World Veterinary Association Oath

"to use my scientific knowledge, skill and training: To prevent, diagnose, treat and manage pain and disease in all animal species to the best of my ability….. help prevent the impact of zoonotic diseases and public health risks …. To advocate for the humane and sustainable management of terrestrial, aerial, and aquatic animals in their diverse ecosystems through stewardship to reduce environmental impacts. To contribute to animal, human, and environmental health ….. promoting health and welfare of humans and animals,"

AVG

CYCLO

The Exotic Pet Trade

An Unnecessary Global Luxury?

Cameron Murray

AVG

CYCLO

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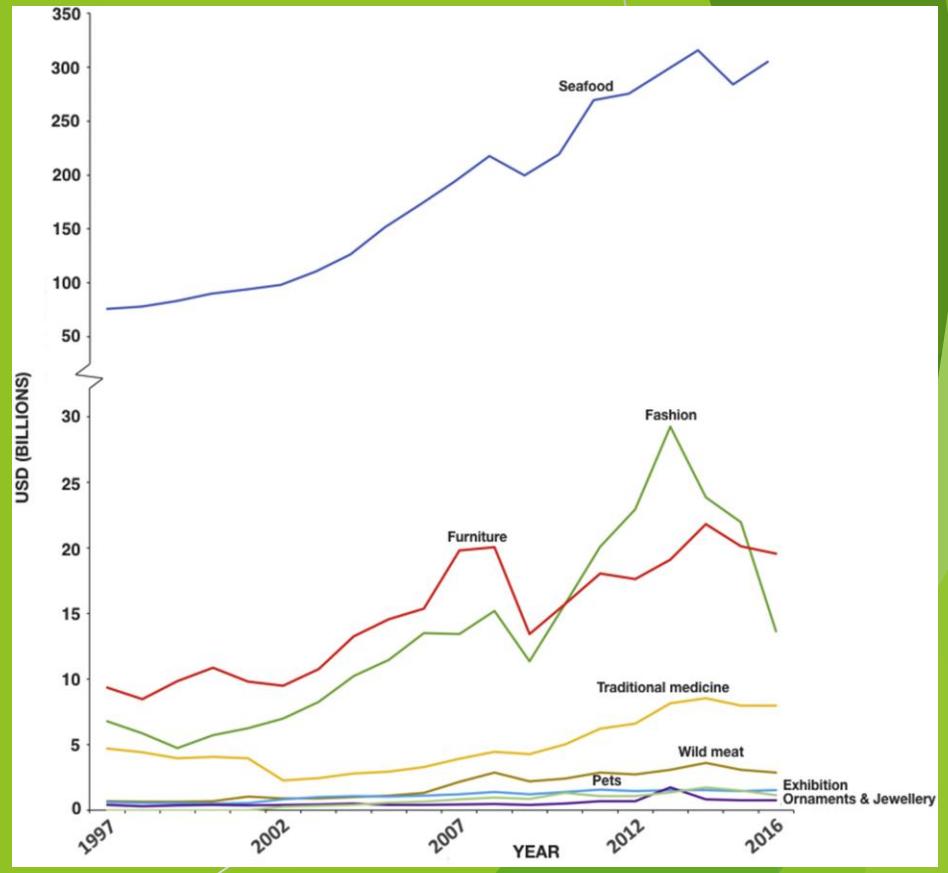
DRS D.A. & N.S. SWAN
VETERINARY
SURGEONS

SAVE African Rhino Foundation

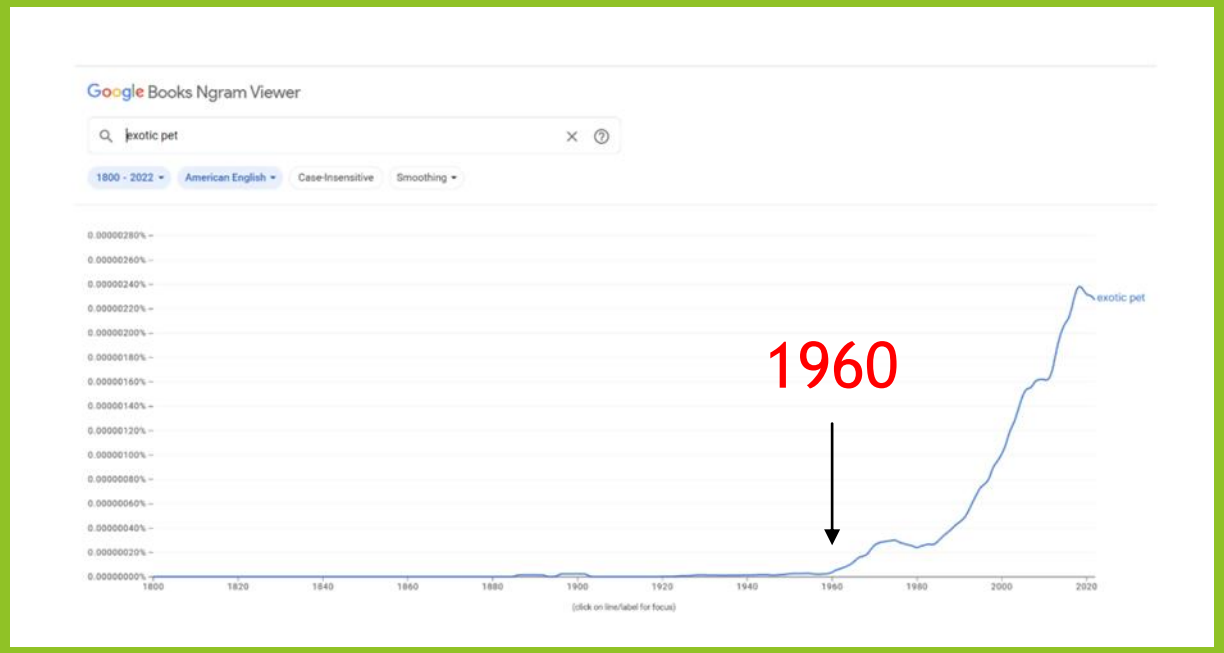
- Established in 1987
- Raised > $17 million for projects in Zimbabwe, Namibia, South Africa and Mozambique
- >99% efficiency
- History of supporting projects with both private conservancies and National Parks
- In the last 5 years population has by nearly 50%!

