



New 'Animal Protection Agency' tackles Government on pet markets

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The Animal Protection Agency (APA), a brand new national organisation to fight the trafficking of wild animals for pets, has been launched. Its first task is to head off a Government proposal to legalise exotic pet markets in the new Animal Welfare Bill. Pet markets were outlawed in 1983 when the commercial sale of pet animals in public places was prohibited.

APA, like numerous other welfare organisations, vets and biologists, maintains that minimal standards of animal husbandry cannot be achieved at these makeshift events and that the animals inevitably suffer as a result. Research has shown that many birds and reptiles on sale at pet markets have been captured from the wild and their experience at pet markets makes for a terrifying ordeal.

In its new report, '*A Licence for Cruelty*', APA slams the Department of the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) for offering a better deal to animal dealers and for even proposing that organisers of illegal markets be allowed to draft their own 'codes of practice'.

Elaine Toland, Director of APA, says:

'The implications of legalising exotic pet markets are little short of catastrophic. The exotic pet trade would escalate – as would all of its associated problems such as cruelty and neglect cases and illegal activity. No common sense or reason seems to have been applied by the DEFRA officials behind this Bill. These events were banned for a good reason and they should remain unlawful.'

Exotic animals, and especially those captured from the wild, are extremely vulnerable to stress and disease. This results in high mortality rates for animals during, or soon after, their ordeal at pet markets. As pet markets are effectively 'mixing pots' of infectious diseases, medical experts warn that they also pose a significant threat to human health as many diseases are easily transmissible from animals to people.

Says Clifford Warwick, Director of Zoonotic Infections & Public Health at the BioVeterinary Group:

'Each animal held and sold at pet markets must be regarded as a potential Trojan Horse of infectious microbes originating in remote areas of the world and delivered fast-track to unsuspecting households. I am confident that UK pet markets present an unquantified yet important source of avoidable infection in the British population. That the Government is now considering legalising their proliferation is in my view a dereliction of constitutional responsibility.'

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- For a copy of the campaign report, '*A Licence for Cruelty*', or for more information, please contact Elaine Toland on 01273 674253.
 - We have an ISDN line for broadcast quality interviews

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