PIC CREDITS: ANGELA HAMPTON, DAMION DIPLOCK, ANDREW FORSYTH (X2), E A JANES/RSPCA PHOTOLIBRARY

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1 Bovine TB: The Scientific Evidence. Final Report of the Independent Scientific Group on Cattle TB. 18 June 2007. www.defra.gov.uk/animalh/tb/isg/pdf/final_report.pdf?bcsi_scan_F94125A2E068478B=0&bcsi_scan_filename=final_report.pdf

2 Scientific staff from the RSPCA's wildlife department used evidence from the ISG research in submissions to parliamentary committees and government.

3 The RSPCA made representations during the consultation and parliamentary scrutiny process.

4 6th International Conference on Fertility Control for Wildlife, 3–5 September 2007, Central Science Laboratory, York.

5 See: www.cites.org/eng/cop/index.shtml

6 The RSPCA is opposed to trade in wild-caught animals because it causes distress, suffering and death to large numbers of animals. Scientific staff represented the Society at CoP14 and worked alongside like-minded organisations to lobby decision-makers in order to protect animals from the negative impact of international trade.

7 The Dangerous Wild Animals Act of 1976 was originally introduced as a Private Members' Bill in response to public concern about the keeping of dangerous pets, especially big cats. It aims to ensure that where private individuals keep dangerous wild animals they do so in circumstances which create no risk to the public and, to a lesser extent, safeguard the welfare of the animals. Licences, issued by the relevant local authority, are required for any animal that appears on the Schedule.

8 Defra Information Bulletin 'Changes to the Dangerous Wild Animals Act 1976 – revision to Schedule of Controlled Species'. 1 October 2007. www.defra.gov.uk/news/2007/071001c.htm

9 See: www.defra.gov.uk/animalh/ahws/pdf/awdelivery-strategy.pdf

10 Council Regulation (EC) No 318/2007.

INTRODUCTION WILDLIFE INDICATORS

2007 saw many occurrences with actual or potential repercussions for the UK's wildlife, including disease outbreaks and oil spillage, high profile conferences, important reports from and to government, and changes to legislation. Although most of these events were likely to have negative consequences, there were a reasonable number of constructive influences as well.

- After nearly a decade's work, the final report of the Independent Scientific Group on cattle TB was published[1], providing a sound science base for the development of control policies. Overseeing the randomised badger cull trial was a major part of the group's work but the parallel research programme on disease development in cattle was also very informative. Rightly, the group's key conclusions regarding badger culling and cattle-based control measures were to prove influential[2].
- Following lengthy consultation, the Regulatory Reform (Deer) Order 2007 (England and Wales) came into effect. This is intended to help to improve management of the UK's wild deer populations but also provide safeguards regarding the welfare of deer[3].
- An opportunity to review progress and take stock of the potential of fertility control tools in managing some wildlife populations was provided by an international conference held at York[4]. Whilst not providing a 'silver bullet' solution to problems, projects were being undertaken with a number of species around the world and some methods were moving from the development phase to field application with, for example, registration in the US being granted or applied for regarding some of the products developed.
- The fourteenth Conference of the Parties (CoP14) to the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) took place in The Hague, the Netherlands[5]. The meeting considered 70 agenda items and 37 proposals to amend the CITES appendices. CoP14 adopted resolutions and decisions on a wide range of topics including the CITES Strategic Vision 2008–2013 and species trade and conservation issues including those on Asian big cats, sharks and sturgeons. Delegates agreed that no cetacean species should be subject to periodic review while the International Whaling Commission moratorium is in place. CoP14 decided to list slender-horned and Cuvier's gazelles and slow loris on Appendix I; Brazil wood, sawfish and eel on Appendix II; and to amend the annotation on African elephants to allow a one-off sale of ivory from Botswana, Namibia, South Africa and Zimbabwe with a nine-year resting period for further ivory trade[6].
- Government conducted a review of the Schedule of the Dangerous Wild Animals Act 1976[7]. With effect from 1 October, many animals were removed from the Schedule, including raccoons, sloths, emus and squirrel monkeys[8]. At the time of writing the Act was the subject of a full government consultation.
- In January the tanker *MSC Napoli* ran aground near Branscombe, South Devon. About 1,020 seabirds, mostly guillemots, were picked up by RSPCA animal collection officers, inspectors and members of the public, and treated at RSPCA centres, with 485 being successfully released back into the wild.
- In March, the RSPCA responded to the Defra public consultation Delivering Good Animal Welfare – A draft strategy under the Animal Health and Welfare Strategy, and in October Defra published its *Animal Welfare Delivery Strategy*[9], calling on NGOs, industry and government to ensure that all those who care for or are responsible for animals understand, accept and meet their duty to ensure good standards of welfare for them. It also seeks to ensure they have the necessary skills and knowledge to manage and minimise risks of harm (including the prevention of foreseeable problems), and to recognise and deal promptly with other problems as they arise. Those who interact with, or benefit from, animals are also expected to pay due regard to their welfare.
- A ban on the import of wild birds into the European Union was enacted on 1 July 2007, as a measure to counter the threat of avian influenza[10]. There is little evidence to date of a significant increase in smuggling, contrary to some predictions.

WELFARE INDICATOR: The number of stranded cetaceans by-caught around the UK

RSPCA concern

By-catch (when non-target animals are entangled, trapped or injured in fishing nets) poses a significant threat to the welfare and conservation of cetaceans in waters around the UK and globally. The RSPCA is extremely concerned about the levels of suffering by-caught cetaceans endure. Cetaceans caught in the nets can become injured as they struggle to get free and will eventually die if unable to return to the surface to breathe. As a result, some animals may later be 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 10 years has remained high, yet no consistent effort of mitigation has been undertaken, even though enforcement of UK cetacean by-catch legislation[1] would bring a reduction in the frequency of harbour porpoise 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 IS LITTLE CHANGE FROM THE PREVIOUS YEAR.

Background

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[2]. Post-mortem evidence pointed clearly at a prolonged and traumatic death for the entangled animals – blood-filled froth had started to form in the lungs, skin was lacerated from net meshes and teeth were broken, all indicative of 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[2].

Observers were placed on fishing vessels in south-west England between summer 1992 and spring 1994[3] in an attempt to identify the source of dolphin mortality. The findings revealed that, rather than dolphins, there were many porpoises dying in nets set on the sea floor (bottom-set gillnets). Estimates put the mortality of porpoise by-catch at more than 2,000 animals each year in that fishery alone[3] – 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 occurred at a rate ranging from one to two dolphins every 100 hours of fishing[4]. Clearly, numerous fisheries were to blame for the cetacean mortality.

Efforts have been made to mitigate cetacean by-catch. Acoustic alarms (called 'pingers') have been developed to deter porpoises from gillnets and have proved effective in trials in North America and south-west England[5] at reducing porpoise by-catch by up to 90 per cent. This is not seen as the definitive solution to the problem[6] and further fishing gear development is required.

Ongoing work in the UK[7] and in Europe is 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[8,9]. Many more French than UK boats use this fishery, so overall mortality will be significantly greater. Research projects are underway to design escape hatches from trawl nets, or to deter dolphins from entering trawl nets using acoustic harassment devices. Under the EU Common Fisheries Policy, a Regulation has been introduced to monitor and reduce cetacean by-catch in certain fisheries. The UK has adopted this Regulation into domestic law[10], thus 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, fishermen are failing to comply with pinger requirements, as they believe that

pingers are unreliable (and costly). Additionally, the large number of small boats using bottom-set gillnets, which are known to cause porpoise deaths, are exempt from the regulations (which only apply to vessels 12m or over).

The indicator figures

The actual death toll of cetaceans 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 over the 13 years between 1994 to 2006, from 360 to 719[11,12]. This is possibly due to the growth in a method of fishing known as pair trawling, used largely to catch sea bass. Between 2006 and 2007 however, the total number of cetacean strandings decreased by more than 25 per cent[13].