Nature Needs More

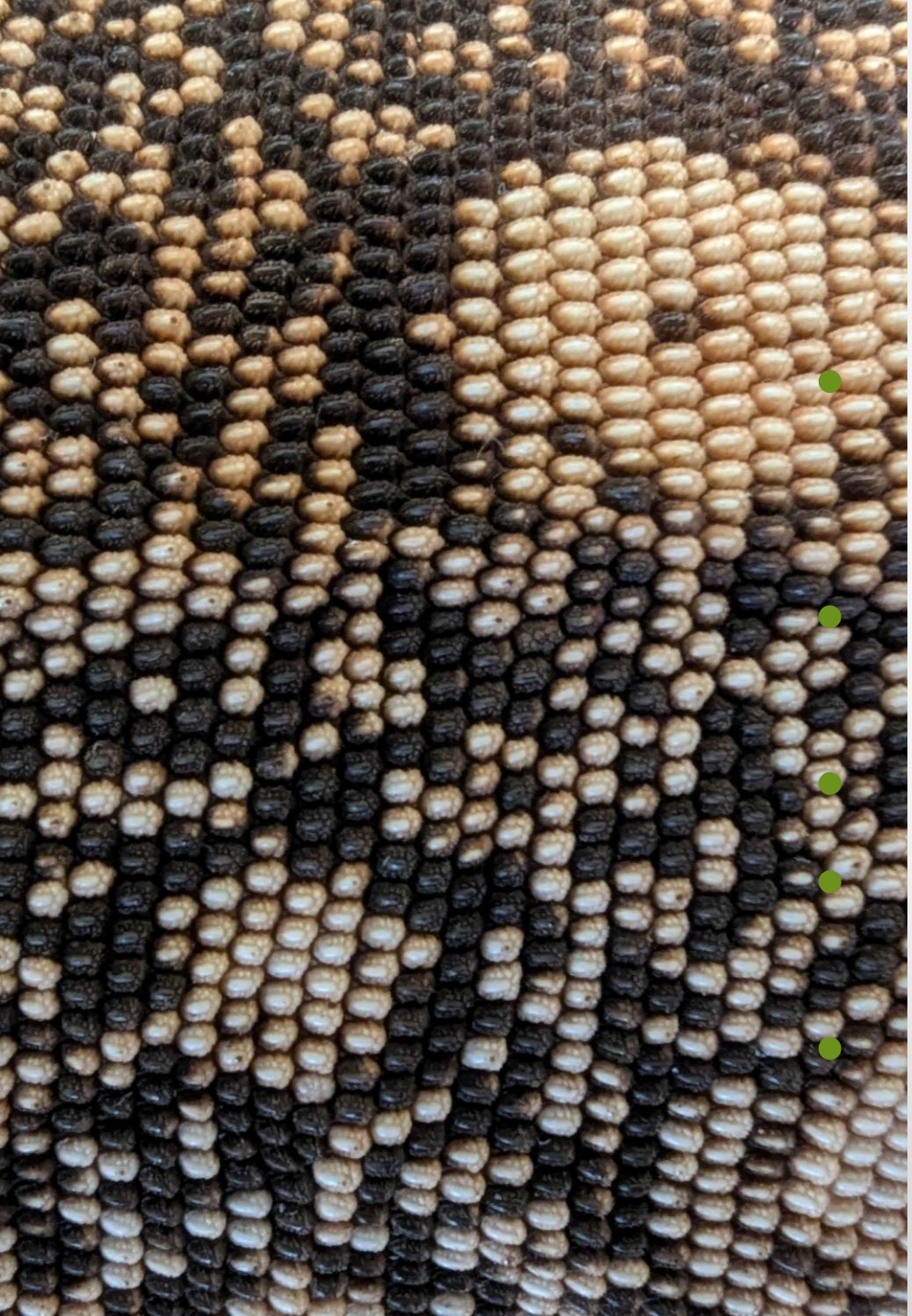
- Established in 2017 By Dr Lynn Johnson and Dr Peter Lanius
- Based in Melbourne and focusing on key systemic enablers of the illegal wildlife trade
- Projects research supply/ demand side and the trade mechanism of both the legal and illegal trade, including the exotic pet trade



