

Should I buy an exotic animal over the internet?

There are serious problems with acquiring an animal over the internet. You will not be able to assess the animal's health and environment properly. The animal may have been wild-caught. It can be too easy to purchase on impulse using the internet, without considering the long-term commitment.

Trade in larger exotic animals such as alligators and tigers also occurs over the internet. This is generally illegal. The animals are often wild-caught and then smuggled. Transportation is very stressful for them, and many become ill or die during transport. It is dangerous to keep large exotic animals. They should never be considered as pets.

So, what is the bottom line?

We keep pets in order to give them a good life while we enjoy their company. This can be very difficult to achieve with exotic animals. In the experience of many veterinarians and humane organizations, most exotic animals do not do well as pets. Even if you are very knowledgeable and committed, you should still think twice before getting an exotic animal.



Sir James Dunn Animal Welfare Centre
ATLANTIC VETERINARY COLLEGE • UNIVERSITY OF PRINCE EDWARD ISLAND

The Sir James Dunn Animal Welfare Centre exists to provide tangible benefits to animals, through research, service and education. For further information, please visit our website at:
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So you want to buy an exotic animal...





What are exotic animals?

Exotic animals are species that are not native to our country. Some exotic animals that people keep as pets are: tropical fish, snakes, iguanas, parakeets, parrots, hedgehogs, chinchillas, and sugar-gliders.

What concerns are there about keeping exotic animals?

The first concern is that exotic animals have very specialized dietary, housing and medical needs. It is often difficult, time-consuming, and costly to meet these needs, and information about them is not easy to find. As a result many exotic pets become sick and die, despite their owners' best intentions. For example, iguanas are one of the most frequently purchased exotic pets, and it is thought that most die within the first year of ownership.

Where exotic pets come from is another concern.

Some are bred in captivity, but many are captured in the wild. Some wild-caught animals are caught illegally, and many die through inhumane capture and transportation. For example, some tropical fish are caught by using cyanide to force them to swim to the top of the water. This kills large numbers of fish and coral every year. Many animals caught in the wild will never adapt to captivity. Also, many carry parasites or infections that are difficult to detect and can be transmitted to people, native wildlife, livestock and domestic pets.



shelter or abandon it. The Canadian Veterinary Medical Association is opposed to the capture of wild animals to be kept or sold as pets.

What steps should I take if I would like to get an exotic animal?

1. Ask lots of questions.

Consult with your provincial department of fisheries and wildlife to find out if it is legal to own the animal. Research the animal's needs for shelter, food, companionship, and environmental temperature and humidity. Consider the costs of meeting these needs. For example, many people do not know that young iguanas will grow to an adult length of 1.5 to 2 meters.

Other things to consider: how noisy is the animal? Is it social or solitary? How long can it live in captivity? For example, some birds can live to be 50 or 60 years old, bond with only one person and require a structured and stimulating environment.

Is there a veterinarian in your area with expertise in exotic animals? Are there any dangers to people from owning the animal? For example, turtles, snakes, and iguanas commonly carry a disease called *Salmonella*.

As you do the research, ask yourself questions: Can I provide for **all** the needs of the animal during its life? Is everyone in my home comfortable with this animal? Who will provide care when I am away?

2. Investigate suppliers.

Once you decide on an animal, search for a reputable supplier. Ask lots of questions: How long has the supplier been working with this species? Have the animals been bred in captivity? Does the supplier have the required permits or licenses? Does the supplier offer information on care of the animal?



If you buy an exotic animal, make sure it has been bred in captivity. If you are buying from a pet store, check that it provides proper conditions for its animals and current information for owners. Buying "sick" or "sad-looking" animals only makes room for new animals to fill that space. If you have concerns about an animal, the local humane society has the authority to investigate complaints.

Another option is to adopt an animal from a shelter or sanctuary.

Most kinds of exotic pets are not domesticated, so they cannot provide the companionship that we expect from more traditional pets. Consequently, owners may give up their exotic animal to a