



## **Questions and Answers about keeping Wild and Exotic Animals in captivity.**

*By Zuzana Kukol, August 2007*



### **1. Should private individuals be allowed to Keep Wild and Exotic Animals as Pets?**

Yes, absolutely. Habitat of many wild and exotic animals is disappearing due to human encroachment, and the only way to save many species from extinction is thru captive breeding. Since it is us humans encroaching on their wild habitat, it is our responsibility to offer them an alternative captive habitat so they can survive into the next millennium.

Nobody is born an expert on captive animal husbandry, and the best way to become one is thru hands on experience and close personal contact.

Unlike domestic animals, most commonly kept exotics are small and relatively easy to take care of. Many books and care sheets are available in pet stores and

on the Internet. Online Elists are also a great way to meet fellow pet owners and ask for more advice on how to become a better educated owner.

Majority of exotics sold in pet market are captive bred and don't require as much space or attention as a dog would. Allergy is also less of a problem with pet reptiles for example than with a domestic cat.

This makes small exotic animals a perfect pet for apartment dwellers or a kid with allergies or asthma. Pet ownership also teaches kids about unconditional love and responsibility by caring for another creature.

Many veterinarians, zoologists, researchers and animal trainers wouldn't be in the business now if they didn't own wild animals as a child. We can never know which child or exotic pet owner will grow up to be our next conservationist, zoo director, biologist or wild animal trainer. Only thru close personal contact can we really understand and appreciate these wonderful creatures. Love and dedication for them cannot be taught through books.

## **2. Is a ban on exotic and wild animal ownership ever justified?**

No, never, especially not in America, where freedom to choose our animals is as important to us as freedom of speech or the air we breathe.

You often hear a phrase that "*exotic animals are not for everybody*", and I couldn't agree more. Most people who choose to share their life with wild and exotic animals do understand special care and considerations needed to keep them. They often live far away from amenities of a comfortable city life, give up extended (or any) vacations just to be able to share their lives with their exotic animals.

Just like we have few sensationalized cases of bad parenting or domestic animal ownership, we have few cases of bad exotic animal ownership. These extremely isolated incidents should never be used as a reason to punish the responsible majority of exotic owners, just like one case of child abuse shouldn't be a reason to ban human reproduction and parenting.

## **3. Are there any serious public safety risks associated with exotic animals?**

Domestic animals cause many more injuries and fatalities than their exotic counterparts, so exotics are less of a public safety risk. But even with domestics, the risk of dying is extremely low compared to **risks we encounter in everyday life** from fellow humans, such as car accidents, murders or natural disasters.

In the USA, only one person dies per year as a result of attacks by captive big cats, 1.5 by captive reptiles, 0.81 by captive elephant, 0.125 by captive bear and 0 by captive non-human primate. In comparison, 45,000 people die each year in traffic accidents, 47 by lightning, and 1,600 by falling from stairs.

Human to human disease transmission is responsible for more diseases than exotics to human transmission.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) reports, that food borne diseases cause approximately 76 million illnesses, 325,000 hospitalizations, and 5,000 deaths in the United States each year.

According to a **CDC study** 1.4 million human Salmonella infections and an estimated 600 associated deaths occur each year in the United States, but only 6% of them is associated with reptile or amphibian contact. However, less than 1% of human Salmonella infections are caused by the “reptile-associated” serotypes (reptile only specific salmonella strain).

This means is that many **captive reptiles might not be the primary source of infection**; they got infected by their food, raw chicken, eggs and vegetables, the same food their human owners ate.

When the veterinary officer from the CDC's Division of Global Migration and Quarantine National Center for Preparedness, Control and Detection of Infectious Diseases was asked recently if there was any disease transmission between a nonhuman primate and a human in the USA, the answer was that when it comes to Herpes B virus, simian immunodeficiency virus (SIV), Simian foamy virus, and Ebola Reston, "**none of these have actually caused disease.**"

Many animal rights (AR) activists **sensationalize exotic animal attacks** and are presenting exotic animal ownership as a public safety issue to scare the public, but there are no facts to back it up. This fraud and fear mongering has to stop.

Exotic animal related fatalities are extremely rare and mostly affect owners and handlers, which is a hobby/occupational hazard associated with their profession, but not a public safety risk. This is not any different than sky diver dying in a jump or firefighter dying in a fire, yet, we don't see calls to ban firefighters or sky diving.

