INTRODUCTION
WILDLIFE INDICATORS 2005–2009

The impact of human life on wild animal welfare is significant and wide ranging. The sheer number of species and individual wild animals means that working to improve the welfare of wildlife is an extremely challenging task.

The situation is complicated by the wide range of circumstances in which humans encounter wild animals and the resulting plethora of welfare issues. Wild animals can be captive, for example as zoo exhibits, circus entertainers and household pets; at approximately12 million, non-domestic pets outnumber the populations of pet cats or dogs[1]. Once under the control of humans, all wild animals are protected by the Animal Welfare Act 2006, but many still fail to receive the level of care necessary to adequately meet their needs. Free-living wildlife can also experience compromised welfare as a result of human activity. For example animals are shot, snared, trapped or poisoned as pests, caught or killed for trade, and can suffer or die from encounters with litter and collisions with vehicles.

People's differing attitudes to wild animals – the same species can be a beloved pet, a source of food or a bothersome pest – present a further complication.

The welfare of wildlife in the UK has been influenced by a number of significant events over the past five years.

2005

- Legislation[2] was passed seeking to monitor and mitigate incidental deaths of cetaceans in fisheries. Bycatch is required to be monitored through an observer scheme and certain vessels must deploy acoustic devices in relation to specified gear whilst fishing.
- Legal protection was increased for some species that are endangered, or at risk of becoming so, due to international commercial trade[3].

2006

- The Animal Welfare Act[4] was passed. Enacted in 2007, it places a legal duty of care on those responsible for animals to meet five welfare needs: somewhere suitable to live; a proper diet, including fresh water; the ability to express normal behaviour; for any need to be housed with, or apart from, other animals; protection from, and treatment of, illness and injury. The law has implications for wildlife as it applies to all vertebrates under the control of man, including wild animals caught in traps, kept as pets or being rehabilitated.

2007

- The tanker *MSC Napoli* ran aground near Branscombe, South Devon. About 1,020 seabirds, mostly guillemots, were picked up by RSPCA staff and members of the public, and treated at RSPCA centres – 485 were released back into the wild.
- After nearly a decade's work, the final report of the Independent Scientific Group (ISG) on cattle TB[5] was published, providing a sound science base for the development of control policies. Work of the group involved overseeing the randomised badger cull trial as well as a parallel research programme on disease development in cattle.
- A ban[6] on the import of wild birds into the EU came into force as a measure to counter the threat of avian influenza.
- Many animals, including racoons, sloths, emus and squirrel monkeys, were removed[7] from the Dangerous Wild Animals Act Schedule.
- The Regulatory Reform (Deer) Order 2007 (England and Wales) came into effect following lengthy consultation; it aims to help improve management of wild deer populations while providing safeguards for the welfare of deer.

2008

- Strategies to tackle bovine TB in cattle were announced. Running counter to strong scientific evidence, the Welsh Assembly Government announced a badger cull would, in principle, take place. A more welcome stance was taken by the UK government, with more funds committed to develop usable cattle and badger vaccines.
- Taking on board recent scientific research[8], the decision was made to play recordings of the dawn chorus to young birds in all RSPCA wildlife centres from June 2008. Recordings should help develop the natural singing repertoires of young fledglings, and so increase their chances of survival after release, which will be monitored.
- The GB Non-Native Species Secretariat published an Invasive Non-Native Species Framework Strategy for GB[9]. This sets out a strategy to deal with non-native species deemed to be invasive, such as American mink and ruddy ducks, and covers topics including prevention, early detection, mitigation and control measures.
- The RSPCA responded to a government consultation on potential changes to the Dangerous Wild Animals Act 1976, highlighting the risks of weakening the Act's welfare provisions.





- Further scientific research was published strengthening the case against keeping elephants in zoos. Defra-commissioned research, part-funded by the RSPCA, found very high rates of lameness, obesity and abnormal, stereotypic behaviour in UK zoo elephants[10]. Another study, published in the journal *Science*, reported vastly reduced life spans in European zoo elephants compared to counterparts living in the wild and in timber camps[11].

2009

- Strategies for dealing with bovine TB in badgers were put into place across the UK. Following a public consultation, to which the RSPCA responded[12], the Tuberculosis Eradication (Wales) Order 2009 came into force. Despite the Independent Scientific Group's recommendation against culling, the intention to undertake a pilot cull in an area of North Pembrokeshire was announced, while a more positive step was taken in England when it announced that the first vaccine against bovine TB in badgers would be used in the field in 2010[13]. The RSPCA responded to the Defra consultation on amendments to legislation to allow lay vaccination of badgers against bovine tuberculosis, outlining our respective concerns and support for the planned vaccination programme.
- New scientific research aided by the RSPCA[14] suggested that hedgehogs may be at risk from anticoagulant rat and mouse poisons. Significant levels of the poisons were found in the animals' bodies, which could potentially have an impact on survival, breeding success or mobility.
- As a result of new scientific evidence[15] from the Zoological Society of London, the Marine Animal Rescue Coalition's (MARC) protocol for stranded whales was updated. Members of MARC, including the RSPCA, agreed that stranded sperm and beaked whales should be euthanased in order to reduce their suffering unless exceptional circumstances arose.
- An estimated 74,000 deer are involved in road traffic accidents every year and these collisions injure up to 700 people. To help raise public awareness about the issue the Highways Agency, together with other members of the Deer Initiative including the RSPCA, launched a campaign called DeerAware as part of the UK National Deer-Vehicle Collisions Project[16].
- The fifteenth Conference of the Parties (CoP15) to the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) took place in Doha, Qatar. Among the many agenda items considered were two proposals for one-off sales of ivory stockpiles in Tanzania and Zambia; both were rejected.

A number of events affecting wild animals have occurred in the first half of 2010.

- A public consultation by Defra on the use of wild animals in circuses found that 94.5 per cent of respondents supported a ban[17] of this practice.
- Amendments[18] were made by Defra to the Dangerous Wild Animals Act 1976. The government did not remove all reference to animal welfare from the Act but unfortunately proceeded with changes to licensing and inspection requirements.
- A legal challenge led by the Badger Trust against the planned badger cull in Pembrokeshire, Wales, was upheld, resulting in a halt of the cull.
- Defra launched a Code of Practice on the Welfare of Privately Kept Non-Human Primates[19] following a public consultation in 2009 to which the Society responded, outlining our concerns about the keeping of primates as pets and evidence of the present situation.
- The British Veterinary Association highlighted the problems faced by exotic pets as the most important animal welfare issue needing to be addressed by the new government[20].

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Photographs: DuncanMurrell, Chris Brignell, Andrew Forsyth/RSPCA Photolibrary

Welfare indicator: The proportion of stranded cetaceans by-caught around the UK

RSPCA concern

By-catch is the term used to describe non-targeted animals that are entangled, trapped or injured in fishing nets. By-catch poses a significant threat to the welfare and conservation of cetaceans (porpoises, dolphins and whales) in waters around the UK and globally. The RSPCA is extremely concerned about the levels of suffering by-caught animals endure. Cetaceans caught in nets can become injured as they struggle for freedom and eventually die if unable to return to the surface to breathe. As a result, some animals are found stranded dead or alive. Entanglement injuries can be used as an indicator that animals were previously caught in nets. The number of porpoises and dolphins dying in UK fisheries over the last 16 years has been consistently high, yet no consistent effort of mitigation has been undertaken, even though enforcement of UK cetacean by-catch legislation would bring a reduction in the frequency of by-catch.

The RSPCA believes the government must take action to enforce such legislation, and must be proactive in supporting research into alternative fishing technology and by-catch mitigation methods, with the aim of eliminating all cetacean by-catch.

THERE HAS BEEN LITTLE CHANGE OVER THE PAST FIVE YEARS.

Background

It has been estimated that more than 300,000 cetaceans are killed throughout the world every year as a result of becoming tangled in fishing gear[1]. Common dolphins and harbour porpoises are the most frequent casualties of the UK fishing industry[2]; in 2008 it was estimated that 600 porpoises and 300 dolphins die every year in set net fisheries waters off the UK's south-west coast[3]. The various fishing methods affect species differently; dolphins tend to get caught in pelagic (open ocean) trawls such as bass pair trawling, while porpoises are more often trapped in bottom-set gillnets and tangle nets.

The issue of small cetacean (dolphin and porpoise) entanglement caused by UK fisheries was first highlighted in 1992, when large numbers of dead dolphins washed up on the beaches of Cornwall and Devon. Within the first three months of 1992, 118 dead dolphins were stranded, and post-mortem investigations revealed for the first time that the deaths of many of these animals could be attributed to by-catch[4]. Post-mortem evidence pointed clearly at a prolonged and traumatic death for the animals. Blood-filled froth had started to form in the lungs, skin was lacerated by net meshes and teeth were broken – all suggesting a sustained struggle by these air-breathing mammals trapped underwater. Cetaceans are conscious breathers, and death was found to be a result of asphyxia when their oxygen supplies ran out[4].

