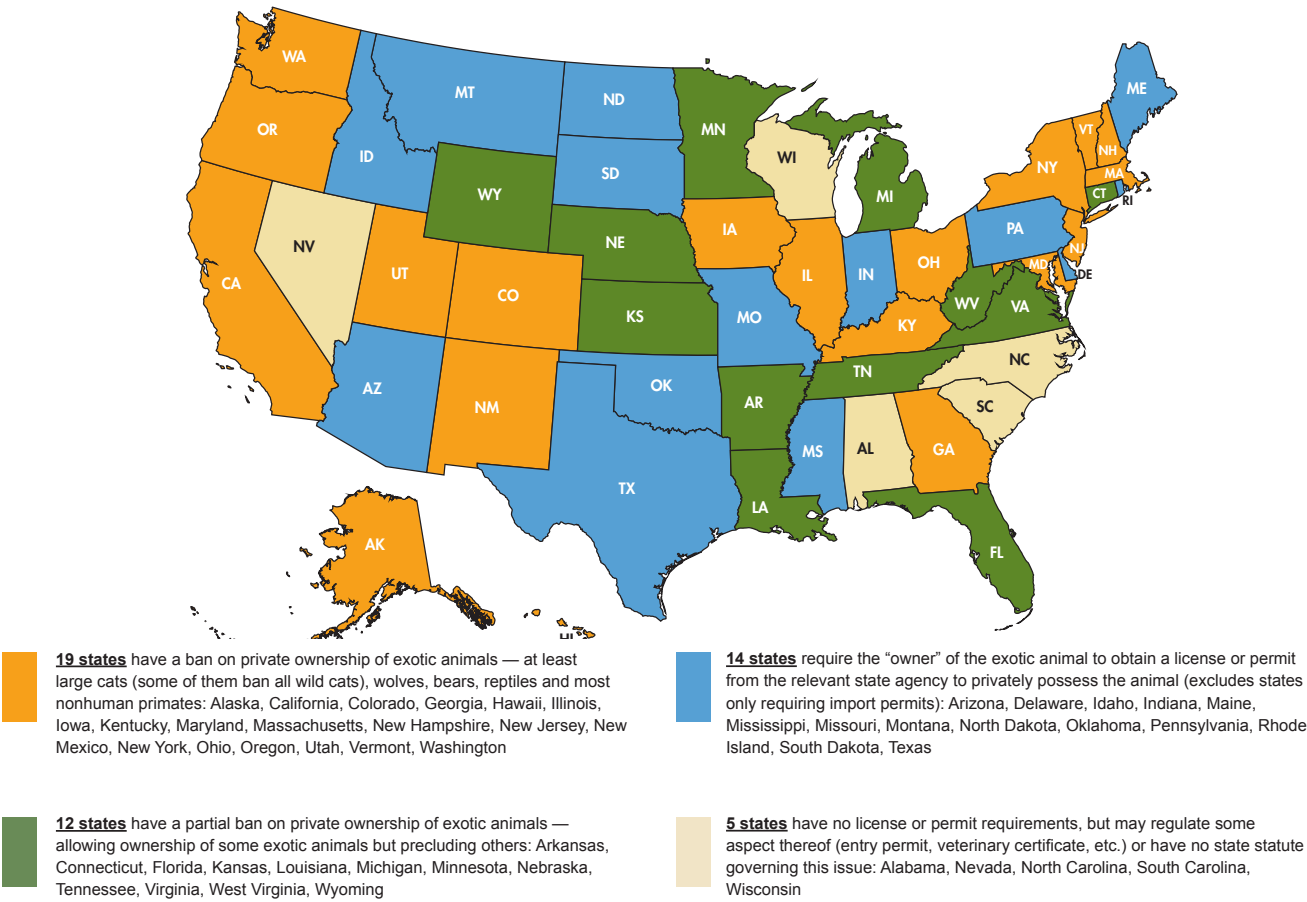
This ad does not warn of the  
dangers of chimpanzees >





The current legal framework for exotic pet ownership is an inconsistent patchwork that undermines enforcement, animal welfare, and public safety. 19 states have a ban on the private ownership of most exotic animals (large cats, wolves, bears, reptiles, and most nonhuman primates). 12 states have a partial ban, allowing the ownership of some exotic animals but not others. 14 states require the pet owner to obtain a license or permit from the relevant state agency, and the remaining five states have no permit requirements whatsoever.<sup>xlii</sup> It is also difficult for a state that prohibits exotic pet ownership to ensure that no animals enter from a neighboring state that lacks equivalent rules. Additionally, it is very challenging to track or verify a seller’s location online, because the person may have intentionally obscured it to circumvent state law.

Summary of State Laws Related to the Private Possession of Exotic Animals:



Ad for "completely harm-  
less" white lion cubs >



To address this issue, a federal law is necessary to create a clarifying and unifying framework. There are currently no federal laws in the U.S. that ban exotic animal ownership in general. However, there is a precedent of federal legislation to regulate the interstate trade of exotic animals. In 2003, President George W. Bush signed the Captive Wildlife Safety Act (CWSA) into law to prohibit interstate commerce of lions, tigers, and other big cats as pets.<sup>xliii</sup> It has had an impact in reducing the big cat trade in the U.S., but the same success must now be replicated for other species.