The Exotic Pet Industry



"considered unusual or uncommonly kept in a home and would in general be accepted to be a wild species rather than domesticated" - AVA Policy 2025



Scale of Trade

- Estimates range between 10,000 and 15,000 species being traded as exotic pets
- Reptiles > 3400 species (35% of all reptile species)
- >6500 marine/fresh water species traded
- Birds approx. 4000 species in trade (36% of bird species)
- 170 amphibian sp, 860 invertebrate sp

Is our commitment to CITES and our Environmental Protection and Biodiversity Conservation (EPBC) Act enough?

Australia and the Exotic Pet Trade

LEGAL → LEGALISH → ILLEGAL

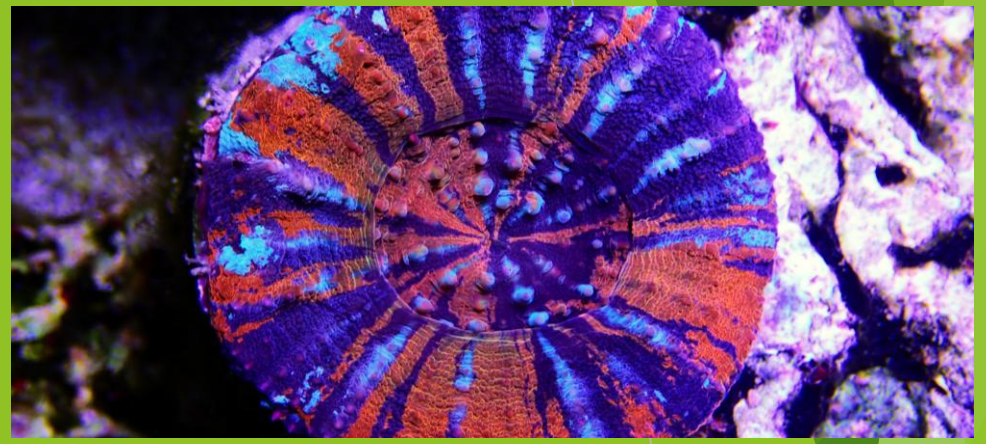
Not all Australian Species are Protected - LEGAL

CITES data from 2011-2021 reveals the following, Australia issued 19 182 permits for the export of coral species:

- **For a total of >6.29 million specimens/items/units**
- **Going to 55 countries (the top 5 being USA, Germany, Japan, France and Great Britain – accounting for 37% of permits)**
- **Nearly entirely wild sourced**
- **The bulk of corals are used in the aquarium trade**
- **Australia's ornamental fish industry is estimated to be worth $350 Million annually.**

Scolymia australis – Scoly Coral

- A single shipment in 2018 of 45 620 units to France
- Each unit valued at $100 - $500 USD
- Total value of shipment $4.5 - $25 million USD
- At the time of the shipment, the cost of the CITES permit for export - $69 +$0.07/unit!!!



Legal(ish)

"The export permit decisions made by Department officers followed the Department's usual practice. **However, the Department's usual practice does not contain adequate policies, procedures and guidelines to inform and document decisions." KPMG**

Australia gave endangered birds to secretive German 'zoo', ignoring warnings

Exclusive: government issued export permits for more than 200 rare and endangered parrots, despite concerns they were being offered for sale rather than exhibited

ABC NEWS

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Lucrative, easy and on the rise: Animal smuggler warns of growing black market in native animals

7.30 / By Erin Parke

Posted Tue 15 May 2018 at 1:10pm, updated Tue 15 May 2018 at 6:57pm

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Illegal

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Hundreds of smuggled animals found in suitcase in record-breaking customs seizure at Eucla

By Briana Shepherd

Posted Tue 1 May 2018 at 1:15pm, updated Tue 1 May 2018 at 1:17pm

Top Stories

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Million-dollar pair
ended up in op sh
National Gallery

The Daily Telegraph

Kids used to catch reptiles: Snake dealer makes plea in 'cruel' crime

An Australian snake dealer who used young kids to catch reptiles before selling them on to crime groups has entered a pleas in his illegal export case.

The Heavy Cost To Australian Wildlife

“There is significant financial motivation for criminals to illegally export Australian wildlife for the overseas exotic pet trade. Organised criminals are attracted to the Australian illegal wildlife trade by large profits and lower penalties”

Why Should We Care?

What are the risks?

