

Ashley N. Mendoza
ENGL 102.006
Dr. Micer
May 2, 2011

Are Exotic Animals Suitable Pets?

Many animals are mistreated and abused every day, which is not unknown, but not many people realize how cruel it is to own an exotic pet, and encourage exotic pet sales by constantly buying them. Just because a trained monkey at the zoo will dance for you doesn't mean the animal always acts like that. Animals are wild creatures with distinct instincts to survive no matter what it takes. Even when thorough research is done, people don't understand that animals aren't meant to be your best friend or a show piece in your home. Dogs, "man's best friend," have been domesticated for over 5,000 years, but yet about 4.7 million dog related attacks are reported each year in the United States alone. Knowing this, why would someone think that an alligator, that is not domesticated, would make a perfect pet?

Why are the numbers of exotic animals being kept as pets increasing? There are many factors that come into play. Psychological factors such as thinking that by adopting this exotic specimen, the person will be able to give the animal a better life. This is not so, actually the animals are quite content in their natural habitat, which is why they have survived there. Also, by purchasing these animals people are just supporting the poachers and increasing demand. Ego is another key factor, many people think owning a boa constrictor or an alligator will make them unique and more interesting. Would you rather

see an alligator or someone's gold fish? Some people just love animals so much that they would pay anything to have one. These people need to know that by supporting this market, they're actually putting animals in harm's way and devastating the populations of many specimens.

Illegal animal trading is an increasing problem due to the large revenue it brings in. Numbers are reported anywhere from \$10-20 billion dollars annually. These numbers are reported from various sources, such as the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and because it's an illegal process these numbers fluctuate often.

There are laws to prohibit or hinder the ownership of these animals, but they're not reinforced. A former Fish and Wildlife Service chief of law enforcement said, "There is no stigma attached to being an animal smuggler. If you get caught illegally transporting animals on a first offense, it's possible you won't even do jail time. You can't say the same for running drugs." These animals are so easily accessible through the internet, auctions, and some pet shops that it's hard to keep track of exactly how many animals are being kept as pets. Not only are they accessible but not many know just how important it is to save these animals. It's not a commonly talked about issue, but animal smuggling is a close second to illegal drug trading. These animals are beaten, tortured, and drugged with alcohol such as tequila. People fight for the right to have these animals, but at what cost, who is to say we can own these animals and treat them this way?

If more people were aware of the fact that only about thirty percent of the animals that are transported actually make it to the destination alive, then maybe they would do

something about it. Some people also don't realize the horrible situations these animals are put into; not only is it unmoral to abuse these creatures, but the populations of species are being devastated in some regions due to the poaching. Enforceable laws need to be put in place to keep these animals out of the hands of poachers, awareness needs to be spread about how these animals are treated and transported, and these animals need to be left in their native habitat to help lower the extinction rate.

The want for exotic pets has caused a booming market for all kinds of illegal trading. Smugglers can make a quick buck at an animal's expense just to ship it off to a pet store to be sold. Some will go so far as to smuggle birds into the country by strapping the animals to the person's legs under their trousers to get them across the border on an airplane. American pet shop owners will go to other countries to find these exotic pets shoved in the trunk of someone's car or bunched into small cages in a little shack. It creates big money because the demand is high: people want these animals. Some want to be able to say they have a boa constrictor, or a monkey, while other people think that they're saving these animals by bringing them into their homes.



Baby

Bengal Tiger being smuggled into the United States and birds being smuggled into a country by strapping them the legs of a man.



The animal abuse isn't limited to the poachers. The actual pet owners usually end up being overwhelmed with the animal and don't understand how to properly take care of it. People who adopt monkeys usually realize after the first few months that they don't have the patience or tolerance to care for the animal. The monkey grows larger, becomes territorial and develops three inch long fangs. To solve these problems the owner starts by removing its nails and teeth to lessen the severity of the attacks. When this fails the owner may resort to drop the animal off in a random area, or try to take it to a zoo. This animal was taken, forcefully, from the wild, and put into the arms of an uneducated human, once the person was finished with stripping the animal of its natural defense mechanisms, the person releases it the wild so it can die. These situations desperately need to stop.

Removing animals from their natural habitat to use them on the trading market is destroying the wild population of the species. Even though the animals aren't being killed to sell, it's still considered poaching when someone removes the animal from the wild. Humans are the number one cause of animal extinction. Even though some animal species will die out naturally as part of evolution and natural selection, the demand of animal habitats and the creatures themselves have caused a decrease in the numbers of many species.

Not only is it cruel to the animal to remove it from its natural habitat, it also creates catastrophic problems for humans. Besides physical attacks, exotic animals carry all kinds of diseases such as rabies, herpes B virus, and Salmonella. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention discourages direct contact with wild animals because of the threat of disease. The herpes B virus is commonly found in macaque monkeys and it can cause death

to humans. Salmonella transfers to thousands of people each year through reptiles and amphibians. In 2003, an outbreak of monkey pox occurred in the United States. This was due to African rodents carrying the disease being imported for pet trading and ended up infecting native prairie dogs that were also being caught and sold.

With the way these animals are treated and transported there's not much money going into handling them, which increases the poacher's profit. Most of the poachers, as mentioned before, are extremely poor people from second and third world countries. These people are looking for a quick way to make easy money, so if the animal is bought straight from the source, they aren't that expensive. A tiger could be sold for as little as \$1000, without any questions asked. When pet shop owners purchase these animals from the poachers they hike up the price to make them appealing to those who want to stand out with a pet that no one else has. Along with the internet, and auction, anybody could get their hands on these animals.

Tigers, lions, and bears aren't the only problematic pets. Pets that aren't necessarily exotic, but just unorthodox, like raccoons and squirrels, are easily attainable and easily hid from the government. Once these animals act out people will go to drastic measures to "tame" them. Even though people think they're doing a service to these animals, they are really jaded by their emotions. Putting a raccoon in a cage doesn't help it. One teenager from South Carolina claims that his father showed him how to tame wild animals and he believes it's possible to train a wild monkey in just days; he actually says his father has done that. The boy tells the readers of this online chatting forum how he has raccoons and he plans to make them breeding cages. Through the whole post, he seems as if everything he's

saying is completely normal, and natural, and that there is nothing wrong with it. This is part of his post that explains the cage descriptions for his raccoons:

This summer I am building a breeding cage for raccoons. It has two sides and each side is 4'x4'x4'. It is going to be all wire held together with j-clips and its elevated off the ground. The waste can fall through the wire and I never have to clean the inside of the cage. I plan to put wild raccoons in them so opening the door isn't the wisest thing you can do. Each cage is also going to have a 2'x2'x2' nest box hung on the outside of the cage with a hingable lockable top that way I can remove babies without having to go inside the cage. It's also going to have two feed stations so the animal can eat from the bowls inside the cage but can't flip the bowls over and I can fill the bowls from the outside of the cage without getting bit. Lastly I am going to make an automatic watering system.

Even though he thinks he is doing right by these animals, how is this good for them? He clearly loves the animals, but why does he want to breed them, or keep them in a tiny cage, instead of putting some food or water outside for them? He has been raised to think that this is right, and he doesn't know any different. He doesn't understand that just because you love an animal doesn't mean it makes for a good pet.

For centuries we have been focused on being the superior organism on this planet. We may have succeeded but at the cost of millions of species. We hunt them for food, hide, game, and now pets. We are doing nothing but destroying our ecosystem. Though there are organizations set in place to help lessen this problem, it is still prevailing and becoming

more and more appealing to those in search of money. If we don't save these animals, who will?