



Banning the Retail Sale of Birds

Pet stores sell many kinds of birds, from tiny finches to large parrots like macaws. The most commonly sold species include parakeets, finches, cockatiels, and conures. Though small, these species are profoundly social, intelligent, and behaviorally complex. Banning the sale of birds protects them from cruelty and reduces the pressure on overwhelmed sanctuaries and rescues.

Pet Stores Acquire Birds from Cruel Mills

Virtually all birds sold in pet stores come from large-scale commercial breeding facilities called mills. Thousands of birds are kept in rows of barren cages in barns and warehouses. Birds are denied the ability to flock, fly, and express their natural instincts.

Investigations of bird mills have revealed severe cruelty. A 2024 US Department of Agriculture inspection of a large bird mill in Oklahoma found multiple dead birds inside a barn with a heat index of 110.7. Other birds showed signs of severe heat distress.¹

In bird mills, babies are usually removed from their parents prematurely to induce reproduction in their parents. Removing babies from their parents is cruel, and hand-reared birds can develop socialization problems and may be injured or starve when handled or fed improperly by inexperienced pet store staff.

Suffering in Captivity

Whether born in captivity or the wild, birds retain the need to fly, forage, and socialize. It's difficult to meet birds' physical and social needs in human homes.

Psychological Stress and Loneliness:

Many bird species, especially parrots, are exceptionally social. Parrots travel in large flocks and congregate in a nightly roost with hundreds or thousands of other parrots.² Birds in captivity can develop self-destructive behaviors such as feather plucking,

screaming, and aggression.

Inadequate Housing

Most bird cages are too small to allow birds to fly. Depriving birds of flight can lead to muscular atrophy, obesity, and depression. The cage recommended by Petco is 27 million times smaller than a parakeet's range in the wild.³

Inappropriate Diets

Birds have specialized diets that are difficult to replicate in homes. Though seed diets are popular, they lack essential nutrients for parrots. Malnutrition is estimated to cause up to 90% of clinical illnesses seen by avian veterinarians.⁴

Long Lifespans

Some birds commonly sold in stores have long lifespans. Many parrots can live between 20 and 80 years. As birds outlive their guardians, they're passed to relatives with no knowledge of bird care or sent to inundated rescues and sanctuaries.

Bird Rescues and Sanctuaries in Crisis

The average bird guardian is unprepared to meet birds' needs. Behavioral problems, financial difficulties, and life changes have resulted in birds flooding rescues and sanctuaries. Few accredited bird sanctuaries exist, and many shelters and rescues do not accept birds. Foster Parrots, one of the largest accredited parrot sanctuaries

in the US, is inundated with surrender requests, receiving 700 to 1,000 requests annually. Executive Director Karen Windsor describes the volume as “soul-crushing and overwhelming.”⁵ Yet the pet industry floods the US with baby birds every year.

Exacerbating the problem is that many surrendered birds have behavioral issues that make them difficult to adopt. For example, cockatoos are popular purchases, but without the companionship of a flock, they often exhibit extreme behavior such as excessive screaming, biting, and self-mutilation. On average, Foster Parrots estimates it takes more than a year to find a cockatoo a new home.⁶

Bird Sales Hurt Conservation

Captive breeding for the pet trade does not support conservation. Many birds are trafficked from the wild to be sold as “pets.” While it’s unlikely that birds being sold in pet stores were trafficked, any bird sales drive the wildlife trade, both illegal and legal, by increasing demand.

The wildlife trade is driving bird species to extinction. Due to the pet trade, African grey parrots are critically



endangered or even locally extinct. In Ghana, 99% of the wild grey parrot population has been wiped out.⁷

The removal of birds from their natural habitats has cascading effects on ecosystems. Birds play essential roles as pollinators and seed dispersers, and their loss in the wild contributes to habitat degradation and reduced biodiversity.⁸

Precedent

- Washington DC, Cambridge, MA and Arlington, MA banned the sale of almost all animals, including birds.⁹
- At least two additional cities banned the sale of birds (Ferndale, MI and Hazel Park, MI).¹⁰

References

- 1 USDA Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service. [Inspection report for Arden and Carol Plett](#). (2024, June 24).
- 2 Engebretson, M. [The welfare and suitability of parrots as companion animals: a review](#). *Animal Welfare*. 2006; 15(3):263-276; Gilardi JD and Munn CA. [Patterns of activity, flocking, and habitat use in parrots on the Peruvian Amazon](#). *The Condor*. 1998; 100(4): 641-653
- 3 A Quaker parakeet’s home range is four kilometers in the wild, while cages advertised for parakeets sold at Petco and PetSmart are [16.5 x 22 x 11.8 inches](#) and [26.2 x 27.8 x 16.5 inches](#); Buhrman-Deever S. et al. [Geographic Variation in Contact Calls of Feral North American Populations of the Monk Parakeet](#). *The Condor*. 2007. 109(2): 389-398.
- 4 Engebretson, M. [The welfare and suitability of parrots as companion animals: a review](#); Harrison GJ. [Twenty years of progress in pet bird nutrition](#). *Journal of the American Veterinary Medical Association*. 1998; 212(8): 1226-1230; Lightfoot, T. [Nutritional Disorders of Pet Birds](#). Merck Manual Veterinary Manual. 2020.
- 5 Jack Perry. [Parrot problem: RI Rescue overwhelmed with requests to surrender birds](#). *The Providence Journal*, October 1, 2024.
- 6 Ibid.
- 7 [Wild at Heart: The Cruelty of the Exotic Pet Trade](#). World Animal Protection, 2019; Annorbah. et al. [Trade and habitat change virtually eliminate the grey parrot *Psittacus erithacus* from Ghana](#). *Ibis*. 2016. 158 (1): 82-91.
- 8 Şekercioğlu, C. Daily, G. Ehrlich, P. [Ecosystem consequences of bird declines](#). *Proc Natl Acad Sci U S A*. 2004. Dec 15. 101 (52):18042-18047.
- 9 Kathleen Conti. [Cambridge bans retail sales of commercially bred pets](#). *The Boston Globe*, August 8, 2017; District of Columbia Municipal Regulations ([25-J DCMR 300 et seq.](#)); [Arlington, Massachusetts bylaw amendment, pet sale restrictions, retail pet sales](#).
- 10 Ferndale, Michigan Municipal Code ([Sec 5-10 Retail Pet Store Sales](#)); Hazel Park, Michigan Municipal Code ([Ordinance No. 07-24](#))

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