To reveal the cause of death, post-mortem examinations were conducted[11,12] on stranded cetaceans that were not badly decomposed. 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. It can be seen that the proportion of deaths attributed to by-catch has remained relatively consistent at around 20 per cent. However this figure would be higher if analysis was restricted to porpoises and dolphins. These figures do not provide information on the scale of the problem, as most discarded carcasses never reach the beach[14].

There is no doubt that enforcement of UK cetacean by-catch legislation could bring a reduction in the frequency of harbour porpoise entanglement in nets. The government must take action to enforce the 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 may be due to normal inter-annual variation in UK waters[13]. The number of cetaceans by-caught, meanwhile, has remained consistently high over the last 10 years and shows no sign of significant decline[10].

Figure 1: The number of stranded cetaceans examined and number of deaths caused by by-catch, 1994–2007

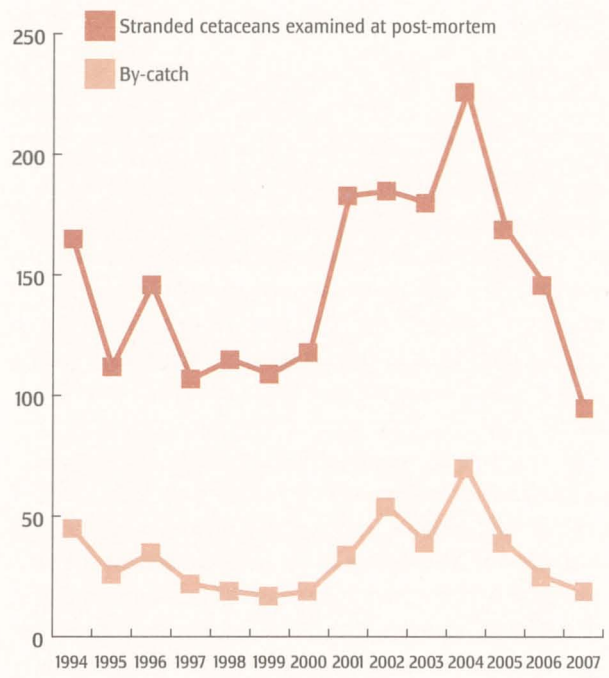
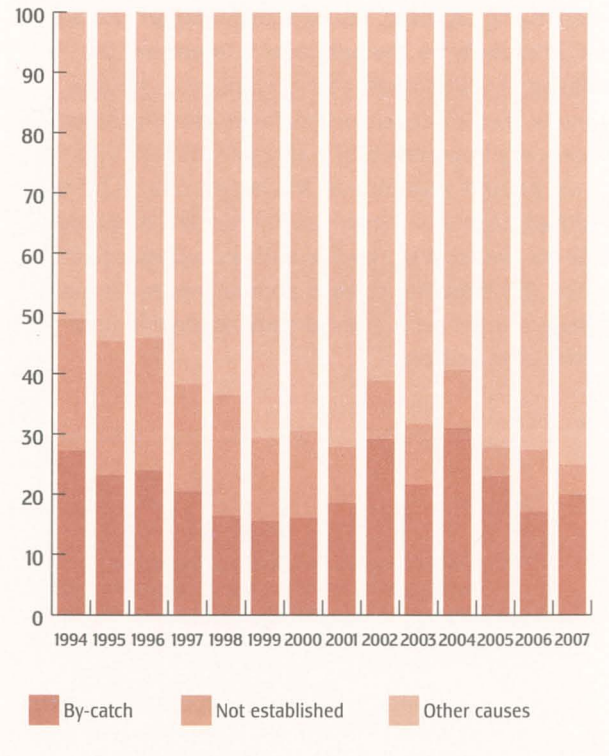


Figure 2: Proportion of total deaths (%) known to be caused by by-catch and other causes, 1994–2007



Data source for Figures 1 and 2: Institute of Zoology.

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13 Deaville R and Jepson P D (compilers). 2008. UK Strandings Investigation Programme: Annual report to Defra for the period 1 January–31 December 2007 (contract number CR0346).
14 Of 22 porpoise bodies tagged then discarded from fishing vessels off Cornwall, none were found to strand. Cornwall Wildlife Trust: Dolphin group observations, 1992–1994.

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 diverse range of live birds and reptiles continues to be seen on sale to hobbyists and the pet-keeping public through many avenues of sale including pet shops, commercial breeders and the internet. Despite improvements in experienced keepers' knowledge of the needs of many species now kept in captivity in the UK, and the ability of commercial breeders to supply some species completely from captive-bred animals, 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 European Union (EU), including the UK. However, since the introduction of EU legislation in October 2005, which stopped the importation of live birds taken from the wild into all EU member states, unsurprisingly UK and EU bird imports have decreased significantly. While the RSPCA will continue to monitor the trade in birds, the ban appears to have all but halted trade in these animals.

The RSPCA is concerned that where animals continue to be taken from the wild, many animals suffer or die before being exported, during transportation and once held in captivity for the pet trade[1,2]. To prevent the suffering of wild animals that are still taken for this purpose, the Society advocates far stricter regulations to prevent the importation of vulnerable animals into the EU, which until recently was the largest market for the wild bird trade and remains so for reptiles. Stopping the trade for the most vulnerable animals will reduce the impact this trade has on wild populations and encourage traders to focus on species already obtainable from captive-bred sources.

Background

Many pet keepers in the UK assume that any animal on sale is captive-bred and that all wild animals are protected by international regulations to limit their capture and use for the pet trade. Both of these assumptions are untrue.

International trade in wild animals is only regulated for species that are endangered or threatened by trade, and which are therefore 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[3] and enforced through the UK Control of Trade in Endangered Species (COTES) legislation[4]. As these controls do not monitor the trade in non-CITES listed species, and the majority of wild animals are not protected by CITES, it is therefore difficult to determine how many species and individual animals in total are imported into the EU or UK from the wild. For example, of the approximate 10,000 species of birds[5] and 7,700 species of reptiles[6] recorded in the wild, less than 15 per cent of bird species and eight per cent of reptile species are protected through CITES to control their commercial international trade.

Figures on CITES-listed animals entering the EU are therefore only part of the total live animal trade. Figures on animals imported into the UK also provide just a partial picture, as they only record animals entering the UK as the first destination after export and not those imported from other EU countries.

Figures on the movements of both CITES-listed and non-CITES-listed animals between EU member states and into the EU are collated into the central EU database called TRACES (the Trade Control and Expert System) and the European Community Eurostat database. However, neither database qualifies important information on the source of the animals being traded – no distinction is made between an animal caught in the wild and an animal bred in captivity. So at present, CITES data is also needed to monitor the source of animals, to investigate any shifts in the number of animals taken from the wild compared to animals bred in captivity. An added complication now exists because, since 2007, bird movements into

NUMBER OF WILD-CAUGHT REPTILES AS A PROPORTION OF THE TOTAL TRADE IN LIVE CITES-LISTED REPTILES IMPORTED INTO THE UK – LITTLE CHANGE FROM THE PREVIOUS YEAR.

TOTAL NUMBER OF LIVE, WILD-CAUGHT CITES-LISTED REPTILES IMPORTED INTO THE UK – THERE HAS BEEN AN INCREASE IN THE NUMBER OF REPTILES IMPORTED INTO THE UK.

NUMBER OF WILD-CAUGHT REPTILES AS A PROPORTION OF THE TOTAL TRADE IN LIVE CITES-LISTED REPTILES IMPORTED INTO THE EU – LITTLE CHANGE FROM THE PREVIOUS YEAR.

TOTAL NUMBER OF LIVE, WILD-CAUGHT CITES-LISTED REPTILES IMPORTED INTO THE EU – THERE HAS BEEN A SLIGHT INCREASE IN THE NUMBER OF REPTILES IMPORTED INTO THE EU.

the UK from the EU no longer seem to be recorded[7], making it almost impossible to monitor trends in total bird trade.

