



Reptiles and Amphibians as Companion Animals

THE FACTS

September 2012



European Union Association
of Reptile Keepers



A source of specialist information and assistance

EUARK credentials

EUARK draws on the experience and resources of reptile experts from across Europe. As a model EUARK uses the experience of British reptile enthusiasts who have been engaged in the political and legislative process for almost two decades. The Federation of British Herpetologists (FBH) and the Reptile and Exotic Pet Trade Association (REPTA) were formed to challenge the flawed arguments presented by animal rights groups and to represent the legitimate interests of reptile keepers.

The European Union Association of Reptile Keepers (EUARK) was formed in April 2012 to provide specialist data, information, research and comment to European legislative and media organisations. EUARK is not a campaigning group but a representative body which aims to be a source of specialist information and promotes high standards of welfare and responsible ownership.

EUARK isn't a campaigning group, but rather aims to be a source of specialist information and assistance to all stakeholders working with reptiles in Europe.

EUARK is a not for profit organisation and receives no government or other political funding. Our work is funded through donations from herpetological hobbyists and businesses.

EUARK aims to provide legislators and stakeholders in the EU with the same support, data, research, expertise and experience that is available in the UK. Representatives and experts from both the FBH and REPTA are engaged on the board of EUARK.

Headed and supported by specialists and experienced herpetologists from across Britain, REPTA and the FBH exist to promote and support the responsible keeping of reptiles and amphibians. Backed by herpetological societies and commercial companies across the UK, these organisations represent the largest collective of experienced amateur and professional reptile experts in Britain. REPTA and the FBH work closely with responsible animal welfare organisations, the media and with local and national government regulatory bodies:

- Associate Parliamentary Group for Animal Welfare (APGAW)
- Partnership for Action Against Wildlife Crime (PAW)
- [CITES] Joint Liaison Group (JLG)
- Pet Advertising Advisory Group (PAAG)
- Companion Animal Sector Council (CASC)
- Sustainable Users Network (SUN)
- Pet Advisory Committee (PAC)



“It is estimated that there are now more pet reptiles than pet dogs in the UK”

Reptile and Exotic Pet Trade Association



Reptiles as companion animals

Research conducted in the UK provides valuable insight into many aspects of the trade in pet reptiles. The figures reproduced here are used by the boards and governing bodies of various parliamentary groups that utilise the specialist data available from REPTA and the FBH.

EUARK is conducting ongoing research to establish data pertaining to the trade across Europe. Figures available from European manufacturers and suppliers suggest that the German pet reptile trade alone is significantly larger than in the UK, with similar market values per capita being estimated for the Netherlands, Belgium, France, the Czech Republic and Spain. Current estimates put the total value of the European pet reptile trade at in excess of one billion Euros.

Read all about it!

Pet Marketing Services is the UK's largest distributor of books on companion animals. Their catalogue lists 200 titles on reptiles compared with only 136 on cats and 104 on horses.

£200 Million – Value of the reptile sector of the UK pet industry in 2012¹

£5.9 Billion – UK Pet trade overall value in 2010²

Eight Million – Reptile pets in the UK

1.1 Million – UK households keeping reptiles

1,000 – Vivariums sold per week in the UK by just one manufacturer

250,000 – Reptiles and amphibians bred in the UK each year, and this is increasing annually

Over 1,000 – Number of stores selling reptiles in the UK

1. REPTA 2008

2. National Office of Statistics

Food glorious food

In 2004 UK cricket farms were producing around ten million crickets a week. Today's data puts the figure at 25 million crickets each week.

It is estimated that over 2,000,000 frozen mice are sold each week for snake food.

REPTA 2012



Reptiles – the responsible owners' choice

There are similar numbers of pet dogs and pet reptiles in the UK. However, RSPCA figures¹ show that rescued dogs outnumber rescued reptiles by 25–1

Reptile welfare MATTERS

“It was a pleasure to meet Richard, but please do not think for a moment that he is alone. He is typical of nearly everyone I met at the show and very far removed from the rabid, ill informed and scaremongering animal rights description of them”³

Tim Wass MBE – Independent animal welfare advisor and former chief inspector with the RSPCA

Enhancing and improving welfare is at the very heart of EUARK's policy and commitment profile and we are keen to promote and advocate suitably high standards across every aspect of reptile keeping. Reptile welfare and husbandry standards are demonstrably high and there is extensive data to show that reptiles make exceptionally suitable pets.

