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## **Experts Call For Ban on Pet Markets to Stop the Spread of Bird Flu to UK**

The Animal Protection Agency (APA), 'Stop UK Pet Markets' campaign has received the support of leading experts in public and animal health who are backing calls to enforce the ban on exotic bird markets in order to halt risks of introducing avian flu into the UK. Birds trapped from Africa, Asia and Central and South America are regularly sold at pet markets throughout the UK. The government has not only failed to act immediately to stop illegal bird markets – which were outlawed in 1983 – but instead has proposed to make the events legal in a forthcoming 'Animal Welfare Bill'.

Those opposed to pet markets include the British Veterinary Association, the RSPCA, RSPB and the Wildlife Conservation Society amongst many other organisations. The Centre for Disease Control in the US recently published a scientific paper that highlighted the unnecessary public health dangers of wildlife markets globally.

Although there has been much concern expressed regarding the risk of migratory wildfowl bringing avian influenza into Britain, experts now claim that a more direct and obvious route for the virus to be carried to our shores would be via imported wild birds for the pet trade.

Says Clifford Warwick, Consultant in Zoonotic Infections & Public Health;  
"Importing exotic animals as pets offers a Trojan Horse of infection for recipient nations. Informed wildlife biologists and epidemiologists globally now recognise that potentially devastating emergent diseases, including avian influenza, are likely to prosper not from migratory birds but from exotic pet markets. Governments must act promptly against pet markets and other such dangerous reservoirs of disease."

Neil Forbes, the UK's premier Avian Vet said of pet markets;  
"These events are a cauldron of infection. The nightmare scenario is that you could import a bird from the Far East that carries the flu virus and brings it into an auction hall and spreads it to a number of others. That then distributes the virus across the UK and we then end up slaughtering every chicken. And, potentially, humans may become ill – and some of them die of the disease."

For more information, contact Elaine Toland on 01273 674253

We have an ISDN line for broadcast quality interviews.

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