Figures for CITES-listed reptiles and birds imported into the UK and EU between 2000 and 2007 have been sub-divided according to the source assigned to each animal: wild-caught, captive-bred or ranched/captive-reared. Ranching involves the rearing in a controlled environment of specimens, such as eggs or hatchlings, which have been taken into captivity from the wild. The same sub-division could not be achieved for data extracted from the TRACES and Eurostat databases, as the source of animal is not recorded. Instead, these data represent combined totals for CITES-listed and non-CITES-listed species for each year.

For more information about the CITES source codes used in this report and detailed results, please refer to the Animal Welfare Footprint website: www.animalwelfarefootprint.com

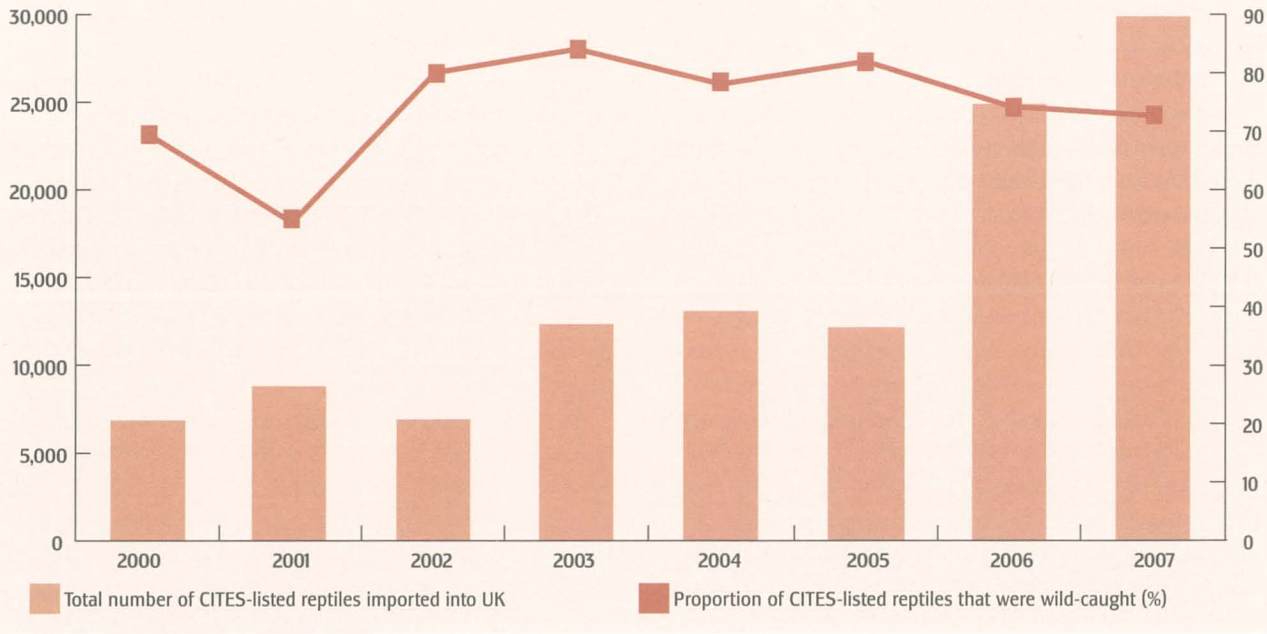
The indicator figures – live reptiles

The number of live reptiles imported into the UK from outside the EU under CITES, as well as the proportion of these that were wild-caught, for 2000–2007[8,9], are shown in Figure 3. Since 2000, it is clear that trade of live reptiles into the UK has increased, particularly in 2006 and 2007 when 24,872 and 29,871, respectively, live CITES-listed reptiles were imported from outside the EU. These numbers represent an increase on 2005 figures of 84 and 121 per cent respectively. More importantly, the number of wild-caught individuals increased almost five-fold between 2000 and 2007 to 29,871 animals and represented as much as 84 per cent of all live reptiles imported in 2003. This high level is consistent with the origin of imported reptiles, as the most common countries exporting them into Heathrow are Guyana, Chile and Ghana where the species live in the wild[10].

With regard to CITES trade into the EU, data for 2000–2006[8,9] are shown in Figure 4. Figures suggest a slight increase in total numbers imported in 2006 compared to previous years. Meanwhile, the total proportion taken from the wild fell slightly from 41 per cent in 2005 to almost 38 per cent in 2006, indicating a greater dependence on ranched and captive-reared reptiles. At the time of writing, 2007 data for reptile trade into the EU were not available.

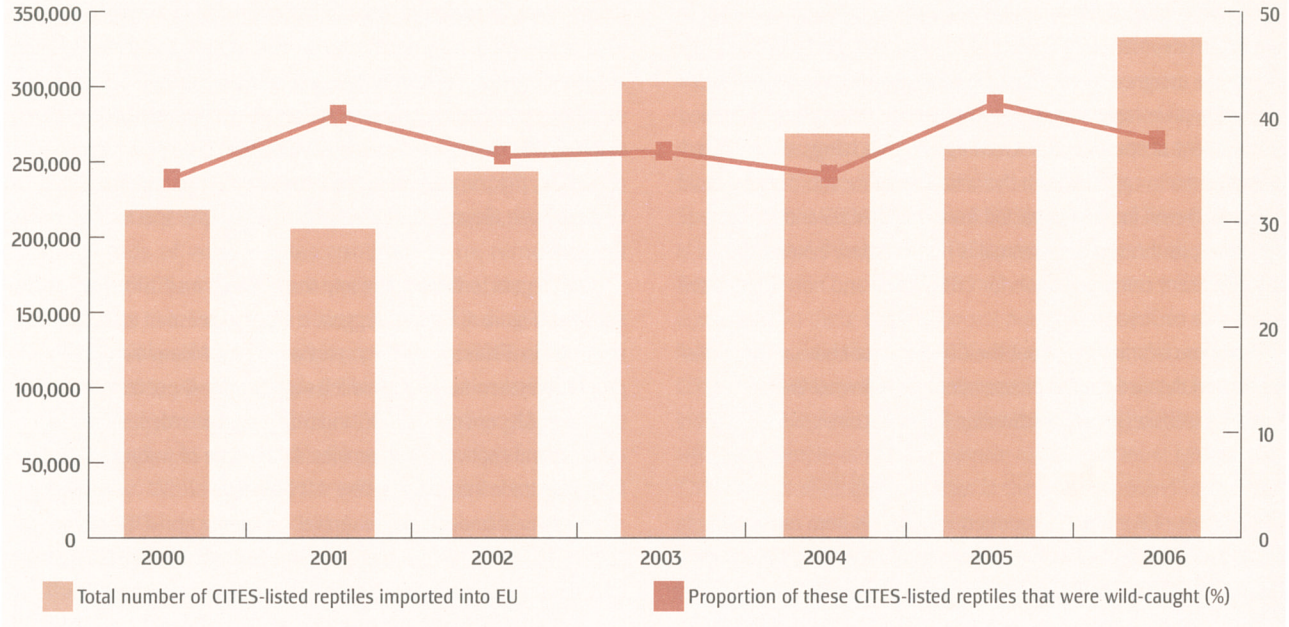
In terms of trade in all live reptiles (including non-CITES listed species for which trade is therefore unregulated), 178,244[11] entered the UK from outside the EU in 2006, but only 1,470[11] from other EU member states. Thus, more than 99 per cent of all live reptiles that

Figure 3: 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, 2000–2007



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

Figure 4: Total number of CITES-listed reptiles imported into the EU, and proportion (%) of these reptiles that were obtained from the wild, 2000–2006



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

were 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[10]. Unfortunately, comparable data on the total number of individual reptiles imported into the EU in 2006[12], and into the UK in 2007[7], were not provided by the government to reveal the latest trends. However, based on 2005 data indicating that 1,613,842 reptiles were imported into the EU[11], it is estimated that between 3.6 and 5.9 million live reptiles were imported into the EU in 2006[13].