Because others DON'T

"The effects on the animals themselves weren't persuasive in terms of changing attitudes"

- **Neil D'Cruze – from 2016 research by non-profit World Animal Protection and WildCRU, Oxford University's wildlife conservation research team.**

- Animal Welfare Concerns
- Invasive Species Concerns
- Biosecurity and Public Health
- Biodiversity Loss

5 Freedoms

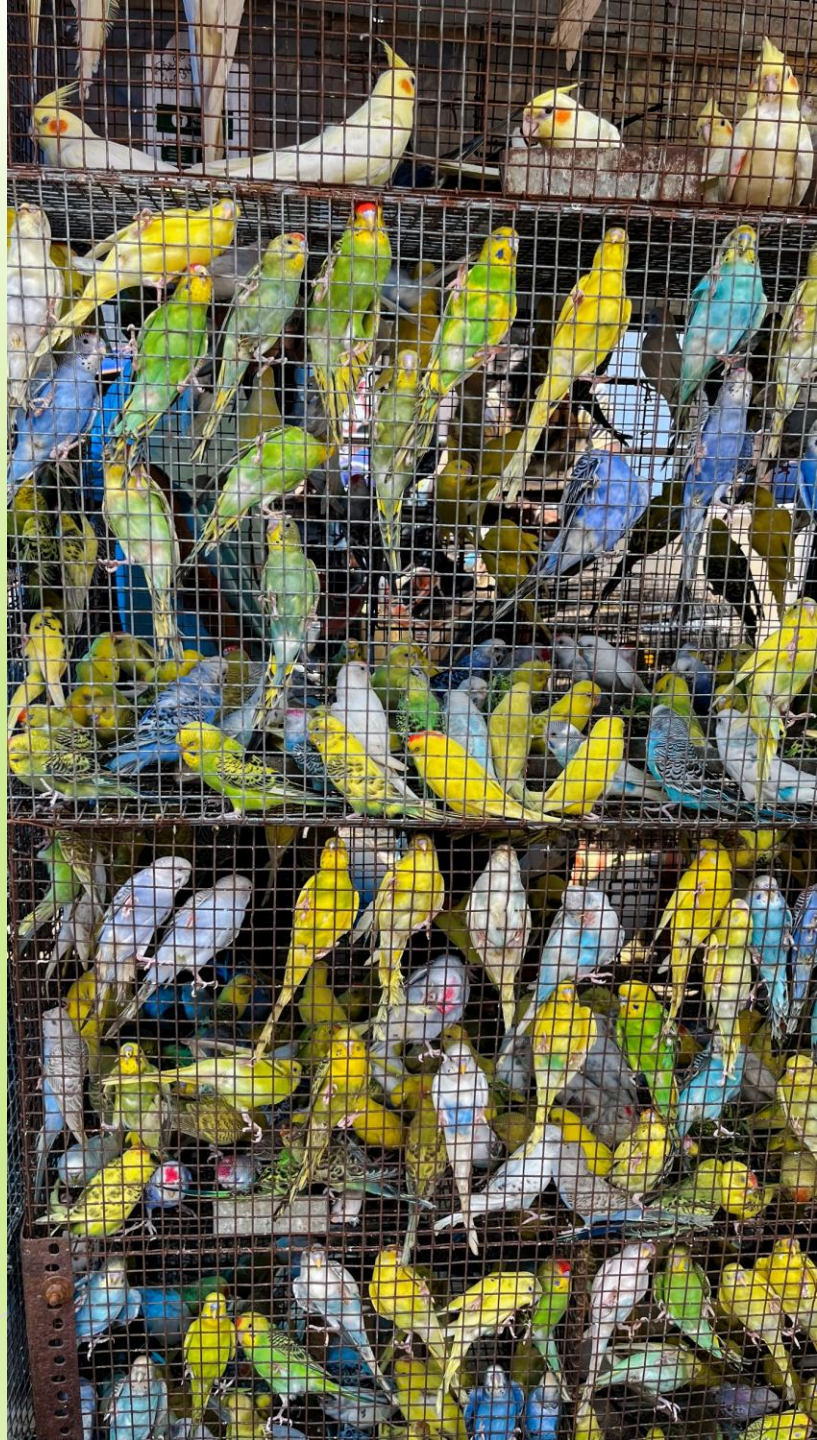
Freedom from hunger and thirst: by ready access to fresh water and a diet to maintain full health and vigour.

Freedom from discomfort: by providing an appropriate environment including shelter and a comfortable resting area.

Freedom from pain, injury or disease: by prevention through rapid diagnosis and treatment.