Companion Animal Welfare Council (UK government advisors on animal welfare) said in a report² on non-domesticated pets kept as companions:

“it may be easier to keep some non-domesticated species to high welfare standards than some that are domesticated. Thus, meeting all the requirements – space, dietary, social, thermal, and so on – of a small, hardy, reptile may be more readily achievable for many people than adequately fulfilling all the needs of some breeds of dog”²

Reptile husbandry standards and our understanding of reptile care and breeding and have mushroomed since herpetology became a mainstream hobby some twenty years ago. Thanks to the private sector there have been vast improvements in husbandry protocols and important breakthroughs in microclimate enhancing equipment and products. The commercial interests of the big pet companies and manufacturers bring extensive research and development budgets – new lighting regimes, dietary and nutritional advances, thermoregulatory provision and monitoring are just a few of the advancements that owe thanks to the pet trade and private sector keepers.

The trade in reptiles as pets has enormous benefits for the conservation of reptiles in their natural habitats too. The proliferation of reptile breeding by the private sector is enormously significant as most pet reptiles are now produced in captivity, rather taken from the wild. Private breeders have long been recognised as the most prolific source of pioneering herpetological knowledge.

1. The RSPCA annual report

2. CAWC, June 2003

3. Open letter following his appraisal of Doncaster International Herpetological Society, Reptile Breeder's Meeting June 2012

Captive breeding and conservation triumph!

The Crested Gecko (*Rhacodactylus ciliatus*) was thought to have been extinct for many years until it was rediscovered in 1994 by private sector reptile enthusiasts. By 2004 the Crested Gecko had become the fifth most commonly bred lizard in captivity with tens of thousands being bred annually.



Benefiting Conservation

Did you know that products developed specifically for the pet trade are now used by conservation organisations to breed endangered species?

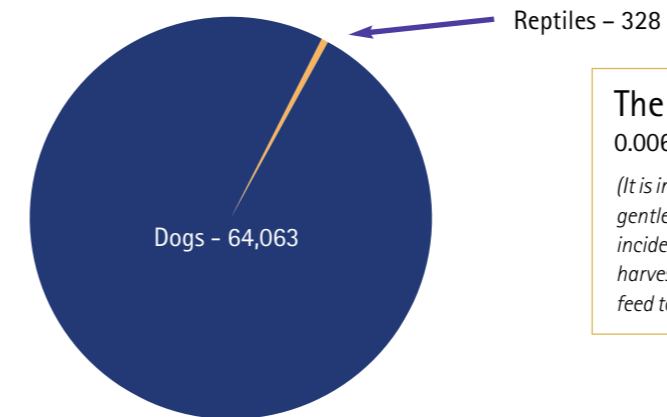
Public health

THE FACTS

Whilst there are risks inherent in keeping any type of animal, reptiles rank as one of the safest. Assessment and statistical analysis for injuries and disease risks highlight reptiles as being the second safest pet to keep, just behind tropical fish.



Injuries caused by animals



HASS (Home Accident Surveillance System, 2002)

The facts

0.006% of companion reptiles caused an injury

(It is interesting to note that one injury recorded as being reptile related was of a gentleman who tripped in his garden when he thought he saw a snake. Another incident told of a keeper who cut their finger whilst using scissors to harvest grass. The grass was used to feed to locusts, which in turn were used to feed to a pet lizard.)



Health and Safety: In Perspective

Figures from the Health and Social Care Information Centre (NHS Trust, 2012*) show that 6,450 people were admitted to hospital for injuries caused by dog bites during the 12 months to April 2012, a rise of 5% from 6,130 in previous year.

Children aged under 10 accounted for more than 1,000 admissions, three-quarters of whom children needed surgery, with 494 for plastic surgery and 278 to the oral and facial surgery unit.

* NHS Trust Health and Social Care Information Centre, 2012

An estimated 350,000 people a year in the UK become infected with toxoplasmosis spread by direct contact with cats or eating contaminated food (ACMSF, 2012**). The disease can cause serious complications in people with weakened immune systems and in pregnant women can result in the baby being born blind or with brain damage. Three babies in every 100,000 are born with the condition in the UK.

** Advisory Committee on the Microbiological Safety of Food (ACMSF), 2012

In 1999, more than 17,250 cases of human salmonellosis were reported, but only 7 cases were confirmed as being contracted from a reptile source

*Stephen Divers
Specialist reptile vet
Reptilian magazine*

Invasive species

THE FACTS

The earliest examples of reptile keeping in the UK date back to the Tower of London menagerie, which was founded in the thirteenth century. The earliest records of breeding date back to 1828 when a pair of pythons bred and laid eggs in the same collection. Copies of the 'Reptilian Review' (a magazine for reptile keepers dating back to at least the 1930's) feature pricelists for animals that were available to hobbyists at the time.

