



POSITION STATEMENT

BATS IN THE PET TRADE

There is currently no state or federal regulation prohibiting an individual from owning one or more non-native species of bats. Some states have finally enacted regulations prohibiting private ownership of big cats, wolves, and non-human primates, and import/export laws require federal permits before most exotic species can be brought into the U.S. Most states do prohibit ownership of some native wildlife species without appropriate permits. However, there is a substantial market for exotic pets, and no penalty for unscrupulous dealers who sell these animals on the Internet and at various pet expos around the country. Some zoos, refusing to maintain single-sex bat colonies or neuter males, find themselves with colonies of 300 or more bats which they cannot maintain. The colonies are culled to control numbers, and the surplus are either killed or sold to the cruel pet trade.

The heart of the matter is that bats are highly social, gregarious individuals who thrive in the company of their own kind. They require large open areas in which to fly, and a carefully balanced, nutritionally sound diet to maintain good health. The average citizen is uninformed and singularly ill-equipped to provide a proper diet and habitat, or sufficient enrichment, and as a result the bats generally die in less than a year. Confined to a small bird cage (the housing recommended by many dealers), the bats cannot fully extend their wings or properly groom themselves, resulting in painful ulcerated sores on their bodies. Untreated, these sores lead to systemic ulcerative dermatitis and infection, and the bats die a slow, agonizing death. Conditions such as Metabolic Bone Disease and other nutritional disorders are common, and bats surrendered from the pet trade generally arrive at Bat World Sanctuary with a host of medical problems.

All too often, the bats entering the pet trade are pregnant females. Buyers are unaware of their condition and are not equipped to deal with complications from a difficult birth. The mother, already distressed, may abandon her baby (assuming she survives the birthing process). Unless the pup is surrendered to a bat care expert immediately, it has no chance of survival.

Bat World Sanctuary does not condone the sale of bats as pets, whether native or non-native. Bats fill an important role in the balance of ecosystems, and harvesting them to satisfy a selfish human desire to possess something unique is cruel, inhumane, and irresponsible. Zoos are encouraged to cooperatively establish captive breeding programs which will ensure a sufficient number of healthy bats will be available for displays without producing an unwanted surplus.