In an attempt to identify the source of dolphin mortality, observers were placed on fishing vessels in south-west England between summer 1992 and spring 1994[5]. Their findings revealed that, rather than dolphins, many porpoises were dying in nets set on the sea floor (bottom-set gillnets). More than 2,000 porpoises were estimated to be dying as by-catch each year in that fishery alone[5] – a level considered to be a threat to the survival of the population as well as a huge welfare concern. Subsequent studies in other European fisheries revealed dolphin deaths in trawl nets at a rate of one to 1.5 dolphins every 100 hours of fishing[6].

Efforts have been made to mitigate cetacean by-catch. Acoustic alarms (called pingers) have been developed to deter cetaceans from certain types of fixed nets. To counter concerns within the industry regarding these devices, a new model, which is louder than those previously used, is presently undergoing investigation and initial results are promising[7]. Pingers, however, are not seen as the definitive solution to the problem[8] and further fishing gear development is required. Research into whether aspects of netting (such as tension) attract porpoises to

nets has suggested some correlation but more exploration is needed[3].

Ongoing work in the UK[9] and in Europe is also aiming to address the deaths of common dolphins in trawl nets. Mortality rates in the sea bass fishery in the English Channel and south-west approaches are extremely high and indicate that more than 900 common dolphins died in the UK bass fishery between 2000 and 2005[10 11]. Many more French than UK boats use this fishery, so total mortality will be significantly greater. Bass pair trawling by UK vessels in certain areas off the south-west coast of England is now banned[12], however efforts by the UK to encourage the European Commission (EC) to extend this to EU member states' vessels that fish in the same waters have been unsuccessful[13]. Research into designing escape hatches from trawl nets, and deterring dolphins from entering trawl nets using acoustic deterrent devices has shown that the latter method is more effective at reducing by-catch, however additional work is needed[3].

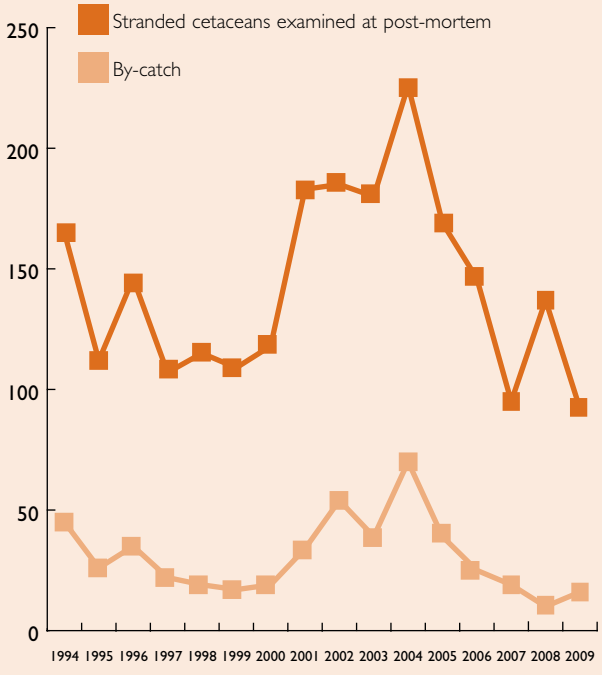
Under the EU Common Fisheries Policy, a regulation[14] was introduced to monitor and reduce cetacean by-catch in certain fisheries. The UK adopted this regulation into domestic law[15], placing an obligation on certain fisheries either to carry observers or to fix acoustic deterrent pingers onto their nets. Though the observer work is underway[7], some fishermen are failing to comply with pinger requirements, as they believe that pingers are unreliable, costly and potentially dangerous[16]. Additionally, because these regulations only apply to boats that are 12 metres long or more, a large number of boats using bottom-set gillnets (known to cause porpoise deaths) are exempt from obligation. The EC is presently undertaking a review of this regulation with a view to clarifying and strengthening current measures in addition to proposing new ones. The UK has announced that it will produce a new 'Small cetacean by-catch strategy' following the outcome of this review.

The indicator figures

The actual number of cetaceans by-caught in fisheries is unknown, but estimates can be made from observer programmes that sample a small proportion of fishing fleets, and from the analysis of carcasses found on beaches. The total number of cetaceans stranding on UK shores doubled between 1994 and 2006, from 360 to 719[17 18], possibly due to growth in the bass pair trawling fishery. Since then, perhaps partly as a result of the ban in the south-west[12], the total number of cetacean strandings has decreased by almost 40 per cent, to 439 in 2009[19].

Post-mortem examinations were conducted on stranded cetaceans that were not badly decomposed in order to try and determine the cause of death[2 17 18 19 20]. Figure 1 shows the numbers of stranded cetaceans examined, and the numbers of those deaths known to have been a result of by-catch. Figure 2 illustrates these figures as percentages. In 2009, 17.4 per cent of post mortemed animals were by-caught. Except for a decline in 2008, the proportion of deaths attributed to by-catch has remained relatively consistent at around 20 per cent. Of animals examined in 2008, 7.3 per cent were found to have been by-caught. Eight harbour porpoises and two common dolphins were by-caught – the lowest numbers recorded of both species for 18 years[2]. Many factors could have been responsible for this decrease, including changes in distribution of prey, fishing effort and weather conditions, and/or the behaviour of the cetaceans themselves[2]. It is important to note that these post mortem figures don't provide information on the scale of the problem, as most discarded carcasses never reach the beach[21].

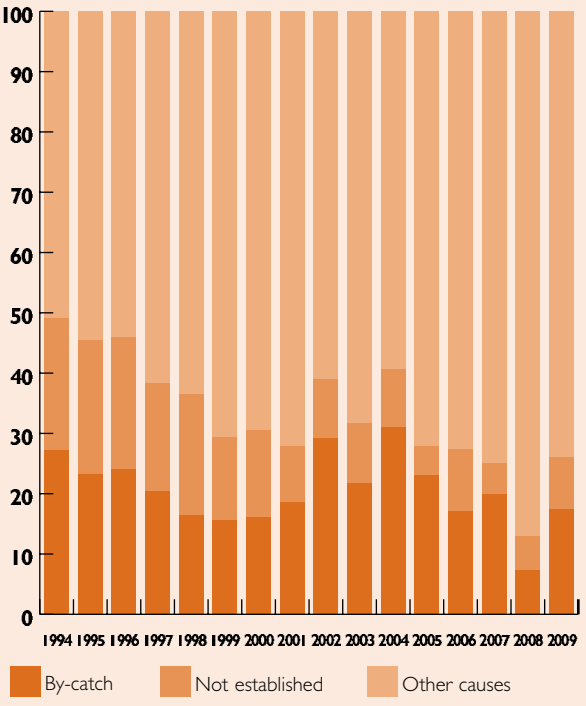
Figure 1: The number of stranded cetaceans examined and number of deaths caused by by-catch, 1994–2009



Data source: Institute of Zoology.

Enforcement of UK cetacean by-catch legislation could bring a reduction in the frequency of their entanglement in nets. The government, and those of other member states that fish in waters off the UK coast, must take action to enforce legislation, and must be proactive in supporting research into alternative fishing technology and by-catch mitigation methods. While the fall in the number of cetacean strandings overall could be seen as encouraging, it is important to appreciate that this decrease is likely to be due to normal annual variation[20]. In order to determine whether this is the case, more must be learnt about cetacean populations around the UK as well as seasonal movement and population structure. The proportion of cetaceans by-caught has remained high over the last 16 years and, despite a fall in 2008, shows no sign of a sustained decline.

Figure 2: Proportion of total deaths (%) known to be caused by by-catch and other causes, 1994–2009



Data source: Institute of Zoology.

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Welfare indicator: The number of imported wild-taken reptiles and birds as a proportion of the total trade into the UK and the EU

RSPCA concern

A huge range of live birds and reptiles is available for sale to hobbyists and the pet-keeping public from many sources including pet shops, commercial breeders and the internet.

Hundreds of thousands of wild reptiles continue to be removed from the wild each year to supply the demands of the pet trade in the EU, including the UK. This is despite improvement in experienced keepers' knowledge of the needs of many commonly kept species, and the ability of commercial breeders to supply some species completely from captive-bred animals.

UK and EU bird imports have decreased significantly following the introduction of EU legislation in October 2005, preventing the importation of live birds taken from the wild into all EU member states. The RSPCA will continue to monitor the trade in birds, but the ban appears to have all but halted trade in these animals.

The RSPCA is concerned that where animals are taken from the wild, many suffer or die before being exported, during transportation and once held in captivity for the pet trade[1]. To prevent the suffering of these animals, the Society advocates far stricter regulations to restrict or stop their importation into the EU – the largest global market for reptiles. Ceasing trade in animals taken from the wild will reduce the impact on wild populations and encourage traders to focus on species already available from captive-bred sources.