Probably the greatest impact on wild animal trade since October 2005 is 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 the transmission and spread of avian influenza[14]. There is always a risk that the suspension of one trade may contribute to a shift in the effort of trappers and exporters, as demands change, towards different animals in order to maintain business. The overall growth in reptile trade into the UK over the last two years (Figure 3) could therefore have occurred following a shift from exporting wild birds towards wild reptiles. To support such a shift however, a wild-bird keeper in the EU would have 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 to supply the trade. 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; now even some hobbyists and traders promote reptiles as a less challenging pet for modern society.

Following the implementation of the US import ban of wild CITES-listed birds in 1992[15], 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[16]. 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.

Hundreds of thousands of reptiles are imported into the EU from the wild without any monitoring or controls on the numbers exported to supply the pet market, which clearly raises concerns about how few reptile species are protected from international trade. Although the RSPCA fully supports the end of the wild-bird trade into the EU on welfare grounds, the Society would not welcome any subsequent shift within the pet trade to another group of sentient animals, such as to reptiles, or an increase in the pet trade targeting non-CITES-

listed animals. Whatever the reason(s) for the increase in reptile imports into the UK, and possibly the EU as a whole, trade into the EU of over one million live reptiles demonstrates an even greater need for the regulation of the reptile trade into, and within, the EU to restrict the importation of species most vulnerable to suffering and mortality once captured and removed from the wild. Reptile traders and keepers also have a responsibility to carefully consider the source of the animal they are acquiring; to choose species that can be supplied from captive-bred animals; and to provide the facilities and care necessary for the animals' welfare when kept in captivity.

The indicator figures – wild birds

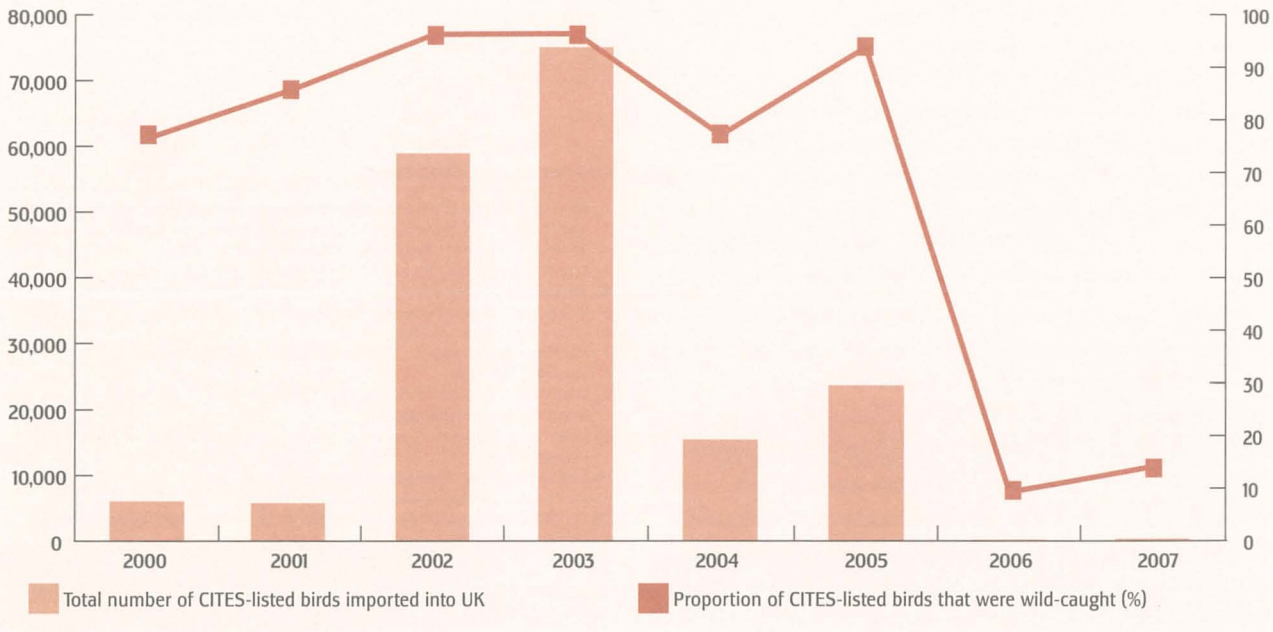
Figures on CITES-listed birds imported into the UK from outside the EU and into the EU as a whole, in addition to the proportion of these birds that were wild-caught, for 2000–2007 are given in Figures 5 and 6.

These figures show that thousands of wild-caught CITES-listed birds were imported annually into the UK between 2002 and 2005[9], but following the EU-wide ban on imports of wild birds[14], the trade in CITES-listed species has all but ceased (Figure 5). Looking at CITES-listed bird imports into the EU as a whole[9], there was a similar crash (Figure 6).

Looking at the trade of all bird species into the UK, not just those listed under CITES, shows that only 54 birds were imported in 2006 for conservation purposes, compared to more than 50,000 in previous years[11]. Unfortunately, comparable figures for 2007 were not provided by the government[7, 12], although it is highly likely that this trend has continued given the current import ban. Furthermore, 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[17] in 2005 compared to. 524,850 CITES-listed birds)[15].

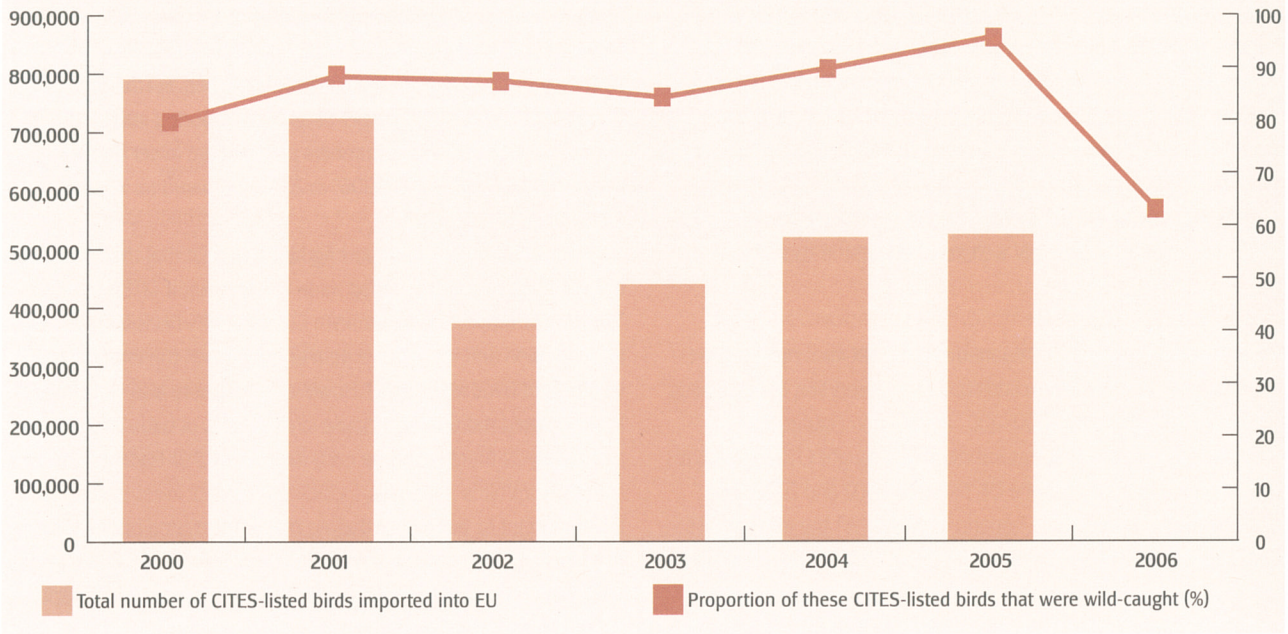
From UK and EU bird import figures, it is clear that the import ban on wild birds has all but ended trade in wild-caught CITES-listed birds. The RSPCA supports the European Commission's decision to amend EU legislation and introduce a permanent ban on the importation of wild-caught birds into the EU. 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, including those not listed under CITES. It is important to remember that no matter whether a bird is currently of conservation concern and protected by CITES, a close watch on the total trade is needed to monitor whether trade in particular species should be controlled or stopped on welfare grounds.

