

R E P T I L E

Pets



T h e • P r o b l e m

It was once commonly thought that reptiles were slimy, evil creatures that were best feared. But that false perception is changing fast. Growing numbers of people are discovering that reptiles can be gentle, intelligent animals that can make great pets, if properly cared for.

In 1994, more than one million (1,000,000) Giant Green Iguanas were imported into the United States from south of the border - a nearly 300% increase from what it had been just a few years previously.

Other forms of reptiles are seeing similar growth in their popularity.

Unfortunately, too often, the people who buy these animals are not aware of the special care they require to keep them healthy in captivity. And greedy importers, exporters, wholesalers and dealers can make matters worse by not informing new buyers of the realities of reptile ownership.

Experts who follow the reptile import trade estimate that fewer than 1% of the animals imported into the US pet trade survive more than their first year in captivity. This is surprising when you learn that the life expectancy of a Giant Green Iguana can be as long as 20 years.

T h e • S o l u t i o n

Public education is the key to solving the problems facing the exotic reptile pet industry. People who are aware of these animals' requirements will be able to make better decisions about the pet they've purchased.

T h e • F a c t s

- Most reptiles sold as pets in the United States were captured from the wild in their natural habitat.
- Most of the animals captured for the pet trade die before they ever reach the pet shops.
- Animals captured in the wild are hauled en-mass through a chain of exporters, importers, jobbers, wholesalers and dealers, often without proper housing, food and water.
- Many animals arrive sick or injured and are not provided with veterinary care.
- Many sick and injured animals are sold to buyers who can not tell their new pet is in trouble.

T h e • A n s w e r

Following is a list of things you can do to help these reptiles:

- Research the needs of all potential pets prior to purchasing. Many terrible situations are created by impulse-buying 'cute' animals that are seen in pet shops. Read several books prior to making your purchase.
- Buy only confirmed captive bred animals from small, private breeders.
- Do not shop for the cheapest animals. It is much less expensive to import sick, parasite-infested animals than it is to breed healthy animals. Always remember - you get what you pay for.
- When purchasing any pet, remember you are making a long-term commitment. Many reptiles have a life-span of 20 or more years. Before buying, make sure you are willing to make that length of a commitment.
- Do not buy reptiles for children. Most reptiles are not appropriate pets for our kids, for obvious reasons. How many children are prepared to handle a 6-foot long, male Giant Green Iguana during mating season?
- Support organizations involved in rescue efforts and habitat preservation.

T h e • A n i m a l s

GIANT GREEN IGUANAS are often sold in pet shops as "green iguanas". These animals, which are cute when young can reach a total length of more than six feet. Males that are sexually mature can be highly aggressive and require a great deal of time to become properly socialized to humans.

LARGE CONSTRICTING SNAKES are not often seen in pet shops in their adult form. But small, cute hatchlings are readily available. Unfortunately, not many people are equipt or qualified to handle a large, twenty-foot, 200 pound python that require regular meals of large, whole-bodied animals. Many people buy the small hatchlings thinking the local zoo will take the snake when they get bigger. Unfortunately, there are too many for the zoos to take. Many are simply 'let go' or are euthanized.

MONITOR LIZARDS are large, and often very aggressive, carnivorous lizards. They require a huge amount of space.

TRUE CHAMELEONS are relatively small, attractive and very fragile animals. Between June of 1988 and June of 1994, 67,457 Senegal Chameleons (*C. senegalensis*) were imported into the US. During that same time period, none of these animals were bred in captivity. The average life expectancy is estimated to have been 2 - 3 months.



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