Despite centuries of reptile keeping across Europe there is little evidence that invasive species could cause a significant risk. Although some individual cases deserve scrutiny and management, EUARK advises that large scale blanket legislation and bans are unnecessary, counterproductive and likely in breach of European human rights laws.

The expertise available through EUARK will enable legislators to make proportionate and appropriate decisions about invasive reptiles in Europe. Understanding the specific risks and how to negate them is vital to the success of any invasive species policy.

CITES & other law

THE FACTS

EUARK employs an evaluative policy regarding the regulatory status of reptiles relating to DWA and CITES. Whilst many groups default to recommending only increased regulation, EUARK employs a species by species approach to recommend increased or decreased regulation where individually suitable.

EUARK's assertion that sustainable trade in wildlife has many positive benefits is supported by all the EU Member States and countries around the world by virtue of their signatory status to CITES and Conservation of Biological Diversity. Attributing wildlife an economic value ensures that local human populations have a stake in conservation.

The Future is Bright for Golden Mantella Frogs

Attributed the highest IUCN protection status, Golden Mantella frogs are numerically and geographically restricted, they are under threat due to mining and other types of habitat destruction. Instead of allowing further mining of the mantella's habitat, the Madagascar government presented a highly credible case for collection of Golden Mantellas for the pet trade thus ensuring the long term survival of the species. Proceeds from the venture are being invested back into local community projects to protect and guard these amphibians and the bodies of water they inhabit. The future is bright for the Golden Mantella and for impoverished local communities.¹

1. The 26th Meeting of the Animals Committee in March 2012. Geneva. CITES and Livelihoods Workshop clearly state that sustainable trade in CITES species for the benefit of impoverished local populations must be considered when formulating legislation.

2. Operation RAMP report 2012

“Understanding the specific risks and how to negate them is vital to the success of any invasive species policy.”

REPTA

The consequences of disproportionate legislation

Banning reptile species will likely compound the invasive species issue, rather than relieve it

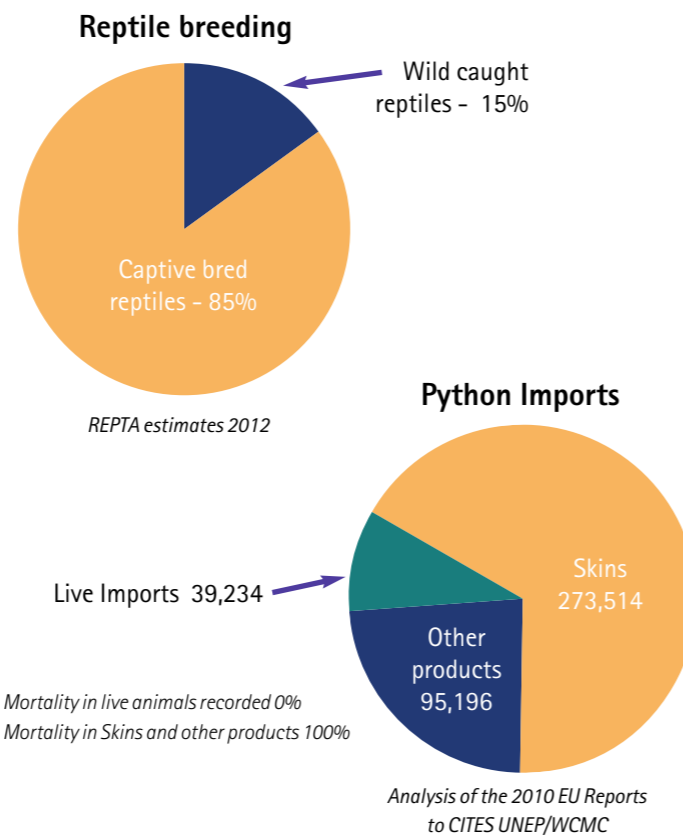
Owners of newly banned reptile species will likely be compelled to release them into the wild rather than consent for their animals to be controlled. Those fearful of breaking new laws may be similarly compelled to release reptiles into the wild.

Bans are ineffective in stopping reptile keeping

Reptile keeping bans in Norway and the previous ban now lifted in Sweden have proven to be ineffective in stopping reptile enthusiasts from pursuing their hobby. Banning reptile keeping in these countries has served only to push trade underground and out of regulatory control.

Banning reptile species is detrimental to animal welfare

Keepers of banned species would be reluctant to source professional or veterinary help through fear of legal consequences.