Background

People in the UK may assume that every animal on sale is captive-bred and that all wild animals are protected from the pet trade by international regulations. Both of these assumptions are unfounded. International trade in wild animals is only regulated for species that are endangered or threatened by trade, and which are listed on the Convention on the International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) appendices. This Convention is implemented through EU CITES trade regulations[2] and enforced through the UK COTES (Control of Trade in Endangered Species) legislation[3]. Of the approximately 10,000 species of birds[4] and 7,700 species of reptiles[5] recorded in the wild, just under 15 per cent of bird species and eight per cent of reptile species are protected by CITES.

In order to get an idea of the level of trade in reptiles and birds as well as the source of animals involved, it is necessary to look at more than one database. Figures on the movements of all animals into the EU and between EU member states are collated into the central EU database called TRACES (the Trade Control and Expert System) and the European Community Eurostat database. However, neither database records the source of the animals being traded, making it impossible to know how many are captured from the wild. In contrast, CITES data records source information but represents only a proportion of total trade as not all species are CITES-listed. Therefore CITES data has been used to monitor the source of animals and investigate any shifts in numbers taken from the wild compared to those bred in captivity.

Obtaining robust data for this indicator is challenging. Figures from the government are often inconsistent from one year to the next[6]. Responses from the government to the same parliamentary question (PQ) in different years can be conflicting; some years data is provided whilst in others the RSPCA is told that figures that have been previously provided

TOTAL NUMBER OF LIVE, WILD-CAUGHT CITES-LISTED REPTILES IMPORTED INTO THE EU. LARGE INCREASE OVER THE LAST FIVE YEARS.

PROPORTION OF LIVE, CITES-LISTED REPTILES IMPORTED INTO THE EU THAT ARE WILD-CAUGHT. LARGE INCREASE OVER THE LAST FIVE YEARS.

TOTAL NUMBER OF LIVE, WILD-CAUGHT CITES-LISTED REPTILES IMPORTED INTO THE UK. VERY LARGE INCREASE OVER THE LAST FIVE YEARS.

PROPORTION OF LIVE, CITES-LISTED REPTILES IMPORTED INTO THE UK THAT ARE WILD-CAUGHT. DECREASE OVER THE LAST FIVE YEARS.

are impossible to obtain[7]. Incomparable data is a problem; for example the number of consignments rather than the number of individual animals is provided in response to the same PQ asked in different years[8]. Inconsistencies have also been found between the figures of CITES trade provided by the government and the World Conservation Monitoring Centre. It is important to note that TRACES does not provide a full record of all EU reptile imports as there are no animal health-based restrictions or conditions for such movements[9]. An added complication now exists because since deregulation[10] in 2007, bird movements into the UK from the EU are apparently no longer recorded, making it virtually impossible to monitor trends in total bird trade. Finally, this report can only deal with legal, recorded trade. Illegal trade into the EU and UK appears common but is largely unrecorded; in 2008/9 alone 1,044 reptiles were seized under CITES by HM Revenue and Customs[11].

The indicator figures – live reptiles

Total live reptile trade (TRACES and Eurostat data)

Unfortunately, comparable data on the total number of individual reptiles imported into the EU in 2006/7/8/9 were not provided by the government[12,13]. The RSPCA estimates that in 2009 between 5.9 and 9.8 million live reptiles were imported into the EU[14]; this is a considerable rise from 2005, when EU data indicated that 1,613,842 reptiles were imported[15].

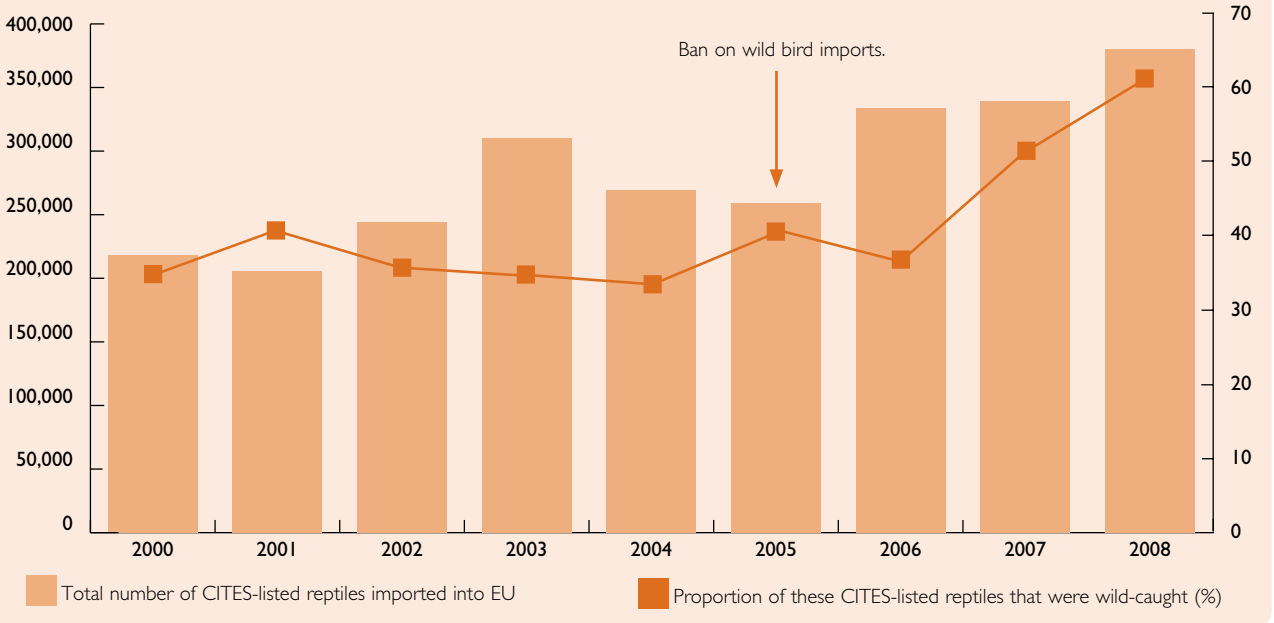
In 2009, 295,607 animals entered the UK from outside the EU, but only 2,042 arrived from other EU member states[9]. This means that more than 99 per cent of all live reptiles imported into the UK originated from outside the EU. In previous years, this has been from South American or African countries where CITES-listed reptile species are found in the wild[16]. Over the last five years, there has been a 123 per cent increase in reptiles imported into the UK from outside the EU[9].

While actual numbers are smaller, movement of these animals into the UK from within the EU has increased since 2005 from 100 to 2,042[9].

Source of reptiles (CITES data)

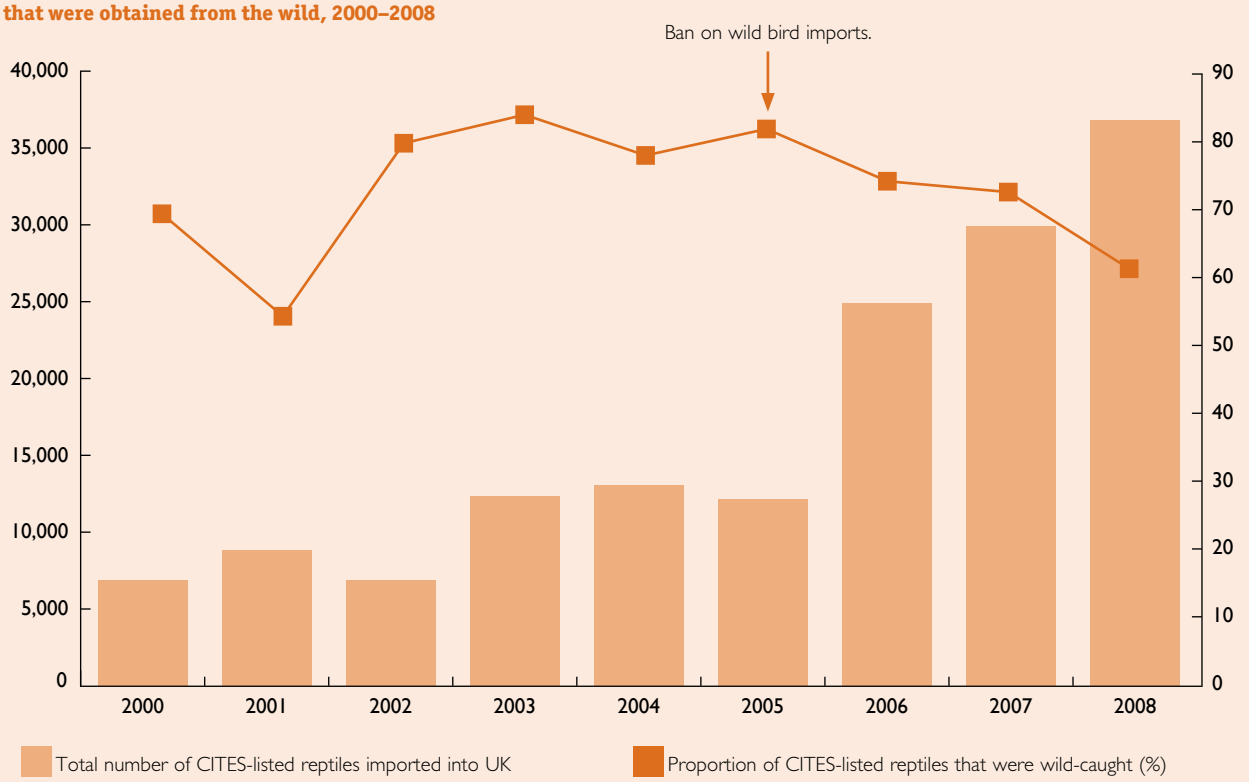
Figure 3 shows the number of live reptiles imported into the EU under CITES, and the proportion of these that were wild-caught, for 2000–2008[17,18]. At the time of writing, 2009 data were not available. Over the last nine years, the number of CITES-listed reptiles imported has increased by 42.5 per cent, to 380,026 in 2008. During the same period, the proportion of these animals that were wild-caught almost doubled, from 34 per cent to 60 per cent. There are now three times as many reptiles being taken from the wild and imported into the EU as there were in 2000. Data for CITES trade into the UK from outside the EU between 2000 and 2008[17,18] are shown in Figure 4. At the time of writing, 2009 data were not available. Since 2000 the trade in live CITES-listed reptiles has increased; the total number of imports is now more than five times what it was in 2000 – a rise of