Figure 5: 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, 2000–2007



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

Figure 6: Total number of CITES-listed birds imported into the EU, and proportion (%) of these birds that were obtained from the wild, 2000–2006



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

TOTAL NUMBER OF LIVE, WILD-CAUGHT CITES-LISTED BIRDS IMPORTED INTO THE UK – THE TRADE HAS VIRTUALLY CEASED.

TOTAL NUMBER OF LIVE, WILD-CAUGHT CITES-LISTED BIRDS IMPORTED INTO THE EU – A VERY LARGE DECREASE IN THE NUMBER OF BIRDS IMPORTED INTO THE EU; THE TRADE HAS VIRTUALLY CEASED.

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WELFARE INDICATOR: The provision of quality written information for the sale of non-domestic pets (reptiles, birds, amphibians and mammals) in a sample of outlets

RSPCA concern

Before acquiring any animal, whether it be a cat, dog or a less common pet such as a reptile, it is essential for the animal's welfare that the person responsible for its care fully understands its long-term needs and is fully prepared to meet those needs throughout the animal's lifetime. If people are not fully prepared, animal welfare may be compromised as a result and potentially the animals involved may be given up or abandoned.

The RSPCA believes that to help inform the person thinking about keeping an animal as a pet, anyone selling or rehoming the animal has a responsibility to help provide good-quality husbandry advice appropriate for the species.

THERE IS LITTLE CHANGE FROM THE PREVIOUS YEAR.

Background

The Animal Welfare Act 2006 in England and Wales clearly recognises the responsibility of any pet keeper to take reasonable steps to meet their animal's welfare needs in captivity. The Animal Welfare Bill's Regulatory Impact Assessment (RIA) also recognised the responsibility of pet vendors to help educate prospective buyers in the husbandry and care of animals on sale. It was therefore advocated in the RIA that all commercial vendors of pet animals should issue information leaflets; a requirement that may be incorporated into new pet vending regulations[1].

Nowadays the diverse range of animals available to keep as pets can be acquired from many different sources, including breeders, specialist pet shops that sell non-domestic animals, generalist pet shops, pet fairs, animal auctions, animal centres, small-ad papers, hobbyist groups, distance sellers (such as the internet), and from friends and family. The animals may have been bred in the UK, bred overseas or caught in the wild before being exported for sale.

To investigate the ownership of non-domestic pets, including where pet animals were acquired, the RSPCA commissioned research that was completed by Dr Deborah Wells from Queen's University, Belfast in 2002[2]. The 1,024 surveys completed by keepers from around the UK (who kept reptiles, amphibians or insects) revealed that pets were acquired from four main sources: 51.2 per cent from a non-domestic (specialist) pet shop; 16.6 per cent from a general pet shop; 22.5 per cent from a private breeder; and 9.8 per cent from a friend or relative.

The same respondents were also asked what husbandry advice they were given. Almost half were given only verbal advice by the seller, 31.2 per cent were given written information and 20.5 per cent were given no husbandry advice at all. The pet keepers then went on to state, when asked, that the most common problem they experienced with their pet was the lack of information provided by the supplier. As two-thirds of suppliers in the study were identified as being either specialist or generalist pet shops, that sector of the pet trade clearly provides an important source for passing on advice to those considering or already keeping a companion animal.

In recognition of the role pet shops play 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, the RSPCA has selected the provision of good-quality written information, appropriate for the animals on sale, as a welfare indicator.

THE ANIMAL WELFARE ACT 2006 IN ENGLAND AND WALES CLEARLY RECOGNISES THE RESPONSIBILITY OF ANY PET KEEPER TO TAKE REASONABLE STEPS TO MEET THEIR ANIMAL'S WELFARE NEEDS IN CAPTIVITY.

The indicator figures

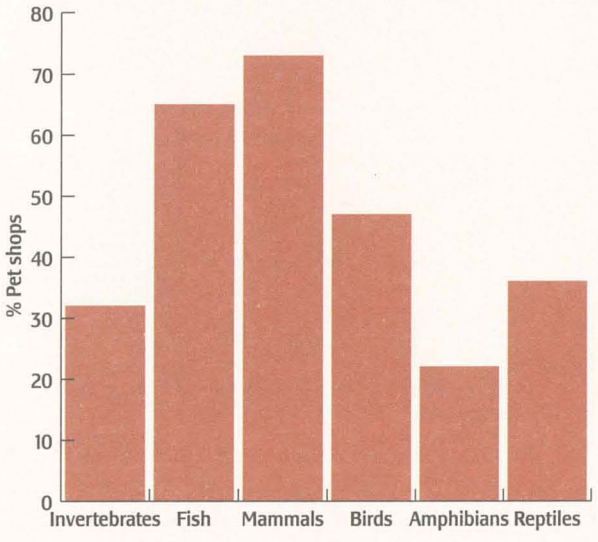
A sample of pet shops in England and Wales is surveyed annually. Data was collected between January and May 2008. Information is gathered on the type of non-domestic animals on sale from four broad animal groups: mammals, birds, reptiles and amphibians. The availability of good quality, appropriate information on the welfare needs of animals on display is also monitored, both on display near enclosures ('signs') and in a form that can be taken away for reference ('care sheets') by those considering buying or intending to buy an animal.

Information scoring

The type of information recorded and scored is based on the five welfare needs of animals as outlined in the Animal Welfare Act 2006: an animal's need for a suitable environment (e.g. enclosure size); a suitable diet (e.g. food type and provision of water); opportunities to exhibit normal behaviour patterns (e.g. branches for climbing or perching); any need to be housed with, or apart, from other animals (grouping and issues of breeding); and its need to be protected from pain, suffering, injury and disease (e.g. health issues, the need for the owner to seek veterinary advice).

Other issues considered desirable for pet shops to cover include: animal's size at adulthood, lifespan, source (e.g. captive-bred or wild-caught), price and sources of further information (e.g. pet shop staff, websites, free care sheets). Surveyors were also asked to note if staff approached them and volunteered any care information.

Figure 7: Availability of different animal groups in surveyed pet shops



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)	3,918	9,857
Birds	25 (1–147)	3,136	6,882
Reptiles	50 (2–410)	6,306	11,883
Amphibians	8 (1–70)	846	1,394
Fish	640 (7–3,000)	90,826	220,962
Invertebrates	23 (1–300)	2,776	5,061
Total		107,808	256,040

Data source: RSPCA.

Animals on sale

Out of 310 shops spread across England and Wales that were investigated in 2008, 222 sold animals belonging to at least one of the four target groups, the remainder either did not sell any target animals or no longer appeared to be in business. Mammals were sold in the largest proportion of shops, followed by fish, birds, reptiles, invertebrates, then amphibians (see Figure 7). An estimated 14,206 animals belonging to the four target groups (mammals, birds, reptiles and amphibians) were on sale. On top of this, 90,826 fish[3] and 2,776 invertebrates were recorded (see Table 1).

Although not every pet shop across England and Wales was visited in this study, data gathered from the surveyed sample can be used to get some idea of the total number of animals on sale. Assuming a similar proportion of non-surveyed pet shops held target animals (72 per cent), and in similar proportions (see Figure 7 and 'Average per shop' column in Table 1), it is estimated that more than 30,000 mammals, birds, reptiles and amphibians were on sale across England and Wales, and a further 221,000 fish and 5,000 invertebrates (see Table 1).

The most common species on sale, across the four groups, are shown in Table 2. Hamsters, mice and rats were the most commonly sold mammals, followed by gerbils and chinchillas. Rarer species included chipmunks and sugargliders.

Budgies were the most popular bird, followed by canaries and finches. Cockatiels, macaws, large parrots and parakeets were found in 13 to 19 per cent of surveyed shops.

Most shops that sold reptiles stocked various species of lizards and snakes, although tortoises were also popular. Fewer shops sold terrapins, and crocodilians (e.g. caimans) were found in only three shops.

