The Belgian Positive List is designed according to the following criteria:

1. Animal welfare: Animals must be easy to keep and kept with respect to their essential physiological, ethological and ecological needs.
2. Environment: No species should be listed for which there are clear indications that, in case an animal escapes, it would be able to survive in nature and consequently represent an ecological risk.
3. Human health: The animals should not be aggressive by nature and/or dangerous, or expose the health of humans to any other particular danger.
4. Husbandry: Bibliographic information must be available concerning the keeping of these animals.
5. No doubt: In case of contradictory data or information on the possibilities to keep an animal, the animal should be given the benefit of doubt, i.e. it will not be on the list.

“Our aim is to prevent unnecessary suffering of wild animals. European countries should create positive lists of species which are allowed to be kept based on criteria considering animal welfare, human health and safety, invasive species risks, species conservation, and available knowledge on the care and needs of the species.”

Sirpa Patalайнен
Member of European Parliament - Finland

The Netherlands
In 2015 The Netherlands passed legislation to regulate the keeping and trade of exotic mammals as pets by means of a Positive List. The regulation is part of the regulation ‘Keepers of Animals’, which establishes the following criteria to assess the suitability of animals as pets:

1. The need of an animal to move and the need for a special environment (e.g. habitat, migration, territory).
2. The average size of the adult animal (e.g. size, body mass).
3. The need of an animal for periods of activity or inactivity during the day or the season (e.g. nocturnal/diurnal, hibernation etc.).
4. The need of an animal to forage and eat, including the composition of its diet (e.g. foraging behaviour, frequency).
5. The degree of need for safety and possibility to shelter (e.g. defensive behaviour, climate sensitivity).
6. The degree of need of the animal to reproduce and raise their young (e.g. parenthood, reproduction, infanticide).
7. The need of the animal to groom.
8. The social or biosocial needs of the animal.
9. The degree of need of the animal for stimulation and enrichment (e.g. the need for play, digging substrates).

Besides taking the animal welfare risks into account, the regulation also prescribes that keeping the animal will not cause an unacceptable degree of danger for humans, other animals or the environment.

THE FUTURE: POSITIVE LISTS IN EUROPE

A Positive List is the single most effective and efficient measure to reduce the suffering of exotic animals being kept unsuitably as pets in Europe. Especially when considering the issues of invasiveness and human and animal health risks, the open international market makes it crucial to achieve Positive Lists in a significant number of countries.

AAP Animal Advocacy and Protection and Eurogroup for Animals, in collaboration with partners throughout Europe, are working together to inform policymakers and the public about the need for and advantages of a Positive List, and offering practical solutions and advice on its design and implementation.

INTRODUCTION

There are more than 200 million pets in Europe, including mammals, birds, reptiles, fish and amphibians. However, many species, especially exotic animals, are unsuited to a life in captivity. This may result in severe animal welfare problems, and can also be detrimental to biodiversity, have a negative impact on public health, and present a danger to the health of other animals. Therefore, the impacts of keeping exotic pets can have high costs across many sectors.

Rescue centres are increasingly confronted on a daily basis with the problems that stem from this trade. Owners may no longer want their pet because it was an unsuitable match from an impulsive and poorly-informed purchase. Much animal suffering and neglect could be avoided if prospective owners considered factors such as life span, adult size, social needs, cost of care and veterinary treatment, and requirements for appropriate temperature, humidity, lighting, and stimulating social and physical environments. Such unsuitable matches of exotic pet keeping is the direct consequence of absent or inadequate laws and regulations, which cause a situation in which the demand for rescue is significantly higher than the actual capacity of rescue facilities.

There are several ways to regulate the keeping and sale of exotic pets, but a Positive List (a list of allowed species) is the most effective, concise, transparent, enforceable and economically feasible way.
THE PROBLEM(S) WITH EXOTIC PETS

Animal Welfare

Exotic pets have complex needs making it difficult, if not impossible, for the average owner to provide specialised care, diet and housing to meet their needs. Examples of exotic pets suffering from inadequate nutrition, injuries from misuse of artificial heating/lights, behavioural problems and inappropriate medical care are commonplace. For many species there is a lack of good quality information, but even when it exists the public often ignore it. In consequence, the animals suffer and die prematurely. For example, animals which are social by nature are frequently forced to live alone; other solitary animals may be forced to live in a group. This tends to cause conflict, which can be lethal.

An additional concern is that animals may be procured by methods that cause suffering, such as in the case of wild-caught animals or species that are intensively bred for the pet trade. Often, particularly with primates, adults are killed in order to capture infants. It has been estimated that for every chimpanzee that is confiscated or kept as a pet, another 10 animals died from capture or trade conditions.

In order to catch baby Barbary macaques (Macaca sylvanus), the mothers and their babies are scared by dogs. They then climb up trees, where they are frequently forced to live alone; other solitary animals may be forced to live in a group. This tends to cause conflict, which can be lethal.

The Convention of International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES) regulates the trade in vulnerable wildlife species through permitting or outright bans based on conservation status. Despite these trade restrictions, there is increasing evidence that the import of exotic animals for the pet trade threatens the survival of some wild populations. Breeding animals in captivity is not an ideal solution either: the actual source can be difficult to verify and can be a loophole for illegal trade.

Some species also require high levels of exercise or key stimuli in their captive environment, often difficult to supply, in order to lead normal lives.

Garble. In the wild, group digging burrows, but in captivity, when they cannot dig a burrow, they often develop stereotypical behaviour, such as constant scrubbing in the corners of their cages.

Some animals have long life spans requiring a lifetime commitment by owners. As such the animals’ welfare may suffer when the owners die or cannot care for the animals any longer, resulting in neglect or difficult rehoming efforts. Tortoises and parrots are prime examples of animal species that can live at least 40-50 years, requiring a significant commitment and long-term planning for their care as a pet.

Environmental Impacts

The capture of wild animals for the pet trade, the destruction of their natural habitat and the introduction of invasive species are significant factors driving biodiversity loss worldwide.

Degus (Octodon degus) require a diet without sugar. Due to feeding of fruit, degus in captivity become diabetic and blind. When there is too much fluff in their diet, they also develop liver diseases and diarrhea.

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Public Health and Safety

Around 72% of emerging zoonotic diseases (transmissible from animals to humans) originate in wildlife. Some of the most serious zoonoses are those associated with non-domesticated, exotic or imported animals. The legal and illegal wild bird trade is known to have played a significant role in the global spread of avian influenza, and as a result, imports of wild-caught birds into the EU were banned in 2007.

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