

► Factsheet #7

Retail Pet Sales Increase the Burden on Shelters

Local governments are responsible for caring for and euthanizing animals in municipal shelters. Nearly a million cats and dogs are euthanized in United States shelters every year.¹ The retail sale of animals expands the number of animals flowing into the community, increasing the already considerable burden on municipal resources and taxpayers who must pay for the cost of their care in shelters. MSPCA-Angell, a shelter in Boston, reported that one in four people surrendering a small animal or a bird purchased them at a pet store.²

The influx of reptiles at shelters has also steadily climbed in some places due to increased accessibility. Salt Lake County Animal Services spokeswoman stated, “We see more reptiles than hamsters.” And a Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) adoption coordinator noted, “We mostly see animals that are easy to purchase but hard to care for...green iguanas, ball pythons, and pond turtles.”³

Wild animals who require complex care or have long lifespans are particularly at risk of being surrendered.

- Cockatiels can live up to 25 years while red-eared sliders can live up to 40.
- Forty-seven percent of first-time buyers spend a few hours – or none at all – researching prior to buying a wild animal, and 43% bought their first wild animal on a whim.⁴
- Many families see an animal in the store and purchase them without understanding the expensive and time-consuming care the animal will require.
- Despite the care wild animals require, they are often mislabeled or marketed as “beginner” or “easy to keep” animals.⁵

1 The ASPCA. *Pet Statistics*. <https://www.asPCA.org/helping-people-pets/shelter-intake-and-surrender/pet-statistics>

2 Kathleen Conti. *Cambridge bans retail sales of commercially bred pets*. The Boston Globe, August 8, 2017. <https://www.bostonglobe.com/business/2017/08/08/cambridge-bans-retail-sales-commercially-bred-pets/q3HC7InBjfFRbA2ktA92I/story.html>

3 Janet Winikoff. *Cold-Blooded Complications*. Animal Sheltering Magazine, 2014. <https://www.zoocheck.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/Cold-Blooded-Complications-Animal-Sheltering-2014.pdf>

4 2018 Stratcom research commissioned by World Animal Protection

5 Clifford Warwick, Catrina Steedman, Mike Jessop, Phillip Arena, Anthony Pilny, Emma Nicholas. *Exotic pet suitability: Understanding some problems and using a labeling system to aid animal welfare, environment, and consumer protection*. Journal of Veterinary Behavior, 26. 2018: pp. 17-26. <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S1558787818300364#bib88>