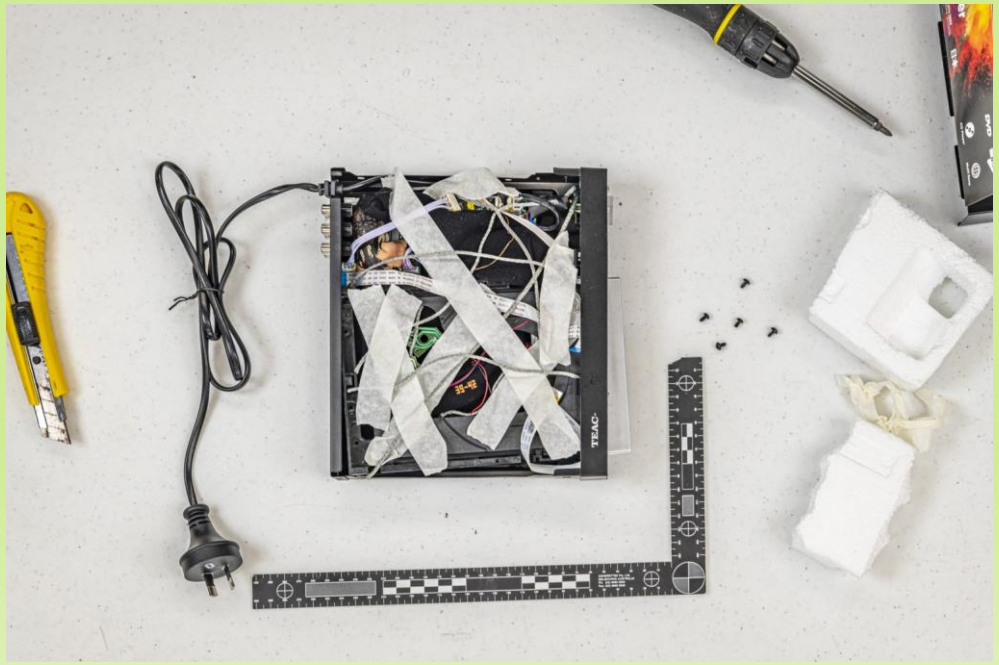
Freedom to express normal behaviour: by providing sufficient space, proper facilities and company of the animal's own kind.

Freedom from fear and distress: by ensuring conditions and treatment which avoid mental suffering.



1. Welfare

AVA Policy - ”Welfare risk exists at all stages of wildlife trade from capture to final destination”



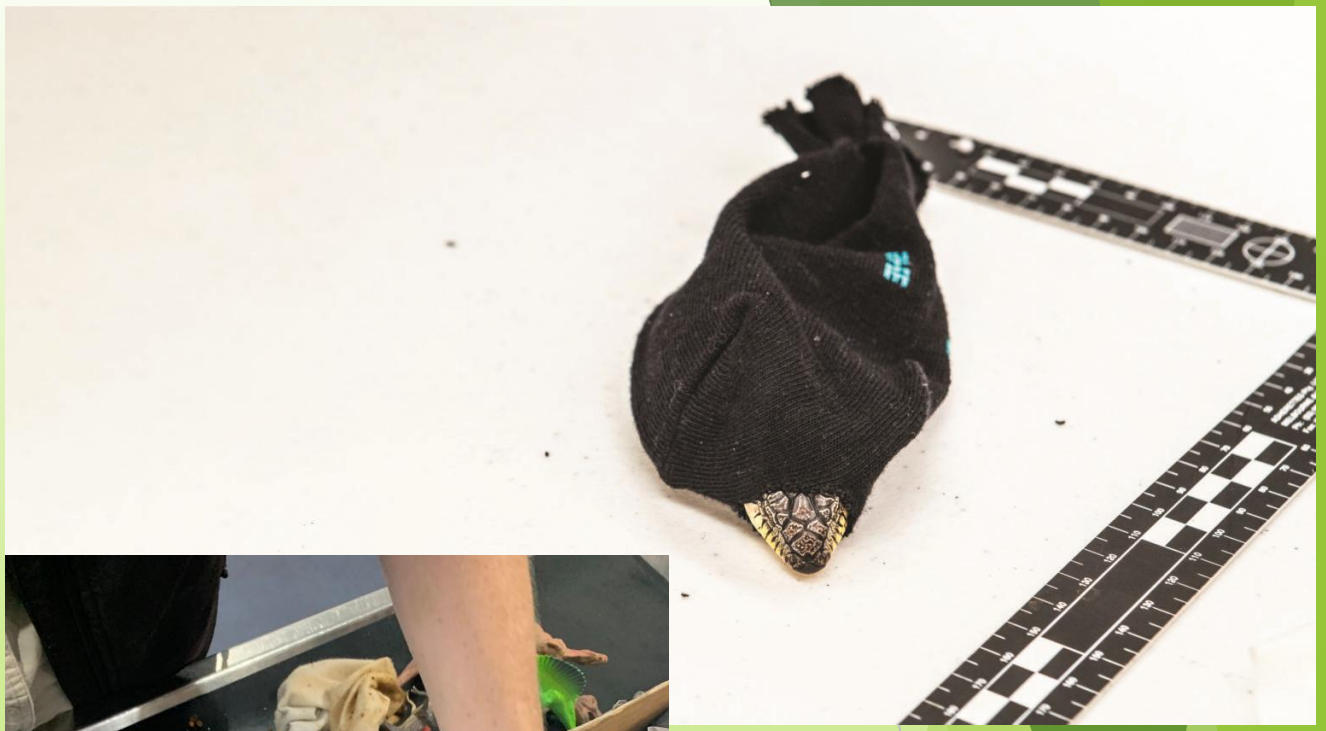
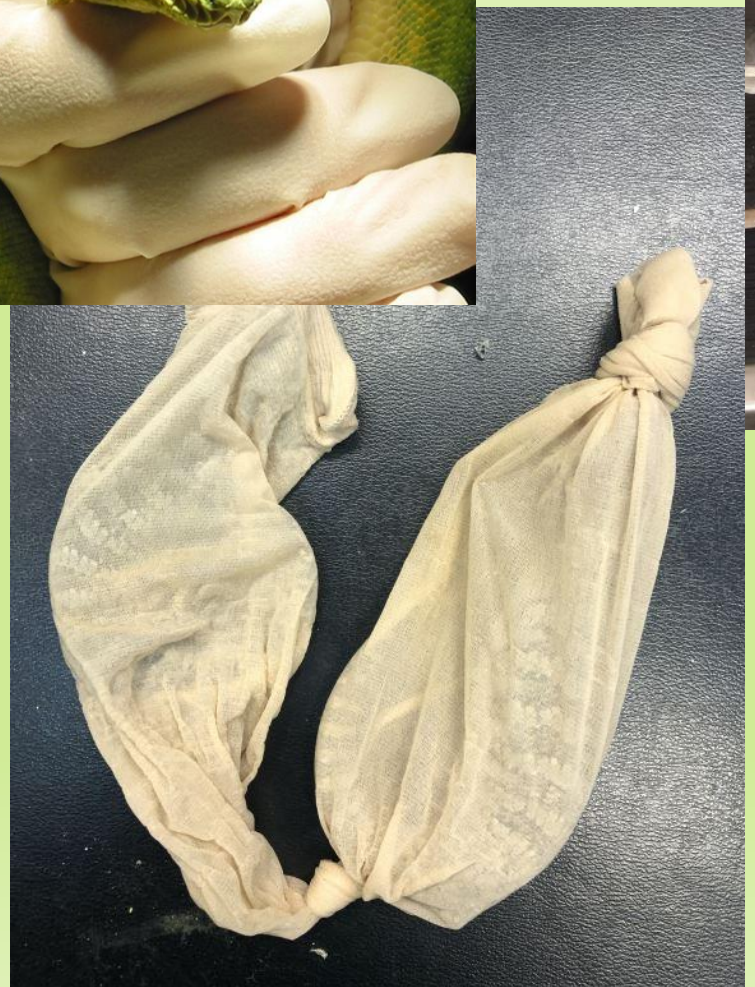


