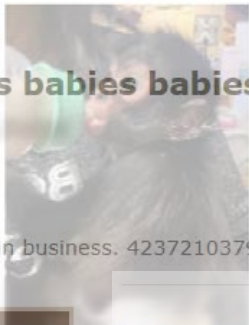




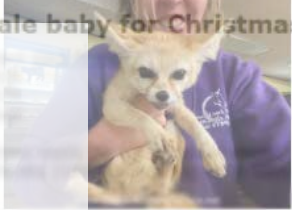
### Marmoset babies babies babies

Marmoset babies 38 years in business. 4237210379 handraised at our ranch .

[View Details](#)



### Spider female baby for Christmas



### Female fe

1 year old female licensed

[View](#)



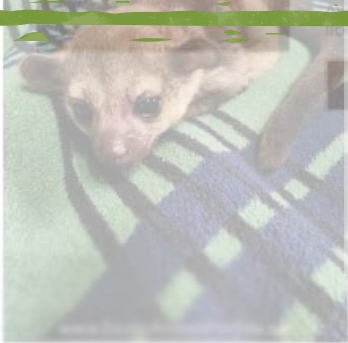
### Screaming Hairy Armadillo, Financing & transport available needed!

### Owl Monkeys



### Two Male Grey Kinkajou

# SELLING SUFFERING: EXPLORING ONLINE SALES OF EXOTIC PETS IN THE U.S.



Male Kinkajou, 9 weeks old, born to a momma, been raised exposed to cats, dogs, and humans. USDA licensed facility

[View Details](#)



[View Details](#)

Baby female tufted capuchin monkey. Others out there. Babies are Awesome temperaments, parent raised, USDA licensed facility

[View Details](#)

### Owl Monkeys

Trusted Seller



2 male owl monkeys. They are 2 years old and are ready to make their own troops. They are available to zoological facilities as exhibit animals. They are parent raised and easy to work around.

[View Details](#)



**BORN FREE USA**

KEEP WILDLIFE IN THE WILD®

**SELLING SUFFERING:**  
EXPLORING ONLINE SALES OF EXOTIC PETS IN THE U.S.

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In the United States, 45% of families share their homes with dogs, and 26% with cats.<sup>1</sup> It is estimated that the total number of cats and dogs combined is around 165.7 million. In addition to domesticated companion animals, an increasing number of people are choosing to purchase a wild, or exotic, animal as a “pet,” despite these animals being woefully unsuited to life in captivity in private homes. Indeed, it is estimated that there are up to 15,000 primates, 7.55 million birds,<sup>2</sup> 6 million reptiles,<sup>3</sup> and likely thousands of big cats kept as pets in the U.S.

In late 2022, the Big Cat Public Safety Act was passed, which banned the private keeping of big cats as pets. Currently owned big cats must be registered with the government and can continue to be kept for their lifetime. No new cats can legally enter the pet trade after the bill was signed into law. The research for this report was carried out prior to the passage of the act but this document has been updated to reflect the new law.

Unlike dogs, who have been living alongside humans for tens of thousands of years and have been domesticated – that is, bred

deliberately to express traits that make them better adapted to living alongside human beings – wild animals have been through no such process. As such, while a dog kept as a companion animal is genetically different from their wolf forebears, a monkey, big cat, or other wild animal kept in a private home retains all the same natural instincts, needs, and adaptations as their free-living counterparts. The restrictive nature of life as a pet therefore affects these wild animals significantly, causing them to suffer substantial physical, psychological, and emotional harm.

Not only does the trade in exotic pets harm the welfare of the animals involved, it also poses a risk to owners who place themselves in dangerously close proximity to wild animals, risking injury, disease transmission, or even death. Where species are captured from the wild, the exotic pet trade additionally jeopardizes species survival and conservation efforts.

All told, the trade in wild animals as pets threatens individual animals and humans, as well as species, and yet the trade continues to grow year on year as people seek unusual animals as “pets” and

ignore the negative consequences.

Historically, buying an exotic animal would mean either attending an auction or tracking down a specialist breeder, but with the explosion of online marketplaces, anyone can now purchase a wild animal at the click of a button.

In 2016, Born Free USA released *Downloading Cruelty: An Investigation into the Online Sales of Exotic Pets in the U.S.* The research discovered thousands of animals for sale on classified ad sites, with availability in almost every state. There were hundreds of primates, big cats, and snakes advertised, and the vast majority of animals for sale were babies. Little care information was provided to potential

buyers with very few posts providing the history of the animals.



1 (2022) 2022 AVMA PET OWNERSHIP AND DEMOGRAPHICS SOURCEBOOK. publication.

American Veterinary Medical Association

2 U.S. pet ownership statistics (no date) American Veterinary Medical Association. Available at: <https://www.avma.org/resources-tools/reports-statistics/us-pet-ownership-statistics> (Accessed: November 8, 2022).

3 *Ibid.*



Overall, the research found a significant, largely uncontrolled trade in wild animals online. In the intervening years, internet usage has only proliferated and this report seeks to update the work carried out in 2016.

In 2022, Born Free USA investigators examined 719 online classified advertisements over a three-month period across four classified ad sites. Overall, sales of exotic pets on these sites were down from the 2016 study. Indeed, in 2016, Born Free investigators found 3,706 ads for exotic pets on the same websites, compared to 1,424 in 2022. It does not appear that the websites themselves have implemented any rule changes that might account for this decrease, so it is unclear why there are fewer than 40% of the ads present in the more recent study, particularly as exotic pet sales are estimated to be growing. We can speculate that sellers are using other platforms, such as social media channels, or setting up their own online shops, which these sellers can establish in mere minutes.

