

P-05-743 - End the Exotic Pet Trade in Wales, Correspondence – Petitioner to Committee, 10.05.19

Dear Petitions Committee

Many thanks for the opportunity to add further to my previous correspondence re my petition to abolish the sale and trade of exotic pets in Wales. Furthermore, I am grateful for the reply to my letter on this subject dated March 4 from the Minister for Environment, Energy and Rural Affairs, Ms Lesley Griffiths AC/AM. I am gratified by the Minister's commitment to animal welfare in Wales, in particular for her work in the area of third party breeding of pups and kittens, as well as her very welcome introduction of a licensing scheme for Mobile Animal Exhibits and her continued good will and intervention concerning the welfare of captive animals as categorised by the Animal Welfare Act 2006.

It is in regards to the wording of this act that I would like to pose a questions. Is it in her opinion right that the duty of care for such animals should be "the owners responsibility to exercise"?

It is my contention that this does not afford enough legal protection for animals at risk as enforcement of the duty of care regulations set out in the act is haphazard and leads to many cases of reported (let alone unreported) abuse. Please see below excerpts taken from a recent article published on the BBC news website:

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-48050788>

Surely, given the lack of adequate knowledge about the scale of care and detail required to keep a non-native, wild species in a wholly unsuitable domestic environment - plus the lack of any requirement for a would be owner of an exotic pet to prove their suitability to be so - the only sensible, ethical and right action is to ban completely the sale and trade of such animals in Wales?

In April of this year the BBC reported that the RSPCA rescued more than 4,000 exotic animals from across England and Wales in 2018.

This included 500 snakes, 300 turtles, 145 bearded dragons, five raccoon dogs, four marmosets and a wallaby - a clear indication that some owners were not properly researching how to keep such species, resulting in animals either escaping or being abandoned or neglected. In one incident, a dead marmoset monkey was found in a street in Edmonton, London in December 2018, while in January of the same year **a royal python was found dead in Cwmbran, with bruising around its mouth** - Inspectors suspected the snake had been beaten before it was abandoned.

According to one exotic pet owner interviewed by the BBC "people don't research enough and some breeders and shops aren't very responsible in how they produce the animals or sell them".

In another case in February 2018, two stray raccoon dogs were found within a mile of each other in the same Cumbrian village of Burneside. **The RSPCA said it strongly believed raccoon dogs should not be kept as pets as it was not possible to meet their needs in a domestic environment.** This is true of all exotic animals.

Gary Clarke, head of exotics at Sparsholt College in Hampshire, where they have taken in five abandoned raccoon dogs, said: "People see videos of the cubs online and think, 'oh, I want one', but they don't make good pets unless you're a specialist".

Stephanie Jayson, the RSPCA's senior scientific officer in exotics and a qualified exotics vet, said: "Although their numbers are small compared to more common pets, we have real concerns about the welfare of exotic animals kept as pets. **Exotic pets are completely reliant on their owners to meet their needs including requiring the correct levels of heat, light and humidity, plus an appropriate diet.**"

Ms Jayson added: "Many of the animals we're called to help are found stray outside, where they can very quickly suffer in the cold. Sometimes animals are neglected when the novelty wears off and the commitment hits home. **This is why we would encourage anyone thinking of getting an exotic pet to find out as much as possible about the animal's needs and whether they're the right pet for them.**"

Given the above, I would ask the Minister for Environment, Energy and Rural Affairs why we are leaving so much to the chance that a would be owner of an exotic pet will be responsible for it once bought? **Surely, either the ability to acquire an exotic pet has to be dependent on strict licensing conditional on proof of care or such exotic animals should not be for sale in Wales at all.**

Regards

David Sedley