Amphibians were the least common group on sale, mainly consisting of various species of frogs and toads.

THE TYPE OF INFORMATION RECORDED AND SCORED IS BASED ON THE FIVE WELFARE NEEDS OF ANIMALS AS OUTLINED IN THE ANIMAL WELFARE ACT 2006.

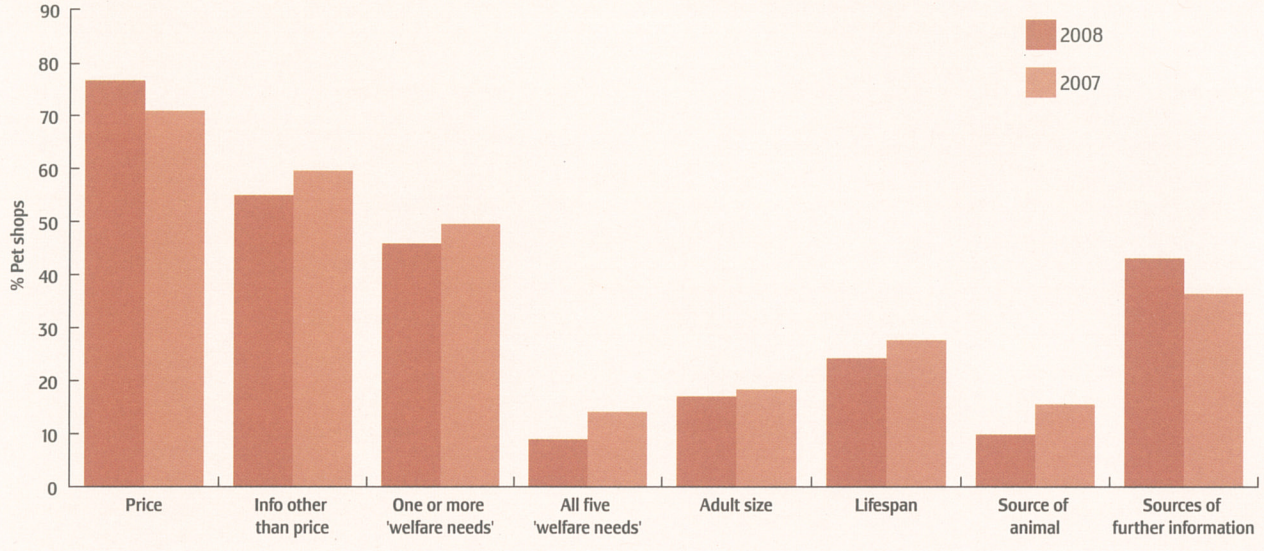
Table 2: Number of surveyed pet shops that sold each animal type

Animals on sale	No. of shops	%	Animals on sale	No. of shops	%	Animals on sale	No. of shops	%
Mammals	**162**	**73**	**Birds**	**104**	**46.8**	**Reptiles**	**80**	**35.8**
Hamster	132	59.5	Budgie	88	39.6	Lizard	77	34.5
Mouse/rat	132	59.5	Canary	64	28.8	Snake	68	30.4
Gerbil/jird	106	47.7	Finch	56	25.2	Tortoise/turtle	63	28.4
Chinchilla	64	28.8	Cockatiel	42	18.9	Terrapin	27	12.2
Degu	24	10.8	Macaw/large parrot	33	14.9	Crocodilian	3	1.4
Chipmunk	5	2.3	Parakeet	28	12.6	**Amphibians**	**50**	**22.3**
Sugar glider	2	0.9	Lovebird	18	8.1	Frog	33	14.9
Primate	0	0.0	Conure	8	3.6	Toad	23	10.1
Other	58	26.1	Other	26	11.7	Salamander	15	6.8
Fish	**144**	**64.9**	**Invertebrates**	**71**	**31.8**	Newt	12	5.4

Data source: RSPCA.

IT IS ESTIMATED THAT MORE THAN 30,000 MAMMALS, BIRDS, REPTILES AND AMPHIBIANS WERE ON SALE ACROSS ENGLAND AND WALES, AND A FURTHER 221,000 FISH AND 5,000 INVERTEBRATES.

Figure 8: Availability of written information on signage displayed in pet shops for at least one of the four groups surveyed



Data source: RSPCA.

Care information provided to potential buyers – on signs

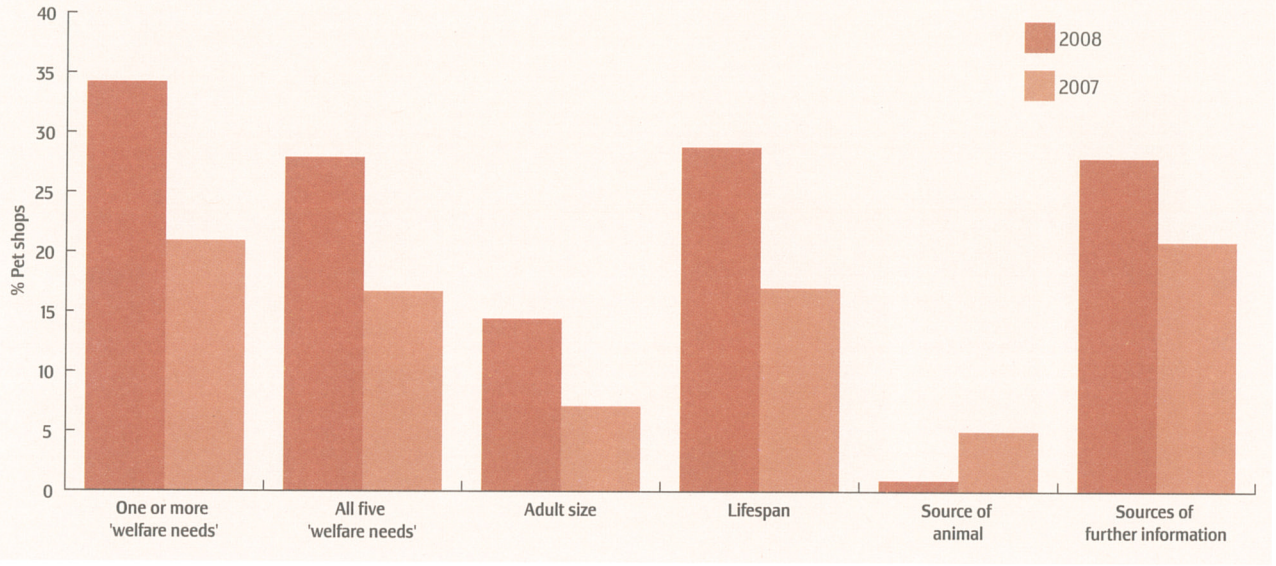
Most pet shops (82 per cent) displayed some sort of written information about at least one of the four species surveyed. The cost of the animal was most commonly on display, and only about half (55 per cent) of shops displayed information in addition to price, which is about the same proportion as last year's survey (see Figure 8). Availability of information specific to animals' welfare needs (environment, diet, behaviour, social grouping and health) showed little change compared to last year (see Figure 8). Almost half (45.9 per cent) of pet shops displayed this information on signs for at least one of the surveyed species, but less than one in 10 (nine per cent) provided information on all five aspects of welfare (see Figure 8).

Compared to last year, a similar proportion of shops provided some welfare-related information for at least one surveyed species (see Figure 8). Information relating to the provision of a suitable environment, substrates to allow the performance of natural behaviours and diet were displayed on signage by between 30 and 32 per cent of shops. This is slightly less than the 37 to 42 per cent recorded last year. Health-related information, such as signs of ill health to look for and the need to take the animal to a vet if it became ill, was the least often provided (16.2 per cent of shops, compared to 20.9 per cent recorded last year). No change was seen in the proportion of shops that displayed information about the lifespan of the species, and therefore the degree of commitment required of buyers, which was reported on signage in about a quarter of shops (see Figure 8).

As reported last year, potential buyers of mammals receive the most information via signage. More than one-third (35.1 per cent) of signs for mammals contained information about the animals' welfare needs in captivity, compared to 26.9 per cent for reptiles, 15.6 per cent for amphibians and 8.3 per cent for birds.