Despite fewer ads being found in the most recent investigation, the trends identified within the ads remained the same as those discovered in 2016, with baby animals being favored for sale, little to no care instructions being provided, and little to no information about potential injury or disease transmission. Specific findings were as follows:

- At least 1,424 individual animals were being offered via 719 individual ads.
- Ads were posted from 41 U.S. states and one unknown location. The states with the highest number of animals for sale were Florida, Ohio, and Illinois.
- There is a wide array of species for sale, including: 210 canine species, 205 primates, 50 wild cats (including big cat species), and 12 marsupials, among others.
- Animals were sold very young, with 180 ads explicitly advertising “baby” or “babies” for sale. Sixty-two percent (62%) (n=446) of the ads were selling animals one year old or younger.
- Little concern appeared to be given to ensuring that the animals went to good homes, where they would be properly cared for, with one ad offering “BOGO” (Buy One, Get One Free) on baby sugar gliders. Another offered to trade a wallaby for firearms. Some buyers offered to trade for other animals.
- The exotic pet trade is big business. The total cost of the animals being offered for sale was \$1,658,292.80.
- Only 20% (144) of all 719 ads demanded that owners ensure that they have the correct permits to own the animals, or that they do research into the legalities of ownership, or provide an experienced home. The remaining

ads made no mention of buyer qualification or licensing.

- The majority of ads did not provide meaningful history for the animals. Many ads (264) provided no information whatsoever and, for those that did, it was often limited to comments such as “really friendly,” “super sweet,” or “tame.” Some ads gave information on vaccinations, but most ads were focused on letting people know whether the animals were used to being handled or not, if they provided any information at all.
- Safety warnings were virtually non-existent with only two of the 719 ads warning that the animal may bite.
- At least 23 animals were listed for sale in six states where their private possession is illegal.





## TERMINOLOGY: DEFINING AN "EXOTIC ANIMAL"

An exotic animal is one that 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 they were 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 rat and mice, hedgehogs, chinchillas, and birds were also excluded from the study, due to limits on the capacity to collect data.

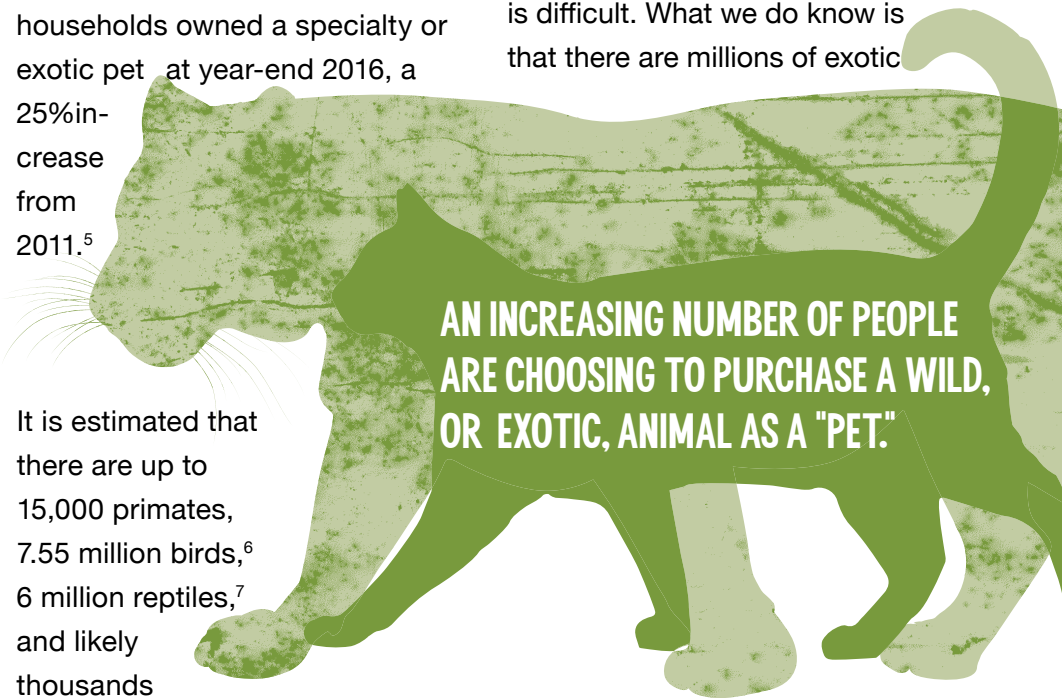
### THE EXTENT OF THE EXOTIC PET TRADE IN THE UNITED STATES

In the United States, 45% of families share their homes with dogs, and 26% with cats.<sup>4</sup> It is estimated that the total number of cats and dogs combined is around 165.7 million. In addition to domesticated companion animals such as cats and dogs, an increasing number of people are choosing to purchase a wild, or exotic, animal as a "pet," despite these animals being woefully unsuited to life in captivity in private homes. Indeed, in 2018, an AVMA published report estimated that more than 13% of U.S. households owned a specialty or exotic pet at year-end 2016, a 25% increase from 2011.<sup>5</sup>

It is estimated that there are up to 15,000 primates,<sup>6</sup> 7.55 million birds,<sup>6</sup> 6 million reptiles,<sup>7</sup> and likely thousands

of big cats kept both legally and illegally as pets in the U.S. We also know that the U.S. imported 3.24 billion live animals from 2000 to 2014<sup>8</sup> with the majority of those animals being taken from the wild and were destined for sale in the pet trade.

Unfortunately, it is impossible to place an exact figure on the number of exotic animals kept as pets in the United States as the lack of regulation surrounding their possession, and lack of data available for those who are kept, means that establishing accurate numbers is difficult. What we do know is that there are millions of exotic



AN INCREASING NUMBER OF PEOPLE ARE CHOOSING TO PURCHASE A WILD, OR EXOTIC, ANIMAL AS A "PET."

4 (2022) 2022 AVMA PET OWNERSHIP AND DEMOGRAPHICS SOURCEBOOK. publication. American Veterinary Medical Association

5 Pet ownership is on the rise (no date) American Veterinary Medical Association. Available at: <https://www.avma.org/blog/pet-ownership-rise> (Accessed: November 8, 2022).