Figure 3: Total number of CITES-listed reptiles imported into the EU, and proportion (%) of these reptiles that were obtained from the wild, 2000–2008



Data source: UK government and the World Conservation Monitoring Centre.

Figure 4: Total number of CITES-listed reptiles imported into the UK from outside the EU, and proportion (%) of these reptiles that were obtained from the wild, 2000–2008



Data source: UK government and the World Conservation Monitoring Centre.

more than 80 per cent. During this time the number of animals that were wild-caught increased by almost 79 per cent. The fall in proportion of animals taken from the wild to 61 per cent in 2008 was a result of a rise in the number of captive-bred reptiles rather than a decrease in the number of animals taken from the wild. In actual fact, this figure for 2008 showed an increase of almost four per cent on 2007, to 22,553 animals.

Trade in reptiles seems to have increased steadily since 2000, possibly due to a rise in popularity of keeping these animals as pets. The greatest impact on wild animal trade since October 2005 is probably the introduction of EU-wide legislation that stopped the importation of wild birds into all EU member states on health grounds in an effort to reduce the risk of transmission and spread of avian influenza[19]. Suspension of one trade may contribute to a shift in the effort of trappers and exporters towards different animals in order to maintain business. The growth in reptile trade into the UK since 2005 (Figure 4) could therefore have occurred following a shift from exporting wild birds towards wild reptiles. To support such a change, a wild-bird keeper in the EU would need to be willing to shift their interest to wild-caught reptiles, in preference to acquiring captive-bred birds that are already kept and sold in the EU. It is possible that heightened public concern about potential disease – namely avian influenza – may have led to pet keepers preferring reptiles over birds. Commercial pet retailers may also be intentionally shifting their efforts towards buying and selling reptiles to the public, in response to the stop on imports of wild-caught birds.

Following the implementation of the US import ban of wild CITES-listed birds in 1992[20], there was a temporary peak in the number of live reptiles imported the following year (totaling 3.29 million reptiles; 15 per cent more than the previous year). However, numbers then decreased each subsequent year until reaching a low in 1996 of 0.72 million animals[21]. It is currently unclear whether the growth seen in reptile trade into the UK and EU will follow a similar trend in the long term.

A large proportion of the reptiles imported from the wild into the EU do so without any monitoring or control. While the RSPCA fully supports the end of the wild-bird trade into the EU on welfare grounds, the Society is concerned by a shift in trade to reptiles.

Whatever the reason for the increase in reptile imports, trade into the EU of over five million live reptiles demonstrates a need for regulation of the reptile trade into, and within, the

EU. The importation of species most vulnerable to suffering and mortality should be restricted. Reptile traders and keepers also have a responsibility to carefully consider the source of the animal to be acquired, to choose captive-bred animals, and to provide the facilities and care necessary to secure the animals' welfare when kept in captivity.

The indicator figures – wild birds

Total live bird trade (TRACES and Eurostat data)

It has been difficult to obtain data regarding the total trade of birds into the EU and UK. Historical figures for the number of all birds imported into the EU appear to be unreliable, as numbers provided are lower than CITES-listed species alone (e.g. 521,906[22] in 2005 cf. 524,850 CITES-listed birds). It was not possible to obtain current figures on the number of birds imported into the EU between 2000 and 2009[13].

The number of birds imported into the UK from within the EU rose dramatically; the import total in 2008 was almost 130 times what it was in 2004. The greatest increase occurred between 2004 (48,725 birds) and 2005 (3,049,918 birds), the year in which the ban on wild bird imports was implemented. This may be due to keepers and sellers seeking to obtain birds (both captive-bred and wild) from within the EU open market rather than from source countries in anticipation of the ban and also as a result of concern over avian 'flu.

In contrast, the overall number of birds imported from outside the EU decreased by 99.8 per cent between 2004 and 2008. The largest fall was in 2006 following the introduction of the bird import ban. Numbers fell from a high of 71,898 in 2005 to 291 animals the next year; this decrease appears to have continued, with just 89 being imported in 2008.

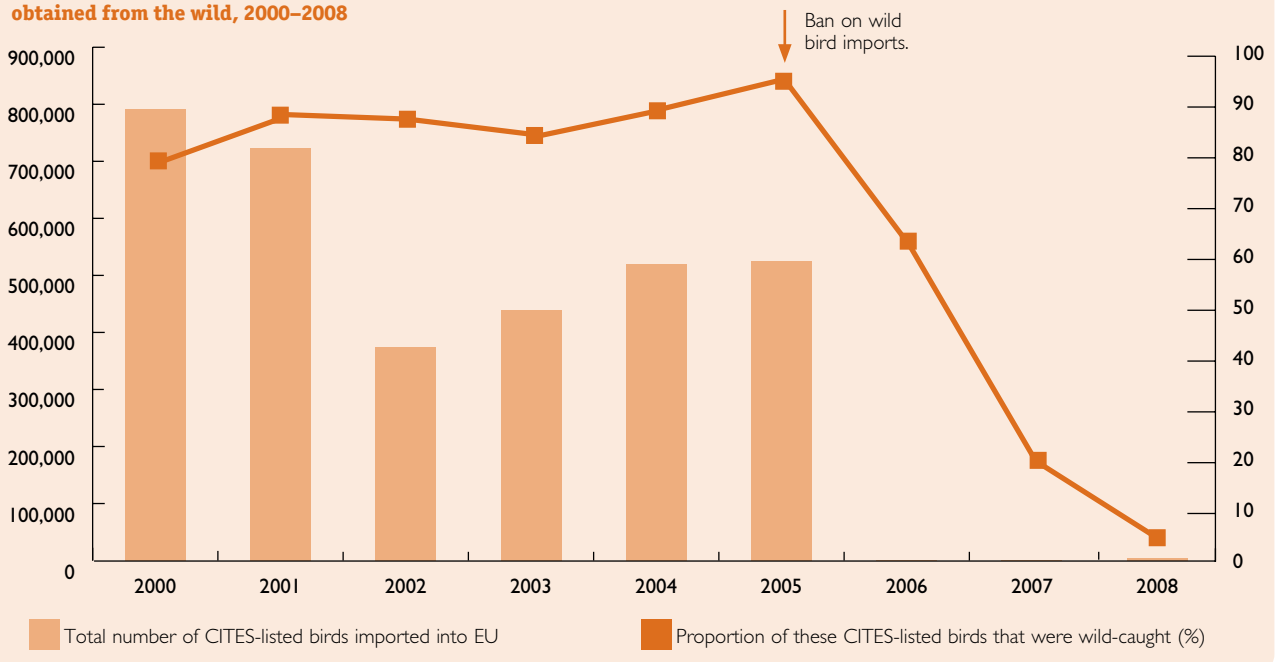
Data on bird trade into the UK from within and outside the EU in 2009 was not provided by the government.

Source of birds (CITES data)

Unfortunately at the time of writing, 2009 data on import of CITES-listed birds were not available. Figures 5 and 6 show the number of CITES-listed birds imported into the EU as a whole and into the UK from outside the EU, in addition to the proportion of these birds that were wild-caught, from 2000. Thousands of wild-caught CITES-listed birds were imported annually into the EU between 2002 and 2005[18], but following the EU-wide ban on imports of wild birds[19], the trade in CITES-listed species all but ceased (Figure 5). Looking at CITES-listed bird imports into the UK, we see a similar crash in Figure 6.