Image credits: Doug Gimesy



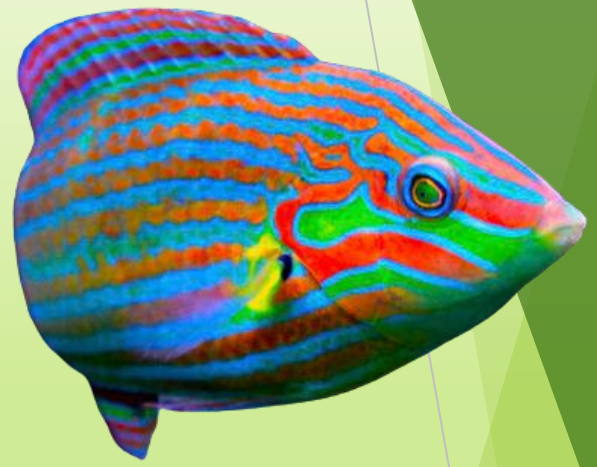
Photos courtesy Taronga Zoo

Welfare in LEGAL Trade

- High morbidity and mortality in distribution
- Lack of knowledge and standards of owner/vet care
- Inability to meet 5 freedoms – numerous reports

Husbandry and Care

"Inherent to the nature of the Exotic Pet Trade is that the species traded are not naturally adapted to the environments into which they are being traded."



For 15 000 species

- Do we understand their environment?
- Do we understand their social structure?
- Do we understand their normal behaviour?

2. Invasive Species

“667 non-native species for sale within Australia from 03/12/2019 to 20/03/2020”

Examples

- Burmese pythons in Florida
- Red eared slider turtle
- Racoons in Japan

Exotic Pet Trade – Invasion

- Linked to nearly 85% of the 140 non-native reptile and amphibians introduced to Florida
- Attributed as the source of 70% of the non-native mammal species in Brazil in the last 30 years
- The primary source of non-native species to the EU of amphibians, reptiles, mammals and birds
- The source of at least 100 species of freshwater fish introduced to North American freshwater bodies, resulting in 40 which have established populations and 33 species of marine fish introduced as pets have been introduced to US coastal waters.
- The most likely origin of the rise of invasive marine species in the EU