6 U.S. pet ownership statistics (no date) American Veterinary Medical Association. Available at: <https://www.avma.org/resources-tools/reports-statistics/us-pet-ownership-statistics> (Accessed: November 8, 2022).

7 Ibid.

8 Eskew, E.A., White, A.M., Ross, N. et al. United States wildlife and wildlife product imports from 2000–2014. *Sci Data* 7, 22 (2020). <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41597-020-0354-5>



## Screaming Hairy Armadillo, FEMALE! Financing & transport available if needed!

Trusted Seller

Screaming Hairy Armadillo, FEMALE! \*\*\* DO NOT EMAIL! STEP ONE OF OUR ADOPTION PROCESS, READ! WE ARE HAPPY TO ANSWER ANY QUESTIONS, BUT SIMPLY COME BY THE STORE OR CALL US! It is a rare opportunity for Screaming Hairy Armadillos to be available...

[View Details](#)

animals being held captive in situations in which they do not belong and are unable to thrive.

### INTERNET SALES EXACERBATE SUFFERING

The growth in internet use over recent years, and the ease by which items – including live animals – can be listed for sale has unarguably contributed to the growth in exotic pet ownership. Recent research confirmed that global e-commerce is likely to reach \$5.5 trillion in 2022,<sup>9</sup> with 76% of adults in the U.S. choosing to shop online and more than half saying that they prefer online shopping to in-store shopping. In addition to the ease with which the internet can be used to purchase anything from anywhere in the world, the internet is now something that the vast majority of Americans carry around in their pockets; 85% of U.S. residents own a smart phone<sup>10</sup> and

they are becoming the preferred way to shop online.

While the internet is convenient, when dealing with the sale of animals it creates potentially serious issues for animals and buyers alike. Unlike brick-and-mortar pet stores, which are at least minimally regulated in some states, sales of animals online are largely unregulated and even untraceable. Buying animals online means that potential buyers have no opportunity to meet the animal they plan to buy, which means that health status, vaccination status, and

**IN ADDITION TO THE EASE WITH WHICH THE INTERNET CAN BE USED TO PURCHASE ANYTHING FROM ANYWHERE IN THE WORLD, THE INTERNET IS NOW SOMETHING THAT THE VAST MAJORITY OF AMERICANS CARRY AROUND IN THEIR POCKETS.**

behavioral issues among other things, are unknown at the time of purchase. Indeed, the ease by which purchases can be made online encourages impulse buys of animals who, even with significant research and attempts to provide proper care, are wholly unsuited to life as pets.



## Zebra weanlings

Weanling male zebras. Several available. Born and raised in a Drive thru park. Grapeland Tx

[View Details](#)

<sup>9</sup> Barber, R. (2022) Online shopping statistics, facts & trends in 2022, Cloudwards. Available at: <https://www.cloudwards.net/online-shopping-statistics/> (Accessed: November 8, 2022).

<sup>10</sup> Mobile fact sheet (2022) Pew Research Center: Internet, Science & Tech. Pew Research Center. Available at: <https://www.pewresearch.org/internet/fact-sheet/mobile/> (Accessed: November 8, 2022).





## THE STUDY

### METHODOLOGY

Four classified ad websites (exoticanimalsforsale.net, hoobly.com, usfreeads.com, and petzlover.com) were monitored for a period of three months. Between July 2022 and September 2022, each website was checked at least once per week. For every relevant ad posted, data was recorded for a set of variables. These variables included:

- 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.
- 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, food, shelter, enrichment, and special care requirements the animal may have (such as medication).

- Whether the ad specifies if this species could be harmful to humans or other animals in the 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.

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

### KEY FINDINGS

Our research found 1,424 individual animals were being offered via 719 individual advertisements. The true number of individual animals for sale is likely to be higher as some listed “various” animals, “litters” of animals, or other multiples that we were unable to define exactly. In instances where multiple animals were indicated but no exact number was provided, our results estimated two individuals.

Adverts were posted from 41 U.S. states and one unknown location. The states with the highest number of animals for sale were Florida (214), Ohio (148), and Illinois (185). A total number of 94 species of wild animal were advertised for sale, including: 210 canids, 205 primates, 52 cats (including three big cats), and 12 marsupials, among others.

Animals were sold very young, with 180 ads explicitly advertising “baby” or “babies” for sale. Sixty-two percent (62%) (446) of the ads were selling animals one year old or younger. This includes animals



#### Owl Monkeys

Price: \$1,000  
Breed: Owl Monkey  
Age: 2 years  
Gender: Male  
Location: Florida

2 male owl monkeys. They are 2 years old and are bonded but are ready to make their own troops. They are available to zoological facilities as exhibit animals. They are parent raised and easy to work around.

[View Details](#)

such as primates who have years-long natural weaning periods and wallaby joeys listed as “still in mom’s pouch.”

Little concern appeared to be given to ensuring that the animals went to good homes, where they would be properly cared for, with one advert offering “BOGO” (Buy One, Get One Free) on baby sugar gliders, and another offering the option of price negotiation for a quick sale. Those ads that were not asking for a specific price for their animal sometimes offered to trade for other items or animals (both specified and unspecified species), with one seller asking for firearms or parrots in exchange for a wallaby.

The exotic pet trade is big business. The total cost of the animals being offered for sale was \$1,658,292.80. The most expensive animals listed for sale were primates. They represented just 14% of the animals for sale, but 49% (\$812,345.00) of sale prices. The average price for primates was \$8,375.00, with the most expensive primate being sold listed at \$25,000. Canines (including wolf dogs and foxes) represented 14% of animals for sale, but just 4% (\$71,550.00) of sale prices. Rodents were the cheapest of the animals for sale, representing 37% of all animals for sale but just 6% (\$101,893.80) of the sale prices. Rodents such as sugar gliders were listed for sale for an average price of \$413.00.