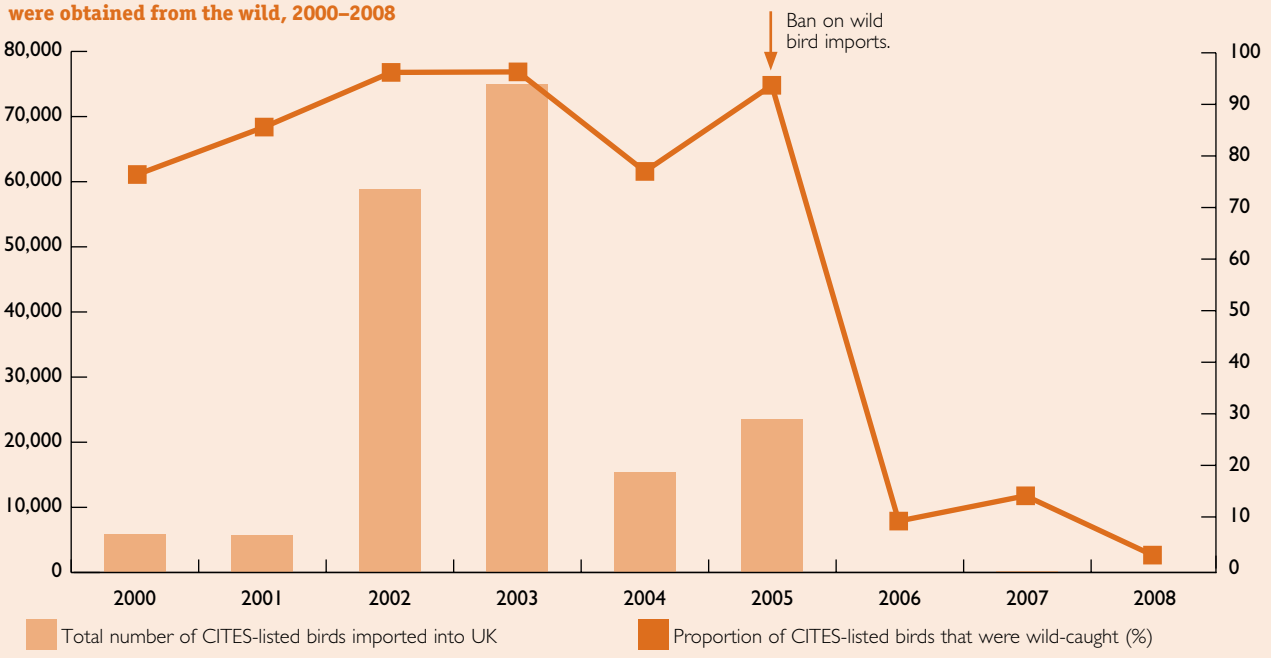
From TRACES and CITES bird import figures it seems that, while overall trade remains high, the import ban on wild birds has effectively ended legal trade in wild-caught CITES-listed birds. Over the last five years there has been a 99.95 per cent reduction in the proportion of CITES birds caught from the wild.

Figure 5: Total number of CITES-listed birds imported into the EU, and proportion (%) of these birds that were obtained from the wild, 2000–2008



Data source: UK government and the World Conservation Monitoring Centre.

Figure 6: Total number of CITES-listed birds imported into the UK from outside the EU, and proportion (%) of these birds that were obtained from the wild, 2000–2008



Data source: UK government and the World Conservation Monitoring Centre.

The RSPCA supports the European Commission's decision to amend EU legislation and introduce a permanent ban on the importation of wild-caught birds into the EU. However, the Society also welcomes the continued monitoring of trade in all species of birds and reptiles, particularly as there are some early indications that trade may be shifting from birds to reptiles. A close watch on the total trade (including species not listed on CITES) is needed to monitor whether trade in particular species should be controlled or stopped on welfare grounds.

TOTAL NUMBER OF LIVE, WILD-CAUGHT CITES-LISTED BIRDS IMPORTED INTO THE EU. VERY LARGE DECREASE FOLLOWING WILD BIRD IMPORT BAN; TRADE HAS VIRTUALLY CEASED.

TOTAL NUMBER OF LIVE, WILD-CAUGHT CITES-LISTED BIRDS IMPORTED INTO THE UK. VERY LARGE DECREASE FOLLOWING WILD BIRD IMPORT BAN; TRADE HAS VIRTUALLY CEASED.

FOOTNOTES AND REFERENCES

1 Altherr S and Freyer D. 2001. Mortality and morbidity in private husbandry of reptiles. RSPCA.
2 Council Regulation (EC) No 338/97 (and subsequent amendments).
3 The Control of Trade in Endangered Species (Enforcement) Regulations 1997.
4 www.birdlife.org
5 www.CITES.org
6 E.g. Figures for number of reptile imports into UK from outside EU in 2006: 178,244 quoted by Lord Rooker (HL Deb, 25 January 2007, c246W); 295,229 quoted by Jim Fitzpatrick (HC Deb, 18 March 2010, c1009W).
7 E.g. Jonathan Shaw (HC Deb, 30 April 2008, c464W) provided data on the number of reptiles and birds imported into the EU between 2000 and 2006, however Huw Irranca-Davis (HC Deb, 14 July 2009, c232W) cited a lack of access to EU statistics as the reason for not providing the same data.
8 E.g. Jonathan Shaw (HC Deb, 30 April 2008, c464W) versus Jim Fitzpatrick (HC Deb, 18 March 2010, c1009W).
9 Jim Fitzpatrick, HC Deb, 18 March 2010, c1010W.
10 Defra News Information Bulletin. June 2007. Deregulation of pet bird imports.
11 Huw Irranca-Davis, HC Deb, 24 March 2010, c309W.
12 Jonathan Shaw, HC Deb, 30 April 2008, c464W.
13 Huw Irranca-Davies, HC Deb, 14 July 2009, c232W.
14 Estimate based on 2009 UK reptile import data (HC Deb, 18 March 2010, c1010W) and method outlined in the 2006 welfare indicator (in The welfare state: Measuring animal welfare in the UK 2006).
15 Lord Rooker, HL Deb, 25 January 2007, c246W.
16 CAWC. 2003. The report on the welfare of non-domesticated animals kept for companionship.
17 Barry Gardiner, HC Deb, 9 May 2006, c136W.
18 CITES trade statistics derived from the CITES Trade Database, UNEP World Conservation Monitoring Centre, Cambridge, UK.
19 European Commission Decisions 2005/759/EC and 2005/760/EC, as amended by Decision 2005/862/EC, Decision 2006/79/EC, Council Regulation (EC) No 318/2007.
20 Wild Bird Conservation Act 1992.
21 Franke J and Telecky T. 2001. Reptiles as pets – An examination of the trade in olive reptiles.
22 Lord Rooker, HL Deb, 18 December 2006, c240W.

Welfare indicator: The availability of written information about the needs of non-domestic pets (reptiles, birds, amphibians and mammals) on sale in a sample of outlets

RSPCA concern

With an estimated 12 million kept in the UK, non-domestic or 'exotic' pet animals outnumber cats and dogs. Understanding how to care for such a diverse range of species is not necessarily common knowledge, which means that welfare problems can develop. Anyone selling or rehoming animals therefore has a responsibility to provide appropriate, good-quality husbandry advice to help inform anyone thinking of keeping an exotic animal as a pet.

THERE IS LITTLE CHANGE FROM THE PREVIOUS YEAR.

Background

Pet owners in England and Wales, as well as other people responsible for animals, are legally required to meet their animals' needs under the Animal Welfare Act 2006, yet not all know how to do so. This lack of awareness has caused concern amongst vets and more than 40 per cent of pet keepers report the most common problem they experience is a lack of information provided by the suppliers[1].

As most pets are bought from pet shops[1], they represent an obvious and practical route to educate prospective owners about animals' needs before they commit[2 3]. In fact the previous UK government was looking to formalise this role in revised pet vending regulations[4]. However, research in 2002[1] found that almost half of pet owners questioned received only verbal advice from the seller, 31 per cent were given written information and 21 per cent were given no husbandry advice at all. Here, we investigate the availability of free written care information in pet shops, appropriate for the animals on sale.

The indicator figures

Between March and June 2010 data about non-domestic animals on sale (mammals, birds, reptiles and amphibians – referred to here as target groups) were gathered from a sample of pet shops in England and Wales. Data collected were: 1) type and number of animals on sale; 2) display of information on signage in shops and 3) availability of free leaflets/factsheets.

