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**Letter to Editor**

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### **Misery to animals brought on by the zodiac animal signs**

With each Chinese New Year welcoming a particular animal in the zodiac, each bringing with them their own good fortune and strengths, pet shops and petting farms go all out to import the animals associated with the zodiac animal signs of that year.

In this year of the rat, a petting zoo farm is drawing in the crowd with its import of foreign breeds in the rodent family such as the capybara, porcupine, degu, dormouse, chinchilla and Sphinx rat, to name a few, as exhibits.

The popularization of exotic pets has a major influence on exotic species demand. This is a deadly start to buying an animal on impulse in the belief that it will bring luck, or when it is young and cute. Once the novelty or fetish dies off, or when the animal becomes too troublesome or outgrown its cuteness it will be neglected or abandoned.

When pet stores sell exotic animals, they help fuel the public's desire for unique pets. It is that need for the newest and trendiest pet that leads consumers to the Internet, where sellers are waiting to make quick cash off illegally obtained exotic animals that cannot be found in pet stores. The more rarer the animal, the more money the seller can get. As long as there's a demand, the cycle will continue.

Sahabat Alam Malaysia (SAM) has frequently criticized the trade in and keeping of exotic pets for the commonly inhumane and harmful practices that are associated with supply and keeping, including animal welfare, species conservation, invasiveness, and public health and safety.

Pet shops are quick to promote exotic species as 'easy to keep' and many have no knowledge about the care needed for a particular species often providing wrong or false information to the buyers. Placing profit over providing proper care for animals, it's a prime example of how the pet trade treats animals as a mere commodity.

What the public does not know is the effect of the exotic pet trade where rampant poaching for the exotic animals is devastating animal populations worldwide. Many animals and reptiles suffer during capture and transport and should they end up at their final destination alive, they are often distressed – unable to eat, move and behave as they would in the wild. They also suffer at the hands of dealers who sell to pet stores and zoos. For individuals possessing exotic animals life in captivity is a death sentence for these countless "exotic" animals who suffer from malnutrition, improper care and environment, loneliness, and the stress of confinement. Robbed of their natural habitat, denied the space to roam, they're forced to pace in endless repetitive circles around the same empty cubic inches.

When abandoned pets may starve or fall victim to the elements or predators. Those that survive may overpopulate and wreak havoc on the ecosystem, killing native species. Most non-traditional pets pose a risk to the health of young children. The acquisition and ownership of exotic pets should be discouraged by all means.

Buyers are unaware that countless animals are taken from the wild — often in violation of the law — for use in breeding operations, sold locally, smuggled out of a country or intentionally mislabelled as captive-bred and exported legally. The death rate in the trafficking of wild animals, particularly reptiles, is horrendous and the plundering of wild populations for pets has decimated some species, especially tortoises.

Demand for unique creatures has exploded in recent years with the popularity of e-commerce and social media websites to advertise the sale of live animals. Currently there are no governmental regulations to control the influx of exotic animals into the country.

SAM is strongly opposed to the keeping of exotic wildlife as pets. We call for a ban on the sale of exotic animals in pet shops as well as banning the on-line advertisement of exotic animals.

Until then the public must realize that animals belong in their natural habitats and not in the hands of individuals as pets. The best is never to keep exotics as pets - 'No Wild Animals choose to be made a pet!'

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