Only 20% (144) of all 719 adverts demanded that owners ensure that they have the correct permits to own the animals, or that they do research into ownership, or provide an experienced home. Some ads demanded that buyers research the laws in their state, but it was unclear whether or not the sellers would refuse to sell to someone if they lived in a state where keeping the animal was illegal. The remaining ads made no mention of buyer qualification or licensing.

The majority of ads did not provide meaningful history or care instructions for the animals. Many ads (264) provided no information on animal history whatsoever and, for those that did, it was often limited to comments such as “really friendly,” “super sweet,” or “tame,” rather than meaningful information about the individual animal and their history. Some ads gave information on vaccinations, but most were focused on letting people know whether the animals were accustomed to being handled, if they provided any information at all. The majority of ads (603) provided no care instructions whatsoever and those that did were generally limited. Some ads gave information about diet, and others listed what came with the animal. One primate ad told potential buyers that the Sulawesi macaque came with “... a starter pack, her blanket, stuffed animal.” No other useful information was provided. Most additional information about

the animals appeared to be geared towards providing encouragement to buyers, such as “this little guy is full of energy and ready to make you giggle.” Or “Sugar gliders are very sweet and playful and enjoy exploring. They are full of energy.”

Safety warnings were virtually non-existent with only two of the 719 ads warning that the animal may bite, though one of the primate ads confirmed that the monkey had had his teeth removed, a cruel practice that is carried out to prevent biting injuries to the owners.

Some ads were selling animals who are illegal to keep privately in the state where the ad was listed. These included 19 primates listed for sale in six states where private primate ownership is banned. Only one of those sellers was a licensed USDA facility but even this seller made no mention that private keeping of primates in the state (i.e., without a USDA license) is illegal. In California, one big horn sheep and two kinkajous were listed for sale despite being illegal to own privately in the state. One lynx was listed for sale in New York, where their private keeping is prohibited. There may be other animals within the dataset who were listed for sale in areas where their keeping is illegal due to some states devolving jurisdiction to local municipalities on exotic animal ownership.





As outlined earlier in this report, wild animals are not adapted to live in private homes and, when they are forced to, they suffer immensely. Exotic animals kept as pets are usually removed from their mothers at a far younger age than they would naturally separate (if they would separate at all in their natural environment). For example, all primates have long childhoods, and would remain dependent on their mothers for years before making their own way in the world. In the pet trade, they are removed deliberately from their mothers at weeks – and sometimes just days – old so that they can be habituated to being handled by humans. The impact this has on their physical and emotional development cannot be understated.

In primates and other mammals, metabolic bone disease (MBD) is a risk due to the combined effect of premature weaning and lack of access to sunlight. Reptiles and birds also suffer from MBD due to lack of access to UV lighting when held in indoor captive environments. This can have devastating health implications on the individual animals affected.<sup>11</sup> Other animals develop diabetes due to poor nutrition and lack of opportunity to move as they would naturally.

As with humans, this can lead to serious health complications and even death. Diabetes in exotic pets can often go undiagnosed and untreated as owners fail to recognize the signs of the disease's development. Indeed, this is the case with many ailments and diseases in exotic pets as few veterinarians are trained in exotic animal medicine and so even if pet owners wanted to take their animals to the vet, they often struggle to find qualified vets willing or able to treat their animals.

- Primates naturally live in large, complex, multi-family troops.
- Female lions will naturally remain in the same maternal group for their entire lives.
- Sugar gliders naturally live in social groups of up to ten individuals.
- Most bird species form pair bonds for periods of their lives.

These complex social structures are impossible to meaningfully recreate in a private home and so wild animals kept as pets are denied this natural social structure and are often forced to live in complete isolation from their own species. This, plus the necessarily restrictive living conditions provided in a private home, and the lack

of opportunity to express natural behaviors, contributes to poor physical and psychological development.

As animals age and move out of the total vulnerability of childhood, they begin to develop the natural characteristics and behaviors that they would express if they were living in their natural environments. At this point, they can become dangerous to their human owners. Whether it is the large canines of a primate, the sharp claws of a big cat, or the dangerous kick of a kangaroo, wild animals pose significant risk of injury or even death to their owners. To avoid injury, owners may perform physical mutilations on the animal, such as de-clawing or removing teeth to prevent the animal from harming them, or they may further restrict the animal into smaller, more secure environments.

The stress caused by being kept in miserable, solitary, and confined situations creates long-term stress for the individual animal, which they are forced to try and cope with as best they can. This stress often manifests in what are known as stereotypic behaviors – baseless, repetitive behaviors such as pacing, rocking, bar biting, self-grasping, or even self-harming.

11 Kumar, R. (2018) "Metabolic bone diseases of captive mammal, reptile and birds," *Approaches in Poultry, Dairy & Veterinary Sciences*, 3(3). Available at: <https://doi.org/10.31031/apdv.2018.03.000563>.