Information was scored according to animals' five welfare needs, as outlined in the Animal Welfare Act 2006: 1) a suitable environment (e.g. enclosure size); 2) a suitable diet (e.g. food type); 3) opportunities to exhibit normal behaviour patterns (e.g. branches for climbing/perching); 4) any need to be housed with, or apart, from other animals (e.g. grouping) and 5) protection from pain, suffering, injury and disease (e.g. health issues).

Other desirable information was: adult size, lifespan, source (e.g. captive-bred), price and sources of further information (e.g. websites). Surveyors were also asked to note if staff volunteered information.

Further details on survey methods and more detailed results are available on the Animal Welfare Footprint website[5].

Animals on sale

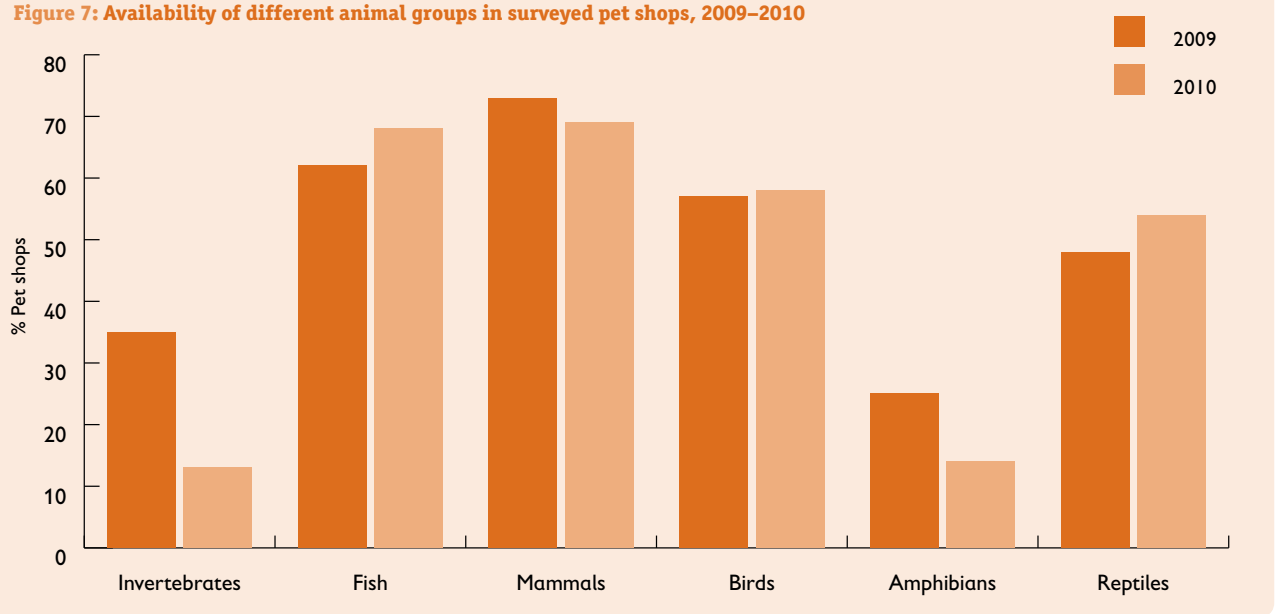
Out of 175 shops investigated across England and Wales, 100 sold animals belonging to at least one of the four target groups; the remainder either did not sell target animals or no longer appeared to be in business.

An estimated 3,902 animals belonging to the four target groups were on sale plus around 33,900 fish[6] and 4,246 invertebrates. Similar to last year, mammals were the most common group on sale followed by fish, birds then reptiles (Figure 7). Amphibians and invertebrates were least common (Figure 7).

Only a sample of pet shops across England and Wales were visited but we can get some idea of the total number of animals on sale by extrapolation. Assuming a similar proportion of non-surveyed pet shops held target animals (57 per cent), in similar proportions (Figure 7), we estimate more than 41,000 mammals, birds, reptiles and amphibians were on sale across England and Wales and a further 619,000 fish and 85,000 invertebrates (Table 1).

Species most commonly sold were similar to last year's survey (Table 2). Mice/rats and hamsters were the most

Figure 7: Availability of different animal groups in surveyed pet shops, 2009–2010



Data source: RSPCA.

Table 1: Estimated number of non-domesticated animals on sale in surveyed pet shops

	Estimated number of animals on sale		Extrapolation to pet shops across all of England and Wales
	Average per shop (range)	Total	
Mammals	26 (2–97)	912	11,543
Birds	25 (1–147)	1,314	16,631
Reptiles	50 (2–410)	891	11,592
Amphibians	8 (1–70)	122	1,544
Fish	640 (7–3,000)	44,900	618,958
Invertebrates	23 (1–300)	4,246	84,677
Total		**52,385**	**744,946**

Data source: RSPCA.

common mammals on sale, found in 61 per cent and 47 per cent of shops respectively, followed by gerbils/jirds (37 per cent). Budgies were the most popular bird (48 per cent of shops) followed by canaries (32 per cent) and finches (29 per cent). Most shops that sold reptiles stocked various species of lizards (50 per cent of shops) and snakes (38 per cent) but tortoises/turtles were also popular (29 per cent). Amphibians were the least common group with frogs (nine per cent of shops) and toads (eight per cent) being the most numerous.

Free information available on signs

Most pet shops (65 per cent) displayed some written information about at least one of the four species surveyed, which is lower than last year (83 per cent). Signage relating to welfare needs was found in 39 per cent of pet shops, down from 46 per cent last year and just six per cent provided information on all five aspects of welfare (Figure 8). Lifespan, which gives an indication of the length of commitment required, was covered in the same proportion of shops as last year (24 per cent), while adult size was mentioned in slightly more shops (22 per cent compared to 17 per cent last year).

Several shops also informed potential buyers of an owner's duty of care to meet their animal's needs under the Animal Welfare Act 2006.

Free information available in leaflets

Free leaflets were available to members of the public in one-third of shops (31 per cent) similar to last year (34 per cent). An additional seven per cent had run out of leaflets at the time of the survey or had leaflets on other, non-target, species. So around two-fifths of shops would normally provide leaflets of some kind. As in previous years, most leaflets were collected in the Pets at Home chain and discounting these brought the proportion down to just 19 per cent (compared to 14 per cent last year).

Much more information was provided in leaflets (when available) than on signs. At least one of the five welfare needs was almost always covered and 68 per cent contained information on all five aspects, compared to 84 per cent last year (Figure 9). A high proportion also provided valuable information about the expected lifespan of the animal (87 per cent compared to 81 per cent last year).

Information in both signs and leaflets

Overall, free care information (excluding price) was available in some form in 56 per cent of shops surveyed, compared to 55 per cent last year (Figure 10). Welfare-related information, covering at least one welfare need was available in 52 per cent

Table 2: Number of surveyed pet shops that sold each animal type

Animals on sale	No. of shops	%	Animals on sale	No. of shops	%	Animals on sale	No. of shops	%
Mammals	**69**	**69**	**Birds**	**58**	**58**	**Reptiles**	**54**	**54**
Mouse/rat	61	61	Budgie	48	48	Lizard	50	50
Hamster	47	47	Canary	32	32	Snake	38	38
Gerbil/jird	37	37	Finch	29	29	Tortoise/turtle	29	29
Chinchilla	25	25	Cockatiel	21	21	Terrapin	9	9
Degu	25	25	Parakeet	18	18	Crocodilian	5	5
Chipmunk	4	4	Other	15	15	**Amphibians**	**14**	**14**
Other	3	3	Lovebird	13	13	Frog	9	9
Sugar glider	1	1	Macaw/large parrot	12	12	Toad	8	8
Primate	0	0.6	Conure	5	5	Newt	5	5
Fish	**68**	**68**	**Invertebrates**	**13**	**13**	Salamander	3	3

Data source: RSPCA.

of surveyed shops (compared to 53 per cent last year) while 24 per cent covered all five needs, down from 32 per cent last year (Figure 10).