An important aspect that people should consider before buying a pet is how large the animal can grow, particularly when buying a reptile. Similar to last year's results, reptiles most often had this sort of information on display, albeit for only 17.3 per cent of reptiles surveyed. Some shops sold boa constrictors, which can grow to more than three metres in length, yet this information was not displayed to the public. Information regarding the source of the animal (e.g. bred in captivity or taken from the wild) was rarely displayed for any animal but reptiles most commonly had this information on display (13.5 per cent of shops). In addition, a few shops displayed a simple rating scale on signage to convey how difficult the species is to keep (e.g. level 2 – for experienced keepers), and some shops displayed signs about pet owners' duty of care to meet their animal's needs.

Figure 9: Availability of written information to be taken away from pet shops for at least one of the four groups surveyed



Data source: RSPCA.

Care information provided to potential buyers – free written information

Results relating to the availability of free care sheets are presented in Figure 9. Care sheets were available in one-third of shops surveyed (34.2 per cent), which is higher than last year (20.9 per cent). An additional nine per cent apparently did hold care sheets but they were unavailable at the time of the survey (e.g. due to the printer not working) and another 8.1 per cent held care sheets on species not selected for the survey. Therefore, about half of shops usually held care sheets of some description. However, as with last year, most care sheets were collected in a single chain of pet stores – Pets at Home – and discounting these brought the proportion or shops with free care sheets down to just seven per cent (compared to five per cent last year). Of this seven per cent, most appeared to produce their own information, although some provided sheets produced by the Pet Care Trust or pet food manufacturers.

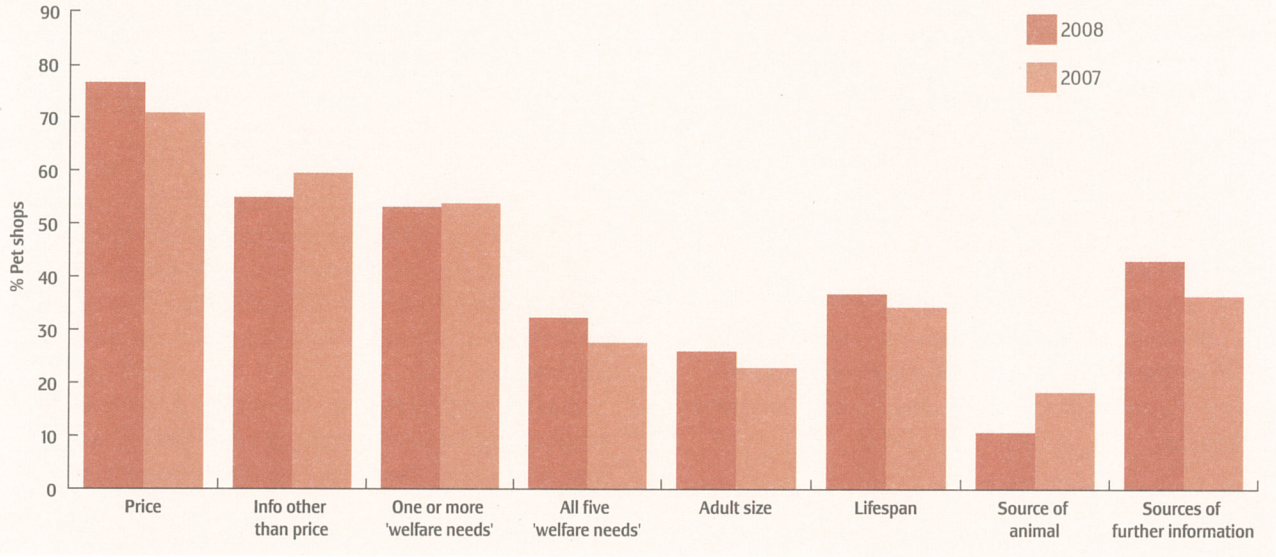
When care sheets were provided, at least one of the five welfare needs of the animal in question was always covered, and 81.6 per cent contained information on all five aspects, which is similar to last year. A high proportion of sheets also provided valuable information about the expected lifespan of the animal (84.2 per cent of sheets). There is thus far more information provided in care sheets, when they are available, than on signage.

Again, those considering buying a mammal were provided with most information, with care sheets available in 27 per cent of shops that sold this group. Care sheets were far scarcer for birds (12.5 per cent of shops) and reptiles (11.5 per cent), which is very similar to the situation seen last year. However, potential amphibian buyers had access to more care sheets this year (18.8 per cent of shops that sold amphibians compared to 6.1 per cent last year).

As with signage, information about the size to which the animal could grow was most often provided for reptiles (83.3 per cent of shops that provided reptile care sheets). Information on the source of the animal was only every provided for birds due to leaflets provided by Pets at Home which stated that all birds were captive-bred.

Overall, free information in some form (either on signs in store or in care sheets) was available in 82 per cent of shops surveyed, compared to 83.3 per cent last year. Excluding information about the price of animals on sale brings this down to just half of shops surveyed, which is about the same as last year (see Figure 10). Welfare-related information, covering at least one of the five 'welfare needs' as described in the Animal Welfare Act 2006, was provided for around half of animals surveyed, but only about one-third covered all five 'needs'. The majority of shops did not provide specifics on the size to which the animal could grow or the number of years it could live (see Figure 10).

Figure 10: Availability of any sort of free written information in surveyed pet shops for at least one of the four groups surveyed



Data source: RSPCA.

Information provided by staff

An additional avenue of information delivery is via staff in store. Surveyors reported that they were approached by a member of staff in over half of the shops surveyed (59.5 per cent of shops), which is far higher than last year (39.4 per cent), but they were no more likely to receive unsolicited advice about the care and welfare needs of the animals on display (14.4 per cent of shops compared to 15 per cent last year).

Surveyors noted that in several stores staff were very helpful and knowledgeable, and in some cases staff made it clear that they would not sell an animal without being certain the buyer had a full understanding of the needs of the animal and the level of commitment required. Furthermore, a couple of shops formally advised buyers of their duty of care by asking them to complete and sign forms to this effect which were then retained by the shop.

Overall, the availability of free written information has changed little compared to last year. Still only about half of surveyed shops provide any information other than the price of the animal on sale and only one-third provide free care sheets, which drops to just seven per cent when sheets provided by a major pet chain are discounted. This is disappointing, given that pet shops are best placed to inform potential buyers of their duty of care under the Animal Welfare Act 2006, and to furnish them with some basic information to aid their decision as to whether or not they are able to meet this obligation.

More encouragingly, when written care information was provided, the scope of the information was wider compared to the sheets sampled last year. There are also hints of some shops taking their responsibility very seriously by starting initiatives such as asking buyers to sign a 'declaration' that they agree to meet the needs of the animal they buy.

Nevertheless, great improvements could still be made in both signage and the availability of free care sheets. Staff obviously represent an important avenue for delivering such information and making sure that people know what they are taking on before they buy a new pet. However, good quality, written information remains a vital means of informing potential pet owners, allowing them to mull over the options and make the correct choice, both for them and the animal.

Further details on the survey methods and more detailed results are available on the Animal Welfare Footprint website[4].

FOOTNOTES AND REFERENCES

1 www.defra.gov.uk/animalh/welfare/act/petsales_fairs.htm
2 Wells D. 2002. The ownership and welfare of exotic pets. RSPCA.
3 Although all numbers are estimates, figures for fish should be treated with some caution given the sheer numbers involved and the difficulty in counting individuals, especially of smaller species.
4 www.animalwelfarefootprint.com

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. Lost and discarded fishing tackle is part of this problem, and poses a significant threat to a range of wildlife, but particularly swans.

Discarded fishing line, hooks and weights used by anglers are responsible for thousands of 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 wild animals) as possible suffer unnecessarily due to the carelessness of humans.

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 litter 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 swans may go unnoticed and unreported.