*A sad example of the harmful health impacts of captivity is Charlie the Japanese macaque – a monkey rescued from the pet trade by Born Free USA in 2018. Charlie had spent seven years as a pet before biting and injuring the grandson of his owner. He was almost killed but local animal advocates intervened to save Charlie's life. When he arrived at the sanctuary, he exhibited extreme signs of stress and aggression. He struggled to socialize with other monkeys, likely due to his unnatural upbringing. After less than a year under the care of the expert staff at the sanctuary, Charlie was found deceased in his enclosure one morning. The reason he had passed was unclear. Despite his mental suffering, he was otherwise fit and healthy. During necropsy, a specialist pathologist found unnatural levels of stress hormones and concluded that his death had been caused by years of compounded stress, which had compromised his immune system to such a devastating extent that it resulted in widespread hemorrhage. Put simply, Charlie died from the stress of being kept as a pet.*

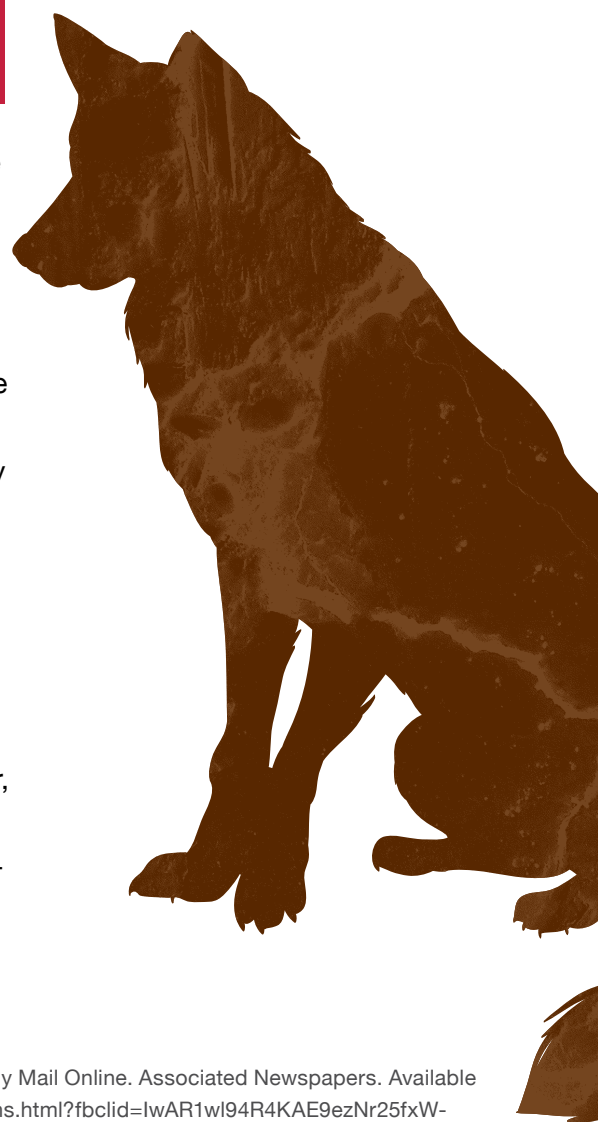
While the idea of having an unusual or exciting animal in your home may be appealing, the impact the cruel trade in exotic pets is far reaching and extremely damaging to both individual animal welfare and species survival. There is no good reason to hold these animals captive in our homes and to deny them the lives – and freedom – they deserve. While the trade in wild animals continues, millions of animals will continue to suffer and die. This is simply unacceptable.

Stereotypic behaviors are common in exotic animals in captivity and are not seen in their free-living counterparts, suggesting that it is captivity itself that triggers these unnatural behaviors. In addition to stereotypies, long-term stress can have a physiological impact on animals, harming their organ function and suppressing their immune system.

Premature death is horrifyingly common in exotic animals kept as pets. Seventy-five percent (75%) of reptiles die within the first year in someone's home<sup>12</sup> and mortality of animals in transit is high.

A *National Geographic* article reported that, between 2000 and

2014, 3.24 billion live animals were imported into the U.S. Half of those animals were taken from their wild homes, and most were destined for the pet trade. The piece goes on to report that, of the 41.5 million marine aquarium animals imported each year, mortality rates range from 5% - 90%. Birds too, the article confirms, suffer immensely, with conservationists estimating that before the import ban on many wild-caught bird species, for 700,000 individuals brought into the country each year, 3.5 million more had died.<sup>13</sup> In this way, it is not just deaths of individual animals that is of concern, but the very survival of species.



12 Victoria Allen for the Daily Mail (2017) Reptiles should not be kept as pets, expert warns, Daily Mail Online. Associated Newspapers. Available at: [https://www.dailymail.co.uk/sciencetech/article-5022473/Reptiles-not-kept-pets-expert-warns.html?fbclid=IwAR1wI94R4KAE9ezNr25fxWE1jX7yssYObW7yWCK6NfP-CPVj9\\_2BeGwH30](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/sciencetech/article-5022473/Reptiles-not-kept-pets-expert-warns.html?fbclid=IwAR1wI94R4KAE9ezNr25fxWE1jX7yssYObW7yWCK6NfP-CPVj9_2BeGwH30) (Accessed: November 8, 2022).

13 Nuwer, R. (2021) Many exotic pets suffer or die in transit, and beyond-and the U.S. government is failing to act, Animals. National Geographic. Available at: <https://www.nationalgeographic.com/animals/article/exotic-pets-suffer-wildlife-trade> (Accessed: November 8, 2022).



## HUMAN HEALTH AND SAFETY

The risk to human health and safety caused by keeping exotic wild animals as pets is significant. Including bites and scratches, zoonotic disease spread, and lifechanging injury or even death – when wild animals are brought into the unnatural setting of a family home – there are countless ways in which things can go terribly wrong for all involved.

Big cats, whose keeping has now been restricted, and primates kept as pets, are among the most dangerous and can seriously injure or even kill their owners, but even smaller animals can cause serious harm.

Perhaps the most well-known incident relating to an exotic pet is the tragic story of Charla Nash and Travis the chimp. Travis had been kept as a pet by Nash's neighbor for many years and knew Nash well. One day he turned on her and attacked her without warning. The chimp destroyed large parts of Nash's face and hands. Even when his owner stabbed Travis with a butcher's knife, the attack did not stop. When police officers arrived at the scene, Travis left Nash and tried to get into the police car. He was shot but this still did not kill him outright. He finally returned to his cage where he died from his injuries. Nash went on to have a grueling 20-hour surgery to perform a face transplant which was largely successful.