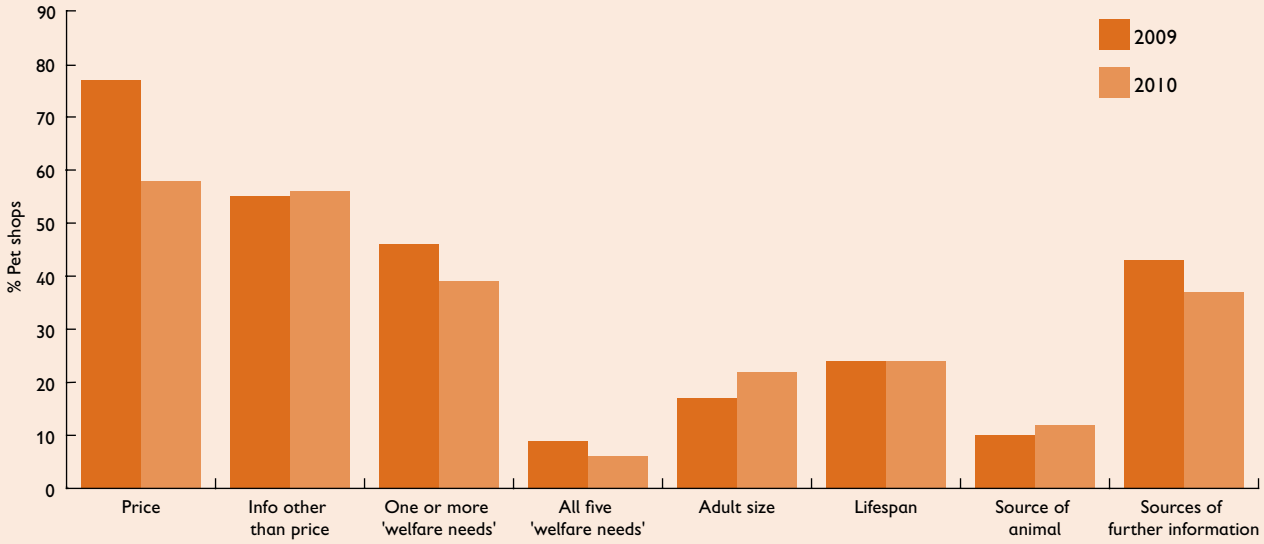
Information provided by staff

Members of staff, who provide a further source of information, approached surveyors in around half of surveyed shops, similar to last year. Staff were very helpful and knowledgeable in several stores, and in some cases made it clear they would only sell an animal to buyers who fully understood the animal's needs and level of commitment required.

Summary

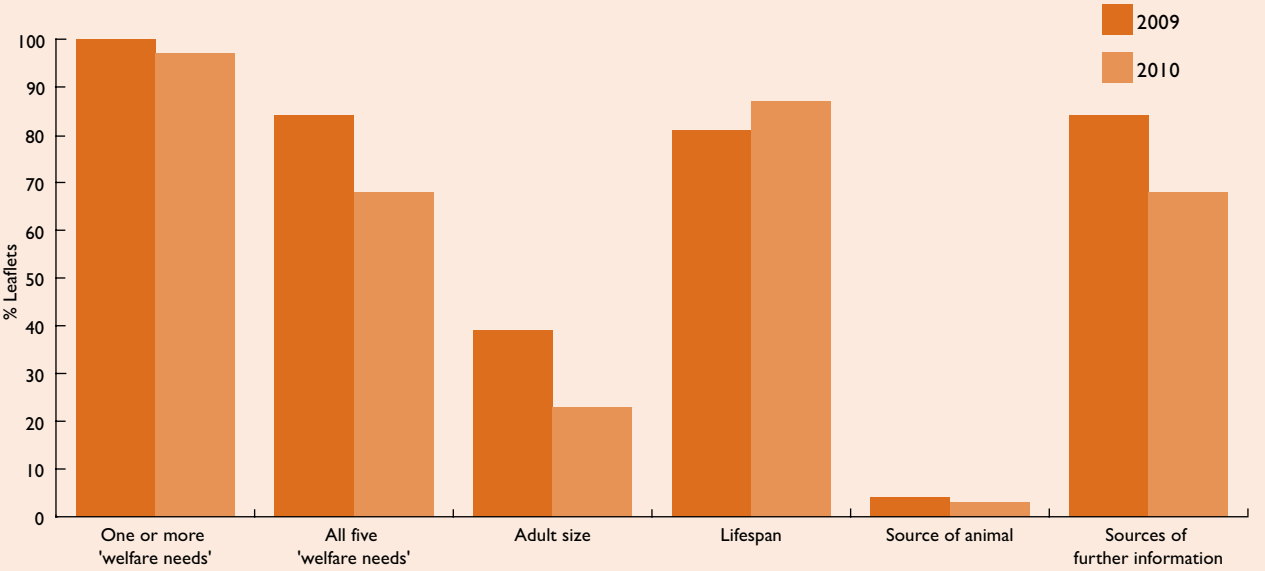
Overall, the availability of free written information has changed little compared to last year. Improvements could be made, particularly in the availability of free leaflets, as these provide the most comprehensive information and allow buyers to mull over any decision.

Figure 8: Availability of written information on signs displayed in surveyed pet shops for at least one of the four groups surveyed, 2009–2010



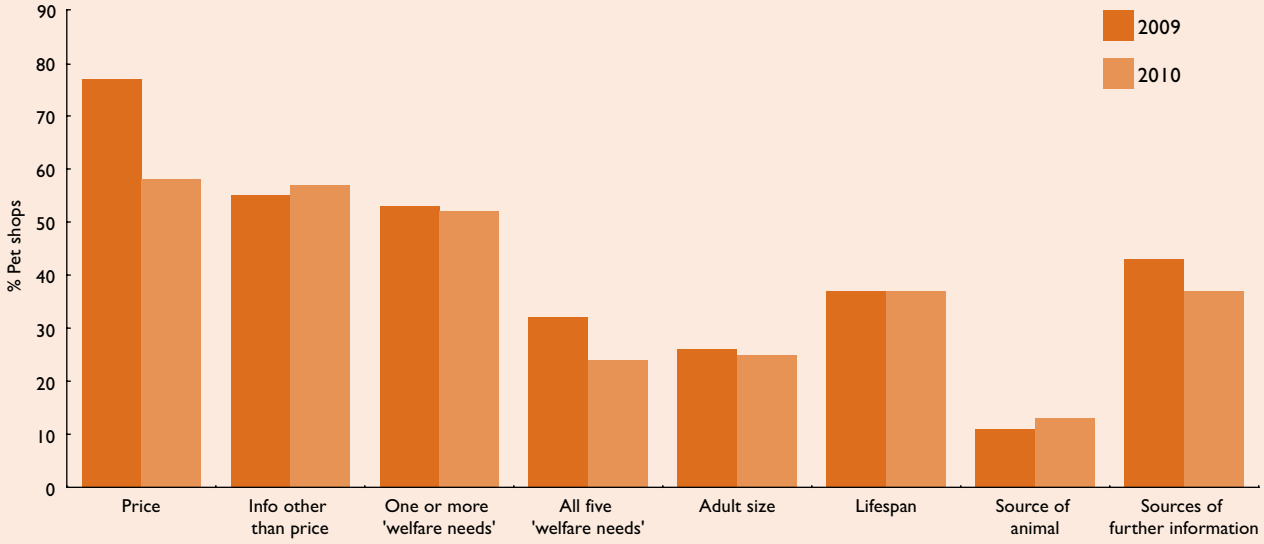
Data source: RSPCA.

Figure 9: Availability of free leaflets in surveyed pet shops for at least one of the four groups surveyed, 2009–2010



Data source: RSPCA.

Figure 10: Availability of any type of free written information in surveyed pet shops for at least one of the four groups surveyed, 2009–2010



PET SHOPS PLAY AN IMPORTANT ROLE IN HELPING INFORM THE PET-BUYING PUBLIC ABOUT THE NEEDS OF ANIMALS IN CAPTIVITY AND WHAT EQUIPMENT AND LONG-TERM CARE IS REQUIRED ONCE THE ANIMAL IS TAKEN HOME. THEREFORE THE RSPCA HAS CARRIED OUT RESEARCH INTO THE PROVISION OF FREE, WRITTEN INFORMATION FOR NON-DOMESTIC ANIMALS ON SALE IN PET SHOPS.

FOOTNOTES AND REFERENCES

1 Wells D (2002). The ownership and welfare of exotic pets. RSPCA.
2 CAWC (2003). Report on the Welfare of Non-Domesticated Animals Kept for Companionship. Prepared by the Companion Animal Welfare Council: www.cawc.org.uk
3 The Animal Welfare Bill's Regulatory Impact Assessment.
4 Defra, personal communication.
5 www.animalwelfarefootprint.com
6 Although all numbers are estimates, figures for fish should be treated with caution due to the difficulty in counting individuals.

Welfare indicator: The proportion of fishing tackle-related swan incidents recorded by the RSPCA

RSPCA concern

Litter is responsible for the injury and death of thousands of animals each year. Part of this problem is lost and discarded fishing tackle, which poses a significant threat to both domestic and wild animals but particularly swans.

Discarded fishing line, hooks and weights used by anglers are responsible for thousands of phone calls made to the RSPCA about swans each year. Fishing tackle can also present a hazard to swans while it is being used.

While it is inevitable that casualties will occur as long as humans live alongside wildlife, the RSPCA believes that education and public awareness is the key to ensuring that as few swans (and other animals) as possible suffer unnecessarily due to the carelessness of humans.

THERE HAS BEEN LITTLE CHANGE OVER THE PAST FIVE YEARS.

