

► Factsheet #4

Wild “Pets” Are a Key Driver of the Destructive Wildlife Trade

The wildlife trade is a multibillion-dollar industry that is fueling the extinction or decline of numerous species.¹

- The legal and illegal trade “is estimated to affect one in four mammal and bird species globally.”²
- The United States is a top importer of wildlife, and the sale of wild animals as pets is a major driver.³
- Between 2000 and 2012, the United States imported 225 million live animals, with most animals intended for the aquarium and pet industry.⁴

The removal of animals from the wild for use as pets has already resulted in population decrease or collapse for many species.⁵

- Tens of thousands of wild animal species are not protected by international trade agreements like the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) which makes it hard to monitor the impacts of trade.
- “If you look at habitat loss, pollution, or climate change, they have a trickling effect on nature over time, but trade is governed by supply and demand. You might have had a species 10 years ago that was of little concern and off the radar, but now it is critically endangered and on the brink of extinction.” – Brett Scheffers, University of Florida conservation biologist.⁶

Spotlight on the Reptile Trade:

Reptiles comprise roughly 20% of the global live animal trade.⁷ CITES covers only 8% of the world’s 10,700 reptile species leaving most species vulnerable to exploitation.⁸ Many of the reptiles sold as pets are illegally taken from the wild but marketed as captive-bred.⁹ For example:

- Most green pythons (*Morelia viridis*) exported from Indonesia are caught illegally in the wild – decreasing local populations – and laundered through breeding farms.¹⁰
- Tokay geckos, another popular pet store species, are generally taken from the wild because it’s much cheaper than breeding them. Like green pythons, Tokay geckos are trapped in the wild, transferred to facilities that secure paperwork stating the animals are captive-bred, and finally legally shipped to the United States.¹¹
- As one senior specialist at the US Fish and Wildlife Service noted, “The infiltration of traffickers into the legal trade has been happening for many years. These animals show up here in declared shipments, and we can’t do anything about it.”¹²



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 - 11 Nuwer. *That Python in the Pet Store? It May Have Been Snatched From the Wild*.
 - 12 Ibid.

