

► Factsheet #5

Wild Animals Formerly Kept as Pets Are Harming Local Ecosystems

Wild animals formerly kept as pets are now a major cause of the spread of non-native species and have already resulted in the establishment of several hundred invasive animal species.¹ Stories about the release or escape of wild animals are regularly in the news, ranging from goldfish to kinkajous to ball pythons.^{2,3,4}

This creates a welfare issue – with some animals killed by predators, starvation, or exposure – and can be devastating for ecosystems. Non-native animals introduce disease and bacteria to animals without immunity to these pathogens and compete with native animals for food and habitat. More than 200 species of imported fishes have been introduced to the wild in the United States, and nearly half of those species established breeding populations.⁵

Globally, non-native species are responsible for \$1.4 trillion in damage and control expenses and cost the United States an estimated \$120 billion annually.^{6,7} As a result, many states regulate or ban numerous species commonly sold in large retail stores. For example:

- Florida banned the possession and sale of green iguanas in 2020.⁸ The endangered Miami blue butterfly is struggling in the Florida Keys because green iguanas eat the plants where the butterflies lay their eggs.⁹
- Massachusetts banned the possession of red-eared sliders in 2014 because they were released so often, harming local turtle populations.^{10,11} For similar reasons, the sale and/or possession of red-eared sliders is banned in multiple states, including Oregon and Florida.
- Pennsylvania, Georgia, California, and other states banned the possession of the Quaker parakeet (also called the monk parakeet) due to concerns about the damage they can cause to electrical lines, utility poles, and agriculture.¹²

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