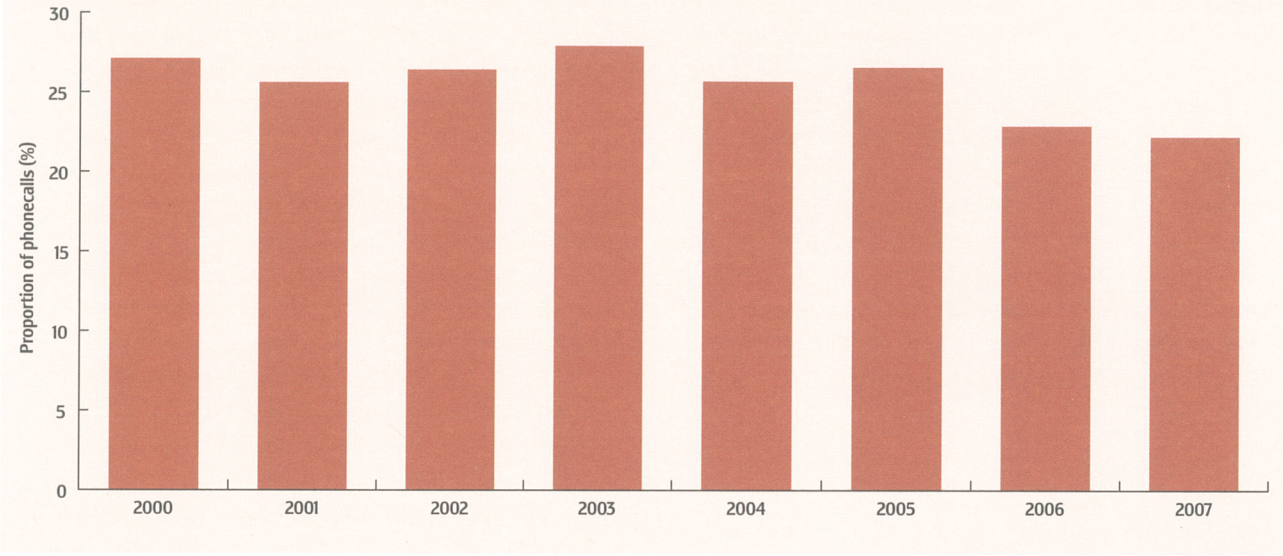
Lead poisoning resulting from the ingestion of fishing weights has also caused significant mortality in swans, although in recent years, as lead weights have been replaced, this appears to be a less significant, albeit lingering problem[2].

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 they are in use; unattended rods thus pose a particular threat[1].

Education and awareness-raising initiatives obviously play a key role in fostering greater care and vigilance and teaching good angling practice. Codes of practice and coaching courses initiated by some angling organisations go some way towards achieving this, but given that most problems appear to involve anglers that are inexperienced or of average skill[1], further outreach may be required in order to engage more casual anglers who are not members of any organisation.

THERE IS LITTLE CHANGE FROM THE PREVIOUS YEAR.

Figure 11: Proportion of swan incidents reported to the RSPCA that involved fishing tackle, 2000–2007



Data source: RSPCA.

The indicator figures

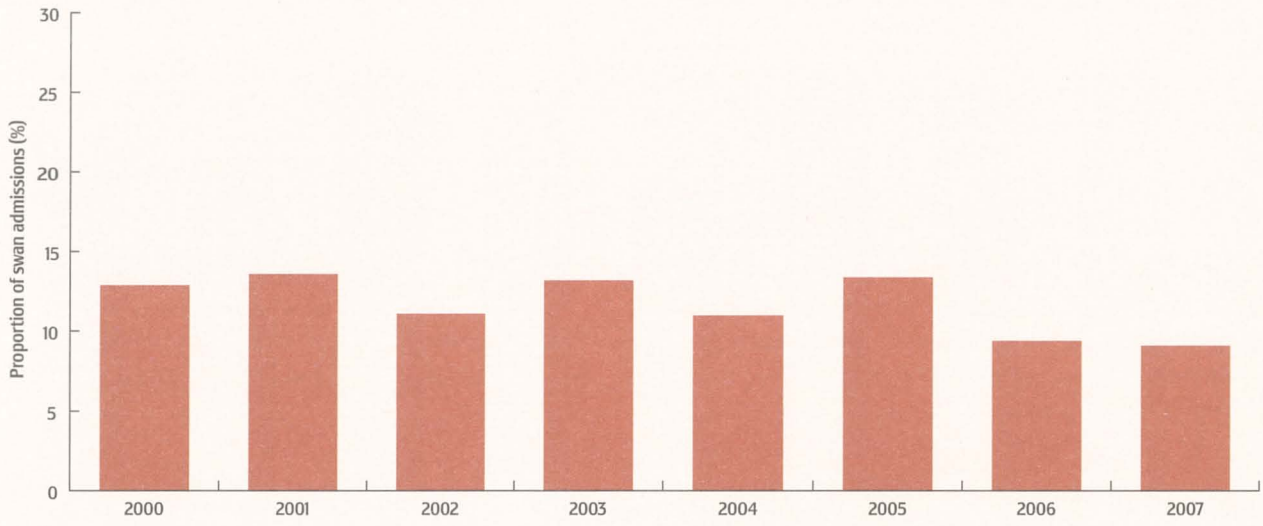
The proportion of swan incidents recorded by the RSPCA that involve fishing tackle has been monitored. Data indicate that the vast majority of incidents involve mute swans, but data on all species of swan are included. An increase in incidents could indicate more carelessness and less public concern, 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 were used covering the period 2000 to 2007. Firstly, telephone calls made to the RSPCA's cruelty and advice line by members of the public are considered (these will include unconfirmed accounts but this should not affect any trends over time) and secondly admission records of swans from three of the RSPCA's four wildlife centres[3].

Between 2000 and 2007, there was a 40 per cent drop in the number of calls about swans and fishing tackle, from 3,590 to 2,169, most notably between 2003 and 2004. However all calls made to the RSPCA show a similar decline. These patterns may be due to changes in the way calls were handled over this period, including the establishment of the RSPCA's National Control Centre. This is one of several factors that could influence the absolute number of calls, and so from a trend point of view the proportion of calls about swans that involved fishing tackle should yield a more revealing picture. Figure 11 shows that there has been a slight drop in the proportion of tackle-related calls, from 26–27 per cent (of 2,700–3,600 calls about swans) between 2000 and 2005, to 22–23 per cent (of 2,200–2,400 calls about swans) over the last two years. This could simply represent a short-term dip or perhaps the start of a significant decline in incidents.

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.

Figure 12: Proportion of swans admitted to three RSPCA centres affected by fishing tackle, 2000–2007



Data source: RSPCA.

Looking at admissions to RSPCA wildlife centres, recent years have seen fewer swans admitted, both in total (from 941 in 2000 to 799 in 2007) and suffering from tackle-related injuries (from 121 in 2000 to 73 in 2007). More importantly, Figure 12 shows that proportionately there have been slightly fewer fishing tackle-related admissions in 2006 and 2007 (nine per cent of swan admissions) compared to previous years (11–14 per cent). However, further data is needed to determine whether incidents are really in decline.

The results to date are therefore inconclusive with regards to whether there has been a significant decline in fishing tackle-related injuries in swans. Only time and more data will tell if the pattern seen in the last couple of years is sustained and that perhaps attitudes and behaviour are improving.

THE RESULTS TO DATE ARE INCONCLUSIVE WITH REGARDS TO WHETHER THERE HAS BEEN A SIGNIFICANT DECLINE IN FISHING TACKLE-RELATED INJURIES IN SWANS. ONLY TIME AND MORE DATA WILL TELL IF THE PATTERN SEEN IN THE LAST COUPLE OF YEARS IS SUSTAINED AND THAT PERHAPS ATTITUDES AND BEHAVIOUR ARE IMPROVING.

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. *Waterbirds* 27(1): 60–68.

3 Data from the RSPCA's fourth wildlife centre was not included due to incompatible recording methods.