No trade in smuggled reptiles

In 2010 Police and DEFRA conducted a series of visits to UK reptile stockists as part of a world-wide operation initiated by Interpol called Operation Ramp. Officials visited 640 establishments in the UK and found a small handful of administrative errors. Not a single illegally imported reptile was found at any of the 640 establishments visited.²

THE TRUTH

The vast majority of aspersions aimed at keeping reptiles as companion animals are unjustified. Utilising flawed research to make wildly exaggerated claims, the reports and media circulations distributed by animal rights groups have received regular and consistent criticism and condemnation from several regulatory bodies. Many of the proposals made by animal rights groups (such as the call for a total ban on reptile and exotic pet keeping) are neither pragmatic nor fair and often detrimental to welfare.

Many of the anti-reptile keeping documents and reports are compiled by a handful of individuals who represent several animal rights organisations across Europe. EUARK is extremely circumspect about the truthfulness of these documents and of the academic and scientific credentials of their authors.

Animal Rights Discredited

EC CITES Scientific Review Group discredits anti-reptile report Morbidity & Mortality in Private Reptile Husbandry¹:

"The outcome of these discussions was that the Scientific Review Group felt unable to accept the conclusions of the RSPCA/Pro-Wildlife report. The SRG felt that the report was based on an incomplete review of the literature, contained inaccuracies and gaps in knowledge"

The SRG concluded that they had difficulties with the RSPCA's approach and the basis on which they formed conclusions"

Note – Many organisations continue to use this document as reference, circulating information from it to legislators and media organisations across Europe. Eurogroup for Animals quoted cited this discredited report as recently as summer 2012.

Bad Advertising

A 2011 ruling by Advertising Standards Agency revealed 'a lack of truthfulness and substance' in the "I'm a Chameleon Get Me Out of Here" advertising campaign by the cosmetics retailer Lush and animal rights organisation the Animal Protection Agency. It found that there was no data to support many of their claims and the ASA stipulated that the document must not appear again in its current form.

Tropical Yorkshire?

According to a document² circulated by Eurogroup for Animals, some tropical species of frogs and lizards are likely to become invasive in Doncaster. Doncaster is a mid-sized industrial town in the north of Britain where winter temperatures regularly fall below freezing.

An annual report³ documenting the number of Dead On Arrival reptiles entering the ports and airports in the EU highlights the false claims that are frequently made by animal rights groups. The most recent report for 2010 recorded only 53 DOA reptiles across the whole of the EU. The report also showed zero dead on arrivals across eight member states, including major trading states such as Netherlands, Spain and the Czech Republic.

Small Print

A recent FVE brochure⁴ about the study of companion animals and zoonotic diseases highlighted that between 60% - 75 % of human disease was transmitted via animals. What the brochure did not highlight was that in the vast majority of cases the causative animal is the mosquito. It is difficult to reconcile the inclusion of this statistic with the remit of the study. EUARK is inclined to question the motives, given that their findings will be used to influence European legislation.

1. Morbidity and Mortality in Private Reptile Husbandry by RSPCA and Pro-Wildlife 2001

2. Amphibian and reptile pet markets in the EU – An investigation and assessment in which *Phelsuma sp.* and *Mantella sp.* were cited as high invasive risk for two towns hosting reptile shows and breeders' meetings. (Hamm, Germany. Doncaster, UK)

3. United Nations Environment Programme-World Conservation Monitoring Centre publication.

4. http://www.callistoproject.eu/joomla/attachments/article/13/CALLISTO_brochure.pdf

5. Veterinary Times magazine – September 2012

“Incorrect” and “Excessive”

Specialist exotics vet Neil Forbes⁵ on the mortality figures cited in a recent article authored by animal rights campaigners





Our aims

EUARK advocates and encourages better regulation as a means to enhance reptile welfare and conservation. Case Study – Reptile keeping bans in both Norway and Sweden were proven to be ineffective and impossible to enforce. Since its accession into the EU Sweden's reptile keepers now benefit from clear regulatory guidance and enhanced animal welfare through commercial and veterinary support.

EUARK aims to raise awareness of the value of reptile keeping, particularly the social, ethical, cultural and economic benefits. Reptile keeping aids conservation, enhances animal welfare, enhances human welfare and benefits the economy.

EUARK vows to promote exceptional standards of animal welfare and conservation wherever possible within its remit and to become a source of self regulatory guidance for the reptile pet trade.

- by supporting good pet businesses that invest in training and development to ensure the welfare of pets.
- by supporting authorities in their work to regulate the pet trade and enhance good standards of welfare and performance.

EUARK aims to assist and advise politicians, regulators, legislators and the media in their work with reptiles in all regards.

- by offering accurate data, credible resources and specialist advice and information.

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