#### **4. Are Exotic and Wild Animals causing damage to our environment?**

With few exceptions in southern climates, even if accidentally escaped or released, most exotics can not survive in the majority of our climate or harm native wildlife unlike feral cats, which are very adaptable and can survive anywhere and harm local wildlife and cause damage to the ecosystem. Most state wildlife agencies already have rules regulating possession of so called ‘detrimental’ wildlife.

#### **5. Is it true that most exotic animal owners abuse their animals?**

No, this is pure AR propoganda. Their real goal is abolishing all human/animal

contact and to end all animal use; no animals in captivity, not even domestic pets, no farm animals and no leather goods...

Owning exotics, especially big predators, requires lots of financial investment and personal commitment on the part of the owner. Why would these owners invest so much time and money, give up so much of their personal freedoms and spent so much time fighting for their rights to keep their cherished pets if they didn't love them? That makes no sense.

There is lots of personal sacrifice involved to own them, however, the exotic animal owners don't see it as a sacrifice; they fight for their animals out of unconditional love for them.

Animals have to be in top physical and mental condition to perform in entertainment or to breed and raise young. Yet, tigers reproduce in captivity very easily, and there are more tigers in captivity than in the wild where their numbers are taking a steep downhill turn. This alone is the proof captive exotics are well taken care of, and if our government ceased to intervene with private ownership, the tiger and other exotics could be saved by the private sector with no cost to our government and taxpayers.

Many more veterinarians are also getting more knowledgeable about the subject of treating exotics.

If extreme AR activists claim there are so many abuse cases, how come we don't have more court cases and convictions related to them? Where are the facts and proofs, instead of hearsay?

## **6. Are all the exotic and wild animal bans a waste of our government's resources and taxpayers' money, as well as attacks on our personal freedoms?**

Yes, bans on exotic and wild animals is a waste of our government's resources, waste of tax payers' money, and a serious attack to our Constitutional freedoms and right to pursue liberty and happiness. Since there is no public safety issue, these bans solve nothing, cost too much and give people an artificial feeling of safety or accomplishment, since their real safety in real life didn't improve with these bans.

## **7. What is an 'animal use' and why are animals 'our property'?**

Under US legal system, animals are considered property. Americans value and cherish their property: land, house, animals... If animals were not our property, anybody could come and take our animals without permission and we wouldn't have a legal recourse, farmers couldn't sell meat or leather and breeders and pet stores couldn't sell us our pets.

Examples of different animal uses include: pet ownership, zoos, rodeos, therapy

animals including guide dogs, law enforcement dogs, farming for food (eggs, milk, meat), farming for goods (leather, fur), 4-H programs, medical research, animals in entertainment and education, hunting and others. We need to keep the word 'owner' rather than guardian to keep the right to legally own and cherish our beloved animals.

### **8. What is the threat of AR movement? How will it cause pets to become extinct and end most if not all animal uses?**

By banning certain species or breeds of animals from private ownership, and by forcing spay/neuter laws, many types of animals will be regulated to eventual extinction. By outlawing certain farming practices, or making government regulations so extremely expensive to comply with that animal farmers will either go bankrupt or will have to raise meat, eggs, milk and leather prices extremely high, only very rich will be able to afford it. As a result, most of us will be forced to become vegans and will not be able to keep and feed most of our animals. Many captive animals like exotic cats, large lizards and snakes, are strict carnivores. Feeding carnivore a vegan diet in itself is considered abusive and will lead to an eventual premature death. This process will lead to an eventual pet, and any other animal use, extinction.

### **9. Why are our legislators passing these extreme laws and bans?**

Many are truly just naïve and misinformed, some have been brainwashed by extreme animal right agendas and their well paid lobbyist. Remember, the extreme AR movement is composed of people making lots of money of purported animal suffering: the bigger the abuse story, the more donations for the group and higher salaries for their officers.

It is the extreme money hungry AR groups making money off the supposed animal suffering.

They have shown little or no concern over the displaced pets that might have to be placed in a crowded sanctuary or euthanized if new ban or extreme regulation (expensive liability insurance requirement) is passed. Exotic animals like big cats get very attached to their original owners, and unfair bans forcing them out of their loving homes is a form of abuse in itself.

***It is the misinformed legislators, together with AR groups, who are the biggest threat to our animals. They are the ones sentencing endangered wildlife to a certain death by regulating them to extinction in captivity. If the wild habitat is disappearing and captive habitat is outlawed, where are the animals supposed to go?***

### **10. What can we do?**

Educate your legislators, friends and family about the threat these bans pose to the wildlife as well as to our freedoms. Contact your legislators and tell them to oppose all exotic and wild animal bans.

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