



# Exotic animals as pets

This lesson looks at the complex needs of exotic (non-domestic) pets and the responsibility involved in looking after them.

Pupils will research, discuss and debate topical issues, problems and events that are of concern to them and offer their recommendations to appropriate people. They will look at what exotic animals need and the responsibility we have to our pets.

## ? Did you know?

- All pets, including exotic animals, require proper care and attention. But exotics can be more expensive to feed and look after properly and they often require specialist living conditions.
- Some owners keep exotic animals in unsuitable conditions, which cause a variety of illnesses and injuries. It can also be difficult and costly to find a vet who is experienced in treating these animals.
- People often buy young animals without finding out how big they will grow and how long they will live. As a result, pet owners might abandon or neglect the animals when they reach their full size. The RSPCA receives around 15,000 calls about exotic animals each year. This includes calls about exotic pets who were abandoned or suffering unnecessarily.
- Keeping a pet can be a lifelong commitment. Therefore, it's important to do your homework before you buy any animal. Be sure that you can provide a suitable diet, care and captive environment for the rest of the animal's life.

## 1 Starter activity

### What is an exotic pet?

- It is difficult to give a clear definition of 'exotic'. However, any animal that is not native to the country where it is kept in captivity can be called an exotic (non-domestic) animal. Generally, these animals are not adapted to the climate and wild environment in the country where they are kept. Therefore, they are often completely reliant on their keeper to provide the appropriate captive environment and food they need to stay healthy and to exhibit their natural behaviours.
- Working in groups or pairs, ask the class to mind map what an exotic (non-domestic) pet is.
- They can then feed back to the group the types of animals they think exotic pets may be.  
For example:
  1. Spiders, such as tarantulas
  2. Frogs, toads, salamanders and newts from tropical countries
  3. Green iguanas, geckos and chameleons
  4. Exotic snakes
  5. Tortoises and terrapins
  6. Parrots and other exotic birds
  7. Monkeys
  8. Chinchillas, chipmunks and gerbils.
- Why does the class think people keep exotic pets?

## 2 Main activity

### Focus on iguanas

- Show the pupils the photo of the iguana from the collection of images [Pets](#).
  1. Tell them iguanas come from tropical places in the Caribbean and in Central and South America.
  2. Ask them to think about the conditions iguanas are used to in these places – heat, sun, monsoon conditions.
  3. How do the pupils think iguanas feel when they come to the UK? How are conditions different here?
- Read through the factsheet [Suitable pets?](#) with the pupils and ask them to make a note of all the different things you need to buy to look after a green iguana properly. Ask the class to feed back what they noted. Write a list of their suggestions, which might include: vivarium, thermostat, hygrometer (to measure humidity), special lights, heat sources, food, water, plants and branches.
- In pairs, ask the pupils to compare a common pet, such as a dog, with an iguana. What are the differences? What do dogs need to be happy and healthy and what do iguanas need?
- Find out more about exotic pets:
  - Watch this video which explains how the RSPCA helps exotics pets and why they often end up in our care: [youtube.com/watch?v=DCfydg-aFag&feature=emb\\_logo](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DCfydg-aFag&feature=emb_logo)
  - Find out more about the needs of exotic pets by looking at our care sheets: [rspca.org.uk/adviceandwelfare/pets/other](https://www.rspca.org.uk/adviceandwelfare/pets/other)

## Plenary activities

### Suitable pets

After feeding back these ideas to the class, ask groups of pupils to decide whether they think animals such as iguanas make good pets. Ask the class to share their experiences of exotic pets. Do they know someone who owns one? Do they have an exotic pet themselves?

## + What next?

### Extension activities

Ask pupils to write to the chief environmental officer at their local authority and suggest ways that pet shops could promote responsible pet ownership. For example, pet shop staff should be trained in exotic animals care so they can give customers detailed information when they buy exotic pets. The local authority could set strict licensing standards for pet shops and visit them regularly to ensure the guidelines are being followed.

### How you can help

There are several ways you can contribute to preventing the trade of wild-caught animals and promoting best practice in pet shops, including:

- only buy animals that have been born and reared in captivity in the UK
- ask pet shops not to sell wild-caught animals
- write to your local authority and ask them to set strict licensing standards for pet shops so staff are properly trained in exotics' care and can provide customers with detailed information on caring for exotic (non-domestic) pets.

### English version

Want to explore the topic of caring for pets further? Try these lessons:

- [How do we care for animals?](#)
- [Campaigning for animal welfare](#)
- [Exotic animals as pets](#)
- [A nation of animal lovers](#)

### Bilingual version

We have relevant resources for each Progression Stage on our website:

<https://education.rspca.org.uk/education/teachers/lessonplanswales>