

▶ Factsheet #2

Pet Stores Purchase Animals from Animal Dealers and Mills

Most domesticated animals and wild animals sold in pet stores come from mills – large-scale commercial breeding facilities – or animal dealers that import and house hundreds or thousands of wild animals.

Many people are familiar with puppy mills – dog-breeding facilities where dogs are intensively bred in poor conditions. In puppy mills, dogs are often kept in small, dirty cages, sometimes stacked on top of one another. They do not receive sufficient exercise, enrichment, or veterinary care. Stores routinely mislead consumers about where puppies come from and their health. As a result, 21 states have laws that provide some recourse for consumers who have purchased puppies who soon become ill or die – so-called “puppy lemon laws.”¹

Similar problems occur at mills for other species. Undercover investigations at reptile mills have revealed extreme cruelty and neglect.

- Animals at mills have been found packed into dirty plastic bins and denied water and veterinary care. Sick and severely injured animals may be ignored or gassed or frozen to death.^{2,3}
- In 2009, Texas authorities raided U.S. Global Exotics (USGE), an animal dealer in Arlington, Texas, resulting in one of the largest wild animal seizures in United States history.⁴
 - They seized more than 20,000 animals including reptiles, rodents, spiders, sloths, and hedgehogs.
 - Investigators found reptiles crammed into shipping crates, malnourished snakes, dead rodents, grossly overcrowded and starving prairie dogs, and rodents cannibalizing one another.
 - Scientists who later reviewed the case determined that USGE was disposing roughly 3,500 dead animals every single week.⁵ In the ensuing court case, USGE argued that the mortality rate, a more than 70% loss every six weeks, was “industry standard.”⁶ USGE supplied animals to numerous companies across the country, including PetSmart and Petco.⁷
- In Montgomery County, Maryland authorities raided Reptile Connections, another wild animal dealer. They found 1,500 animals, including ball pythons and scorpions, without adequate food, water, or space. Hundreds of animals were dead.⁸

Clifford Warwick, a reptile biologist enlisted by the Texas Department of State Health Services to assist in the USGE seizure, stated, “Pet retailers will say it’s just a one-off but USGE is what I’ve found almost everywhere.”⁹

Many animals also die in transit to pet stores or before they reach the United States.¹⁰

- To be transported, reptiles and amphibians are loaded into small containers, bags, or crates and sometimes suffocate, starve, or are crushed to death.
- Because these animals are cheap to breed or capture from the wild, high mortality rates at every step of the process are considered the cost of doing business.
- As one North Carolina reptile dealer noted about the reptile trade, “You can lose up to 50 or 60 ball pythons a day. It’s going to happen. Nothing you can do about it.”¹¹



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 - 2 Ameena Schelling. *This Is Where PetSmart Gets Its Animals, And It's Not Pretty*. The Dodo, February 29, 2016. <https://www.thedodo.com/petsmart-supplier-lizards-1633352619.html>
 - 3 Russ Wiles. *PETA claims reptile abuse by PetSmart supplier in Ohio*. The Republic, February 29, 2016. <https://www.azcentral.com/story/money/business/2016/02/29/peta-claims-reptile-abuse-by-petsmart-supplier/80552012/>
 - 4 Kelley Chin. *20,000 exotic animals seized in Texas raid*. NBC News, December 16, 2009. <https://www.nbcnews.com/id/wbna34442754>
 - 5 Shawn Ashley, Susan Brown, Joel Ledford, Janet Martin, Ann-Elizabeth Nash, Amanda Terry, Tim Tristan, and Clifford Warwick. *Morbidity and mortality of invertebrates, amphibians, reptiles, and mammals at a major exotic companion animal wholesaler*. *Journal of Applied Animal Welfare Science*, 17(4). 2014. pp: 308-321. <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/10888705.2014.918511>
 - 6 Ibid.
 - 7 Katarzyna Nowak. *The World Has a Chance to Make the Wild Animal Trade More Humane*. National Geographic, February 26, 2016. <https://www.nationalgeographic.com/animals/article/160226-animal-trade-animal-welfare-exotic-pets-cites-wildlife-trafficking>
 - 8 Don Oldenburg. *Born to Be Wild*. Washington Post, July 30, 2003. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/lifestyle/2003/07/30/born-to-be-wild/Od5ed40a-Odfb-4215-a594-057e9ee824b0/>
 - 9 Katarzyna Nowak. *The World Has a Chance to Make the Wild Animal Trade More Humane*.
 - 10 Rachel Nuwer. *Many exotic pets suffer or die in transit, and beyond—and the U.S. government is failing to act*. National Geographic, March 2, 2021. <https://www.nationalgeographic.com/animals/article/exotic-pets-suffer-wildlife-trade>
 - 11 Oldenburg. *Born to Be Wild*.