3. Biosecurity/Public Health

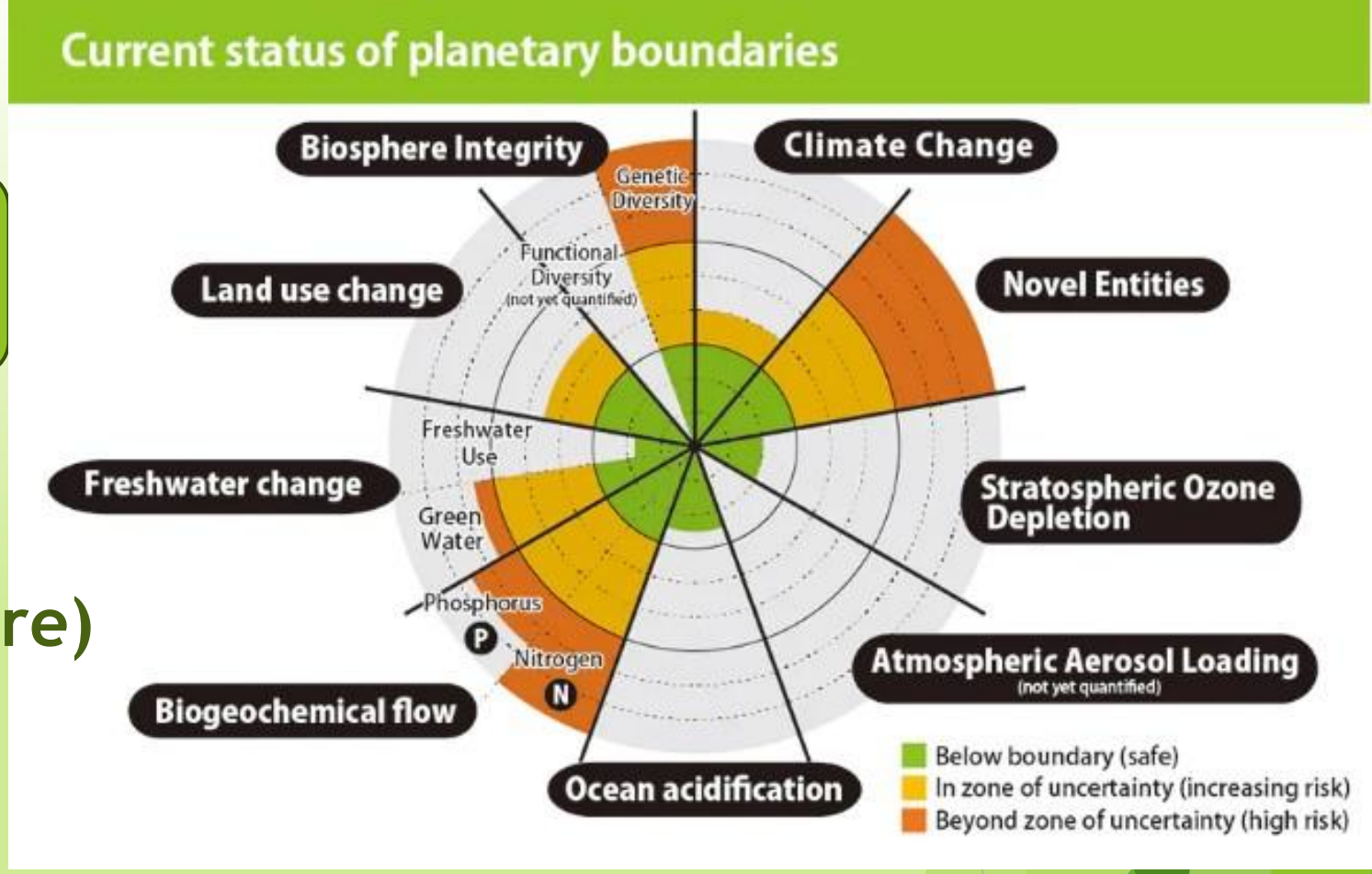
- Risks to human health – SARS CoV-1/2, Hendra
- Risks to native animals
- Risks to agriculture

Salmonella

- 6000 cases annually UK
- 27% of cases of children under 5
- Approx. 74 000 cases annually USA