Background

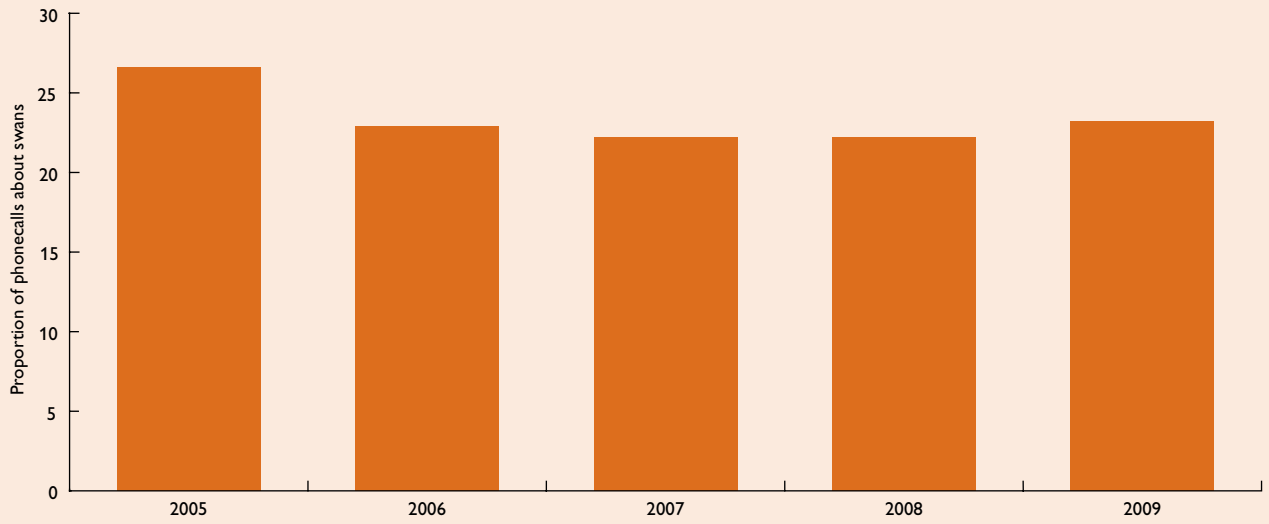
Lost and discarded fishing tackle presents a real hazard to wildlife: hooks are swallowed and pierce through skin; weights and floats are ingested; and line is swallowed and becomes wrapped around bodies and limbs. As a result, fishing tackle can cause painful injuries, internal blockages, poisoning and sometimes death. Swans are particularly badly affected. Fishing tackle has been identified as the single most important cause of mute swan rescues[1] and admissions to an RSPCA wildlife centre[2]. It has been estimated that 8,000 swan rescues take place each year in Britain, with 3,000 caused by fishing tackle[1]. This could of course underestimate the true scale of the problem, as many affected swans may go unnoticed and/or unreported.

Lead poisoning resulting from the ingestion of fishing weights has also caused significant mortality in swans, although as lead weights have been replaced, this appears to have been a less significant, albeit lingering, problem in recent years[2].

In addition to discarded and lost tackle, observations suggest that a significant proportion of incidents are caused by swans eating baited hooks or swimming through lines while in use[1]; unattended fishing rods thus pose a particular threat.

Education and awareness-raising initiatives obviously play a key role in fostering greater care and vigilance. Angling organisations' codes of practice and coaching courses go some way towards achieving this, but as most problems appear to involve inexperienced anglers or those of average skill[1] further outreach may be required.

Figure 11: Proportion of swan incidents reported to the RSPCA that involved fishing tackle, 2005–2009



Data source: RSPCA.

The indicator figures

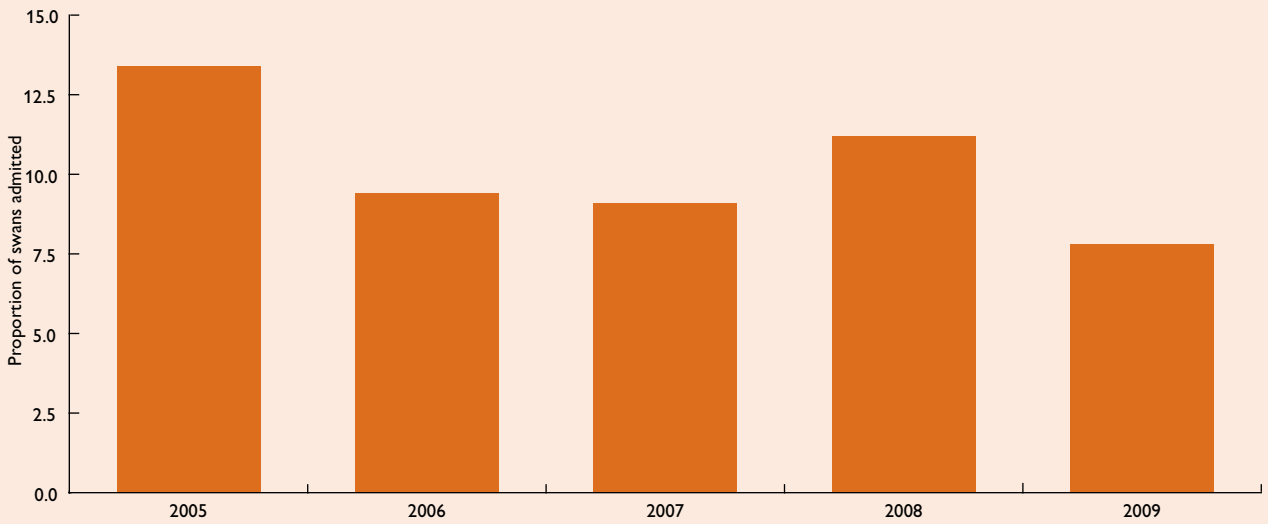
The number of swan incidents dealt with by the RSPCA that involve fishing tackle has been monitored. An increase in incidents could indicate more carelessness and less public concern, but equally it could indicate a higher rate of reporting by a more vigilant and compassionate public. Figures could also be affected by other factors, such as swan numbers and the activity of rescue groups. Regardless of the underlying causes, the RSPCA takes the view that any human-induced harm to wildlife is a potential cause for concern and is therefore worthy of monitoring.

Two sources of RSPCA data are used: 1) telephone calls from members of the public to the RSPCA's cruelty and advice line[3] and 2) admission records from three of the RSPCA's four wildlife centres[4]. For the purpose of this report data collected in 2005 to 2009 is used, previous editions contain data from 2000[5].

Over the past five years, the number of calls about swans affected by fishing tackle fell by 22 per cent, from 2,698 to 2,115. This could be attributable to a range of factors, such as changes to the way calls are handled. A more informative picture is therefore gained by looking at changes in the number of tackle-related incidents relative to all others. In doing this we see little change over the past few years. A relatively steady proportion of all calls about swans involved fishing tackle, between 22 and 23 per cent, following a 'high' of 27 per cent in 2005 (Figure 11)[5].

Looking at RSPCA wildlife centres, the number of swans admitted has changed very little over the five years, rising slightly (three per cent) from 808 in 2005 to 836 in 2009. A smaller proportion of these swans were affected by fishing tackle in 2009 – eight per cent compared to 13 per cent in 2005 – although there has been some fluctuation over the years (Figure 12)[5].

Figure 12: Proportion of swans affected by fishing tackle admitted to three RSPCA wildlife centres, 2005–2009



Data source: RSPCA.

Fishing tackle has therefore been implicated in a similar proportion of cases reported to the RSPCA between 2005 and 2009. But in RSPCA wildlife centres, 2009 saw a slight drop in the proportion of admitted swans affected by fishing tackle to the lowest value in the past five years. The reason for the apparent discrepancy between the two datasets is unclear, but it does not appear to be the result of more affected swans being dealt with on site or being taken to establishments other than wildlife centres. The data are therefore considered inconclusive.

DISCARDED FISHING LINE, HOOKS AND WEIGHTS USED BY ANGLERS ARE RESPONSIBLE FOR THOUSANDS OF PHONE CALLS MADE TO THE RSPCA ABOUT SWANS EACH YEAR. FISHING TACKLE CAN ALSO PRESENT A HAZARD TO SWANS WHILE IT IS BEING USED.

FOOTNOTES AND REFERENCES

1 Perrins C, Martin P and Broughton B. 2002. The impact of lost and discarded fishing line and tackle on mute swans. R&D Technical Report W-051/TR. Environment Agency, Bristol.
2 Kelly A and Kelly S. 2004. Fishing tackle injury and blood lead levels in mute swans.Water birds 27(1): 60–68.
3 This dataset includes accounts that have not been confirmed by RSPCA field staff but this should not affect any trends over time.
4 Data from the RSPCA's fourth wildlife centre was not included due to incompatible recording methods for part of the dataset.
5 Previous reports and more detailed data are available at: www.animalwelfarefootprint.com and www.rspca.org.uk