***Below are some of the other incidents involving exotic animals collated by Born Free USA in the last few years:***

**September 9, 2021 – INDIANA**

Maliki, a five-year-old vervet monkey arrived at the Born Free USA Primate Sanctuary. He had been kept as a pet in a private home since he was a baby. As he grew older, he became more and more aggressive and bit his owner badly on her hand. As a result, the woman surrendered him into the care of the sanctuary. Sadly, Maliki died a very short time after arrival due to long-standing and previously undiagnosed heart condition.

**June 11, 2021 – RENO, CA**

Gebbe, a pigtailed macaque, escaped from his home in Reno and injured four people. Brenda O'Mealia, the victims' attorney, said Gebbe also bit two other children in the neighborhood.

**October 29, 2020 – DAVIE, FL**

A man had to undergo multiple surgeries after he was attacked by a leopard.

It happened after he paid \$150 to have "a full-contact experience" with the wild animal. Detectives with the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) say the attack happened in an enclosure at a south Florida home owned by Michael Poggi. Investigators say the victim paid Poggi to play with the big cat, rub [their] belly, and take pictures.

**February 5, 2020 – SHAWANO, WI**

Diane Wilke was hired by Rita Mondus and her husband to paint a mural in their Shawano, Wisconsin home. While there, she was bitten by the couple's pet lemur. She suffered permanent nerve damage and now lives with post-traumatic stress disorder.

In another incident, the Modus' neighbor was bitten by the lemur when she went round to leave groceries on the porch of the house.

**October 30, 2019 – OXFORD, IN**

A 36-year-old woman was strangled to death by a pet python. Medics who



responded to the scene “attempted life saving measures” but could not revive her, state police said.

#### **June 23, 2019 – BLOOMINGTON, IL**

A woman and her child were hospitalized after being attacked by an exotic cat. Residents said the large cat was walking down the sidewalk when it attacked the child. The child’s mother intervened and was able to distract the animal. A police sergeant on the scene said the cat was a caracal who escaped from a nearby home. Officials said the animal lunged at animal control and police and was subsequently shot and killed.

#### **April 13, 2019 – ALACHUA COUNTY, FL**

A man died after he was attacked by an exotic bird he was keeping on his property. Alachua County sheriff’s deputies say the 75-year-old was breeding the rare birds, called cassowaries. The man was killed inside the bird’s pen when he was trying to retrieve an egg from one of the birds, and the bird attacked.

#### **February 12, 2019 – LEE COUNTY, VA**

A baby was mauled to death by a wolf/dog hybrid belonging to his parents. The animal was later killed.

These are just a few of the incidents reported in recent years. Other incidents include children being bitten by monkeys; the owner of a king cobra being hospitalized after being bitten; a ball python biting a four-year-old child in the chest – the owner decapitating the snake to get the animal off the child; a man fracturing his arm after being attacked by a zebra; and an Asian jungle cat mauling a two-year-old, who required 200 stitches. Given the extent of the trade, the number of incidents reported is likely to be a tiny percentage of those that actually occur.

In addition to the risk of injury from exotic pets, there is a significant risk of disease transfer from animal to human, and vice versa; this is known as zoonotic disease spread. In recent years, we have all learned more about the devastating im-

pact of zoonotic disease from the COVID-19 pandemic, thought to have originated in non-human animals and jumped to humans at a “wet market” where wild animals are crowded together and slaughtered in unhygienic situations in close proximity to humans.<sup>14</sup> While the COVID-19 pandemic is an extreme case of what can happen when disease crosses the species barrier, individual wild animals can pass extremely dangerous diseases to humans on an individual basis. These include transmission of tuberculosis, Ebola, and Herpes B (a disease fatal in 80% of human cases if left untreated),<sup>15</sup> among others, from primates. Humans can also contract salmonella from reptiles and a form of chlamydia from birds. According to the World Health Organization, there are currently 200 recognized zoonotic diseases and they comprise a

large percentage of new and existing diseases in humans.<sup>16</sup>

The risk of injury when keeping exotic animals as pets is clear and, far too often, it is not just humans who are injured. Animals who attack people will, more often than not, be killed – either in the moment in the case of an escape, or after the fact to prevent further injury to their owners. Some of the very few lucky ones may be rehomed to a sanctuary but, with sanctuaries around the country operating at capacity, only a tiny number of individuals are given this second chance. When we consider, too, the risk of disease spread involved in keeping wild animals in our homes, it becomes obvious that the exotic pet trade is not just a threat to animal welfare but presents a very real risk to human health and safety.

14 Maxmen, A. (2022) Wuhan market was epicentre of pandemic's start, studies suggest, Nature News. Nature Publishing Group. Available at: <https://www.nature.com/articles/d41586-022-00584-8> (Accessed: January 20, 2023).

15 Tan, R., 2021. China reports its first death of a human from rare Monkey B virus. The Washington Post. Available at: <https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2021/07/19/monkey-b-virus-chinahuman/>

16 Zoonoses (no date) World Health Organization. World Health Organization. Available at: <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/zoonoses> (Accessed: November 8, 2022).