4. Biodiversity Loss

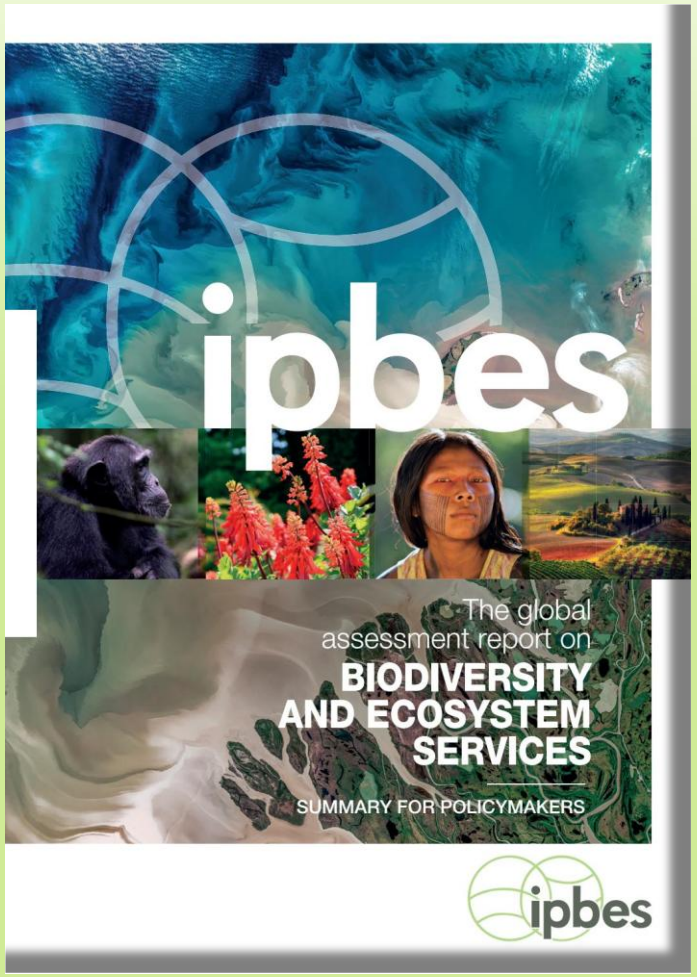
- Planetary Boundaries (Stockholm Resilience Centre)
- IPBES report of 2019



- Sixth major extinction event
- Extinction rate 100-1000 x rate in natural history
- ↓ ecosystem resilience + ↑ disturbance/catastrophic event

Some Take Homes from IPBES Report

- **ONE MILLION species are at risk of extinction**
- **The average abundance of native species in most major land-based habitats has fallen by at least 20%, mostly since 1900. More than 40% of amphibian species, almost 33% of reef forming corals and more than a third of all marine mammals are threatened.**
- **Three-quarters of the land-based environment and about 66% of the marine environment have been significantly altered by human actions.**
- **More than a third of the world's land surface and nearly 75% of freshwater resources are now devoted to crop or livestock production**
- **In 2015, 33% of marine fish stocks were being harvested at unsustainable levels; 60% were maximally sustainably fished, with just 7% harvested at levels lower than what can be sustainably fished - in 2011 up to 33% of worlds fish catch thought to be illegal, unregulated or unreported**
- **+/-50%: live coral cover of reefs lost since 1870s**



Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services Report

The landmark May 2019 IPBES report into the global
extinction crisis confirmed that:

- **Direct exploitation for trade is the most important driver of decline and extinction risk for marine species.**
- **Direct exploitation for trade the second most important driver of decline and extinction risk for terrestrial and freshwater species.**

Rare Sells

Sylvia’s tree frog – described 2018

Shinglebacks

"Despite stringent domestic regulation and enforcement of legislation, an endemic Australian reptile is being poached from the wild, illegally exported out of Australia and sold on international markets across Asia, Europe and North America."
Sarah Heinrich - Animal Conservation Journal

Animal Conservation

ZSL LET'S WORK FOR WILDLIFE

Animal Conservation. Print ISSN 1367-9430

Strengthening protection of endemic wildlife threatened by the international pet trade: The case of the Australian shingleback lizard

S. Heinrich[1,2], A. Toomes[1], C. R. Shepherd[2], O. C. Stringham[1,3], M. Swan[4] & P. Cassey[1]

1 Invasion Science & Wildlife Ecology Lab, The University of Adelaide, Adelaide, SA, Australia
2 Monitor Conservation Research Society (Monitor), Big Lake Ranch, BC, Canada
3 School of Mathematical Sciences, The University of Adelaide, Adelaide, SA, Australia
4 Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions, Kensington, WA, Australia

How do we fix the EPT?

- Positive Listing (Black Listing will not work)
- Traceable Trade - one factor is fixing CITES!
- Directly regulate trade - registered/licensed supply chain
- Owner licensing, pet registration/death reporting, surrender
- Dedicated monitoring and enforcement network
- Harsher and predictable penalties
- Demand reduction - behavioural change not educational

How can YOU help?

- Be interested
- Be vigilant
- Improve your awareness of the exotic pet trade and indeed the legal/illegal wildlife trade
- Support a Positive Listing and a modernisation of CITES – Nature Needs More
- Think outside the consult room – what oath do you swear?

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Questions?

Report -
The Exotic Pet Trade - An unnecessary luxury in need of regulation

CYCLO

AVG

Blogs – Australia's Exotic Pet Trade Is Both Surprising And Rising

We're Oceans Away From Saving Nemo

The Risky Business Of Heavy Petting

Exotic Pet Trade Risk Reduction Strategies

The Future Of The Exotic Pet Trade

Beyond The Clinic: The Veterinarian's Role In Wildlife, Welfare And One Health

CITES In Critical Condition: It's Time For A Morbidity & Mortality Review

Low Risk, High Return – It's Time For A Judicial Awakening

Arusha Reflections and the Alice Effect