The CWSA set the stage for a bill that has been introduced several times in Congress, and could drastically reduce the number of primates held in private captivity in the U.S. The Captive Primate Safety Act would prohibit interstate commerce in primates for the exotic pet trade.<sup>xliv</sup> Prohibiting the sale of these animals across state lines would help crack down on the online trade, which promotes interstate sales. Many ads analyzed in this study offered shipping to anywhere in the U.S., or said they would be willing to drive the animal to adjacent states. Making it illegal to cross state lines with a pet primate would severely impede this exploitative business model.

The need for additional federal legislation to address other exotic species is clear, since the trade in reptiles, amphibians, small mammals, and others continues to thrive. There is still a role for state legislatures to play, as well. States that have weak or nonexistent exotic pet laws must pass new legislation to prohibit private ownership of all non-domesticated species, and states with moderately strong laws must improve them by passing species-specific bans. Furthermore, all states with legislation on the books can continue to evaluate and improve their enforcement, ensuring that the relevant agency has adequate funding, resources, and training to respond quickly and remain proactive in addressing illegal pet ownership.

While enforcement of legislation is often insufficient, particularly as it relates to online activity, passing laws remains a crucial component of the fight to shut down online sales of exotic pets.



# Recommendations

The following recommendations are intended to reduce the prevalence of online sales of exotic pets by targeting lax legislation, irresponsible website policies, and a dearth of public knowledge about the trade.

## LEGISLATION

This report provides policymakers with evidence of the severe — and growing — problem of private exotic animal ownership, and the contribution of online sales to this public safety and animal welfare crisis.

- 1) Congress must give serious consideration to the success of the Captive Wildlife Safety Act, and pass additional legislation to ensure that prohibitions on the interstate commerce of exotic pets are expanded to a greater range of species.
  - The Captive Primate Safety Act would prohibit trade of pet primates across state lines, similar to the restrictions already in place against interstate trade of pet big cats. A law against shipping primates to other states would greatly limit the reach of online primate dealers.
  - The Big Cat Public Safety Protection Act, which would prohibit private ownership of big cats entirely, is also crucial to curtail the exotic pet trade. There would be no ambiguity over whether a big cat could be sold as a pet based on the seller’s location.
- 2) Furthermore, a federal law prohibiting an individual from buying an exotic animal in interstate commerce over the internet would ensure that a person could not purchase a non-domesticated pet sight unseen. This trade is so unknown and irresponsible that there should be no sales directly to buyers online.
- 3) Every state should have a law prohibiting the private ownership of exotic animals, and each law should cover the full breadth of the undomesticated species offered for sale. The five states (Alabama, Nevada, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Wisconsin) with no restrictions at all on exotic pet ownership, in particular, must examine a legislative remedy to provide greater oversight and accountability for exotic animal breeders, sellers, and private owners.



PHOTO: WICHALLICA

This ad features young coyote pups for sale >



- 4) The U.S. Department of Agriculture, which is responsible for enforcement of the Animal Welfare Act, should review and revise its licensing system for breeders and exhibitors of exotic animals to ensure that unqualified and unscrupulous breeders, dealers, and owners are not enabled by a lax interpretation of the Act. For instance, breeders and exhibitors should not be automatically re-licensed without a thorough review and inspection of their operation.

## WEBSITE POLICIES

This report provides irrefutable evidence of the volume of online exotic animal sales, and creates a starting place for an informed discussion of how to eliminate ad space for breeders and dealers.

The classified ad websites have a responsibility to ensure that what is sold on their platforms is both ethical and safe. Exotic pet sales meet neither of those criteria, and so *the websites must work to greatly restrict or entirely eliminate the ads for these animals.*

One way to discourage classified ad websites from hosting exotic pet ads is to create a certification for such websites. A classified ad website would need to pledge to prohibit ads containing exotic animals, and this pledge would alert the public that this platform has taken proactive measures to be humane and responsible.

## EDUCATION

It is important for the public to be aware of the origins and consequences of exotic animals who can be purchased online, and refrain from buying them. If demand for these animals drops, then the incentive to supply them will drop, as well, and the ruthless cycle of breeding and buying will diminish. This report provides the general public with accessible information about the animal welfare and public safety risks inherent in exotic pet ownership, and will hopefully discourage easy impulse buys via the internet.

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This ad features two breeding pairs of cavies who "are not pets" >



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This ad offers financing with an "instant decision" >

**Sloth**

Name: Panhandle Exotics  
Posted: 5/6/2016  
Website: [www.PanhandleExotics.com](http://www.PanhandleExotics.com)  
Phone: [REDACTED]  
State: Florida  
Location: Pensacola

3.5 year old male, very sweet!  
Pickup at our store in Pensacola, FL or we can ship to your nearest airport at buyers expense. For more information go to our website [www.PanhandleExotics.com](http://www.PanhandleExotics.com) or come by Panhandle Exotics  
4500 North Palafox St  
Pensacola, FL 32505

Short on cash? FINANCING AVAILABLE!!! Apply online and get an instant decision. To apply go to our website [www.PanhandleExotics.com](http://www.PanhandleExotics.com) and click the financing tab on the top.



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