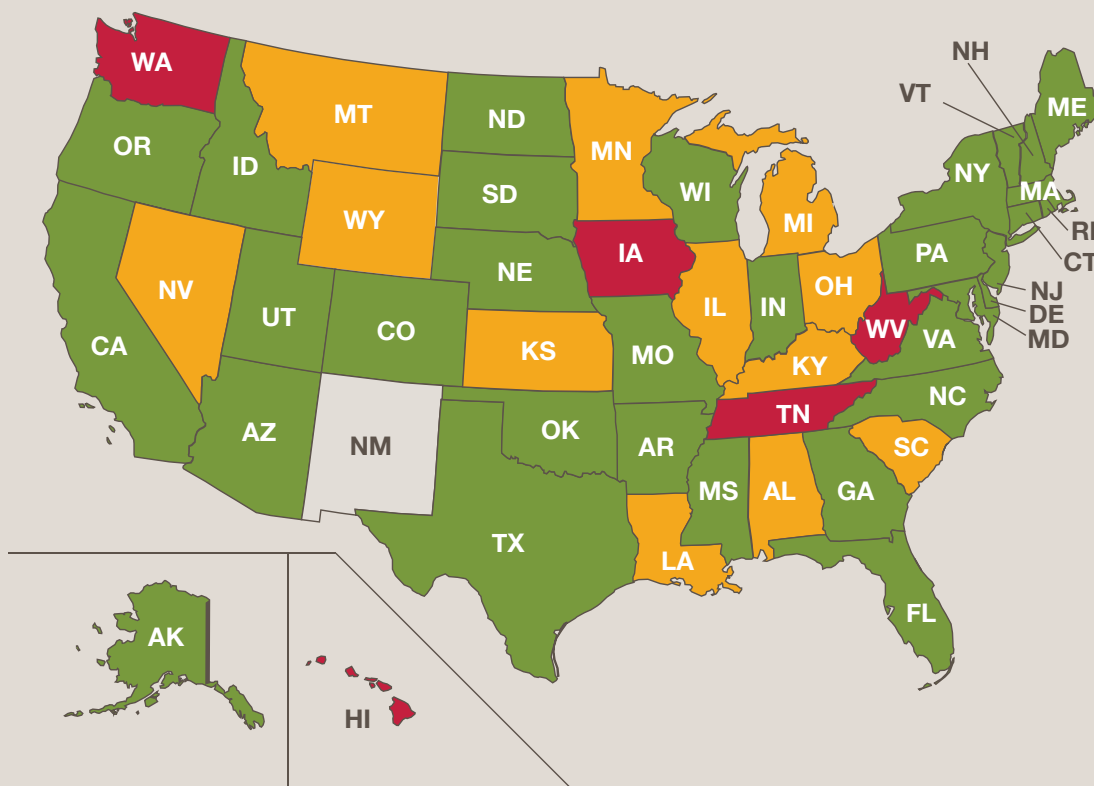
## LEGISLATION

While a handful of federal laws exist with the goal of protecting wild animals in the United States, including the Lacey Act (1900), the Animal Welfare Act (1966), and the Endangered Species Act (1973), most legislation is enacted and enforced at the state level. In 2022, the legislation pertaining to private

wild animal ownership throughout the country differs widely between each state and remains negligent of public health and safety, animal welfare, wildlife conservation concerns, and ethical issues; 66% of the country allows ownership of the most dangerous wild animal species with the acquisition of a

permit or license (but little to no husbandry experience or knowledge of the animals' needs or history required), 24% of the country requires a partial ban on some animal species, and only 10% of the country has a full ban on all wild animals.

### WILD ANIMAL OWNERSHIP LAWS IN THE U.S. IN 2022



- As of the publication of this report, just five states have enacted a comprehensive ban on private wild animal ownership (Hawaii, Iowa, Tennessee, Washington, and West Virginia).
- Twelve states have adopted a partial ban on some species but not all (Alabama, Illinois, Kansas, Kentucky, Louisiana, Michigan, Minnesota, Montana, Nevada, Ohio, South Carolina, and Wyoming).
- Thirty-three states required a permit, license, and/or another form of registration for legal ownership (Alaska, Arizona, Arkansas, California, Colorado, Connecticut, Delaware, Florida, Georgia, Idaho, Indiana, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, Mississippi, Missouri, Nebraska, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New Mexico, New York, North Carolina, North Dakota, Oklahoma, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, South Dakota, Texas, Utah, Vermont, Virginia, and Wisconsin).



## Kinkajou

Male Kinkajou, 9wks, eating solid food. This boy is small like his momma, been raised in our home, underfoot. He has been exposed to cats, dogs and older children. Very social and loves to snuggle! USDA facility. This boy will come with a care...

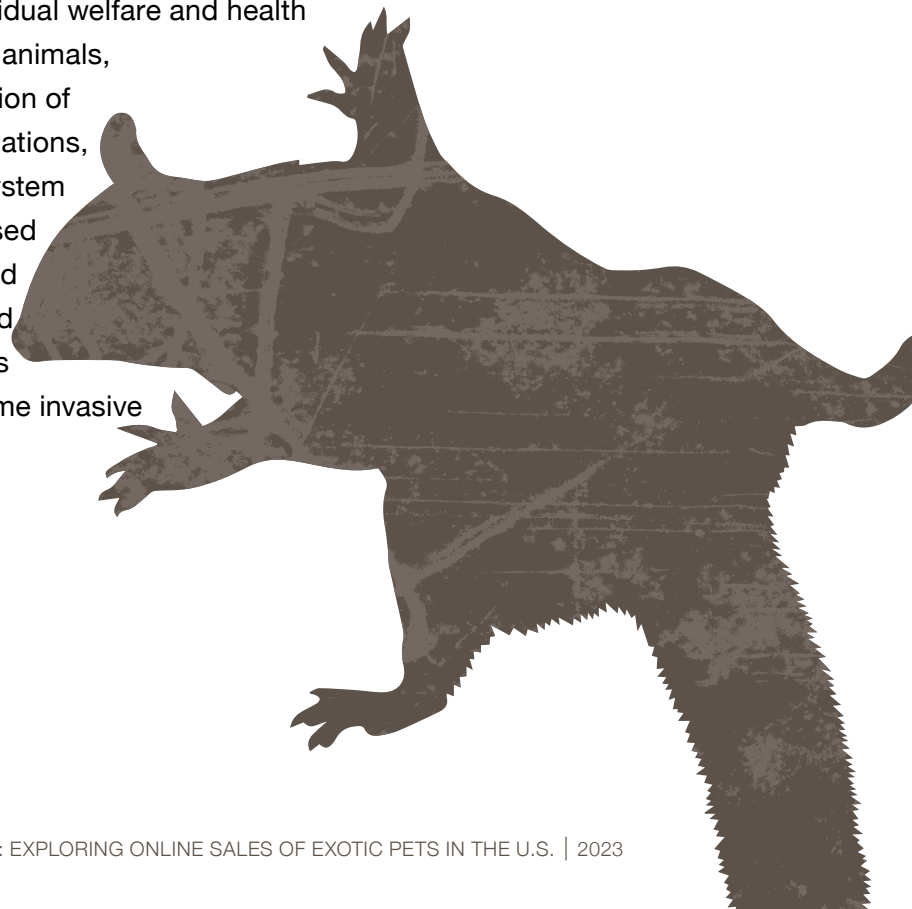
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The only states that were included in the comprehensive ban category were those states that had some version of the statement: “No person shall possess any wildlife including, but not limited to, the following species” or “any potentially dangerous wild animal” in their legislation. States that only regulated certain species or taxa as “dangerous,” “controlled,” “regulated,” “protected,” or otherwise “prohibited” were included in the partial ban category.

