

Factsheet – Non-domestic (exotic) pets

What is a non-domestic (exotic) pet?

The term 'non-domestic' or 'exotic' is difficult to define. Strictly speaking, it should relate to any animal kept outside of its country of origin. However, this would include rabbits, gerbils and hamsters, even though these animals have been bred and kept in captivity for a long time.

Non-domestic or exotic pets can be any animal:

- that is not well-established as a common household pet
- where limited and variable animal care information is available to pet owners
- where veterinary knowledge is not available from the majority of veterinary surgeries.

Which types of animals can be considered non-domestic (exotic)?

- Spiders, such as tarantulas
- Tropical frogs, toads, salamanders and newts
- Iguanas, geckos and chameleons
- Snakes
- Tortoises and terrapins
- Parrots, parakeets and other exotic birds
- Monkeys
- Chinchillas and chipmunks

Where do they come from?

A wide variety of animals are now bred in captivity in the UK.

However, every year, millions of wild animals continue to be trapped from countries such as South America and Africa for use in the pet trade. Many die at the time of capture, during transport and before being sold as pets. The trade in wild-caught 'exotics' for the pet trade, along with habitat destruction, means that several species, including parrots and tortoises, are now endangered.

What about the trade in endangered species?

CITES (Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species) is an international agreement designed to ensure that international trade in wild animals does not threaten their survival by preventing or restricting trade in certain endangered animals.

What do you need to consider when buying a non-domestic (exotic) pet?

Before you buy a non-domestic (exotic) animal or any other type of pet you should make sure that you have all the necessary equipment and enough time, money and commitment to provide the animal with a good standard of long-term care.

You should also find out as much as you can about how to look after that animal, particularly if it is a non-domestic pet, from your own research and from the pet seller. You will need to find out what veterinary care might be needed and whether your local vet can treat and give advice on non-domestic pets. Treating non-domestic pets can be expensive.

Many non-domestic pets are rescued by organisations such as the RSPCA, so consider rehoming a non-domestic pet rather than buying one. Although many non-domestic pets are now bred in the UK, some are captive-farmed in other countries and then imported, which is very stressful for the animal.

You should also make sure that you do not buy imported wild-caught animals.

Different animals have different needs, and some are more difficult to meet than others. It is important that owners choose the right animal for them.