Due to the patchwork nature of these laws, which functionally blurs the differences in legality that exist between states regarding wild animal ownership, breeding, and transportation (potentially masking the occurrence and enforcement of illegal wildlife trafficking within the country), the United States requires a federal ban on all exotic animal ownership as the only effective means to adequately prohibit this harmful practice.

As such, legislation like the Big Cat Public Safety Act, which has now been enacted, and Captive Primate Safety Act, which remains in draft form, exemplify effective solutions to the national and global issues that private wildlife ownership and the exotic animal trade cause and prolong, including zoonoses transmission, public safety risks from potentially deadly attacks or escapes, extremely poor individual welfare and health of captive animals, the depletion of wild populations, and ecosystem harm caused by released or escaped exotic pets that become invasive species.

**THE UNITED STATES REQUIRES A FEDERAL BAN ON ALL EXOTIC ANIMAL OWNERSHIP AS THE ONLY EFFECTIVE MEANS TO ADEQUATELY PROHIBIT THIS HARMFUL PRACTICE.**







## RECOMMENDATIONS

### LEGISLATION

The most effective way to end the suffering of wild animals kept as pets, and to protect humans from coming into close contact with wild animals, is to ban their private possession.

Following the introduction of the Big Cat Public Safety Act at the end of 2022, there remains one piece of federal legislation under consideration – the Captive Primate Safety Act – which, if enacted, would remove some of the more dangerous animals (primates) from the U.S. pet trade and protect these complex animals from further generations of suffering.

An additional federal law to prohibit sale of wild animals over the internet would be a step in the right direction and would ensure that wild animals cannot be purchased sight-unseen.

to protect wild animals and humans from the dangers of the exotic pet trade. Some states, such as Hawaii and Tennessee, have comprehensive bans in place for some or various wild animal species but these laws are undermined by other states continuing to allow the keeping of wild animals as pets. Our research has shown that, even where private ownership of certain species is banned, these species may still be on sale within state lines. This will continue to be the case while the trade remains largely unregulated across large parts of the country. State-level legislation to prohibit the trade is vital.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) should review and revise its licensing system for breeders and exhibitors to ensure that unscrupulous breeders, dealers, and owners are not enabled by a lax interpretation of the law. This includes ensuring that licenses are not automatically reviewed without thorough inspection.

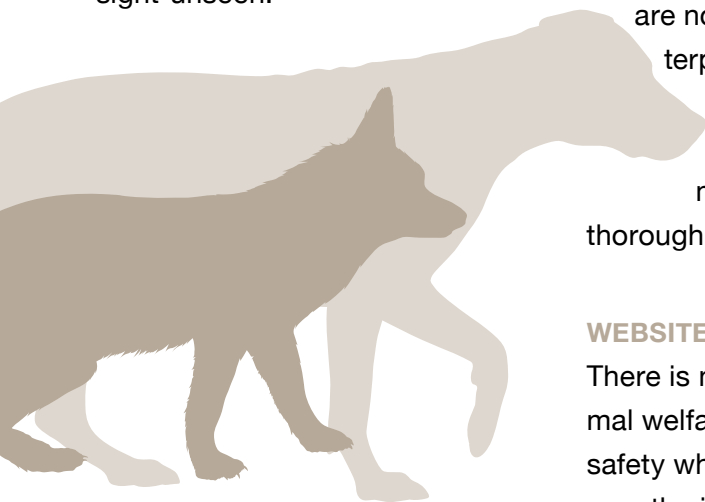
### WEBSITE POLICIES

There is no way to guarantee animal welfare and human health and safety when wild animals are sold over the internet. Platforms that host the classified ads that have been investigated as part of this report, and social media platforms,

where animal sales are rife, must take steps to prohibit live animal sales. Prohibition is, however, only the first step. Once policies have been introduced, they must be effectively enforced. For example, in theory, the sale of live animals is prohibited on Facebook marketplace, but we are aware that sales continue to be listed. Indeed, Born Free USA rescued an illegally kept pet monkey in late 2021 whose former owner confirmed he had been purchased on Facebook by her boyfriend. Other ads selling exotic animals on Facebook and other social media platforms have been uncovered in work carried out by Asia for Animals' Social Media Animal Cruelty Coalition (SMACC).

### EDUCATION

The purpose of this report, and the wider work of Born Free USA, is to raise awareness surrounding the issues related to the keeping of wild animals in captivity to facilitate meaningful change. We hope that, by outlining the dangers that the exotic pet trade presents for both animals and humans, we can help to reduce demand for wild animals as pets. We also work with law makers to ensure that they are properly apprised of the realities of the trade in exotic animals so that they can make informed policy decisions.



At a state level, more states need to introduce comprehensive laws



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