



## INTRODUCTION WILDLIFE INDICATORS

There were many occurrences with repercussions for the UK's wildlife in 2008, both good and bad. These included strategies to tackle disease outbreaks and non-native species in the UK, influential conferences, changes to legislation and the release of valuable scientific research findings.

- News for badgers was mixed as strategies to tackle bovine TB in cattle were announced. Although the Independent Scientific Group had recommended against badger culling, the Welsh Assembly Government announced that a badger cull would, in principle, take place<sup>1</sup>. A more welcome stance was taken by Defra, which ruled out a cull and committed additional funds to develop usable badger and cattle vaccines.
- The RSPCA contributed towards a series of best practice guides produced by the Deer Initiative, which aim to safeguard the welfare of both deer and humans<sup>2</sup>. The Society produced a factsheet on road traffic accidents involving deer, which covered ways to reduce the risk of accidents and what to do if an injured animal is found<sup>3</sup>.
- Further scientific research was published which strengthens the case against keeping elephants in zoos. Defra commissioned research, part-funded by the RSPCA, that found very high rates of lameness, obesity and abnormal, stereotypic behaviour in UK zoo elephants<sup>4</sup>. Another study, published in the journal *Science*, reported vastly reduced lifespans in European zoo elephants compared to counterparts living in the wild and in timber camps<sup>5</sup>.
- The UK government conducted a public consultation on the Dangerous Wild Animals Act 1976. The RSPCA responded, highlighting the risk to animals if proposed changes were adopted. These included removing all reference to animal welfare from the Act and at least doubling the time between inspections. Although the UK government thankfully recognised the role of the Act in pre-empting animal welfare problems, it unfortunately intends to proceed with changes to licensing and inspection requirements<sup>6</sup> that will likely lessen protection for animals.
- The 23rd meeting of the Animals Committee of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) took place in Switzerland<sup>7</sup>. A total of 24 agenda items were discussed, including the periodic review of CITES-protected species. Other topics covered were the conservation and management of sharks and criteria used to decide whether trade in a particular species is 'sustainable'.
- Taking on board the findings of recent scientific research<sup>8</sup>, young birds in all RSPCA wildlife centres have been played recordings of the dawn chorus since June 2008. These recordings should help young fledglings to develop their natural song repertoires, and so increase their chances of survival after release.
- Support for the RSPCA's stance against the keeping of primates as pets was garnered at the International Primatological Society (IPS) conference in Edinburgh. More than 360 experts have now signed up to our joint statement with the Monkey Sanctuary Trust, which states that if primates are kept by private keepers, it should only be for the purposes of sanctuary or species conservation, and not simply for companionship. Members of the wildlife department also attended the winter meeting of the Primate Society of Great Britain, where the subject was discussed and more support gained. As a result of our dialogue, the IPS has passed a policy statement voicing opposition to the practice of keeping these animals as pets.
- In May, the Great Britain Non-Native Species Secretariat published their Invasive Non-Native Species Framework Strategy for Great Britain<sup>9</sup>; the RSPCA responded to a public consultation on this in 2007. It 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.
- Discarded fishing tackle remains a significant problem for swans in England and Wales. RSPCA data shows there is little sign of improvement in the proportion of swans affected by discarded fishing line and hooks<sup>10</sup>.
- Although the number of wild-caught birds imported into the UK has all but ceased since an import ban came into force in July 2007, worryingly, numbers of wild-caught reptiles continue to rise<sup>11</sup>.

### FOOTNOTES AND REFERENCES

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- 6 [www.defra.gov.uk/wildlife-pets/wildlife/protect/dwaa/review.htm](http://www.defra.gov.uk/wildlife-pets/wildlife/protect/dwaa/review.htm)
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- 9 The Invasive Non-Native Species Framework Strategy of Great Britain. 2008. Available online at: [www.nonnativespecies.org/documents/Invasive\\_NNS\\_Framework\\_Strategy\\_GB\\_E.pdf](http://www.nonnativespecies.org/documents/Invasive_NNS_Framework_Strategy_GB_E.pdf)
- 10 See page xx of this document.
- 11 See page xx of this document.

## 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. The issue of by-catch continues to pose 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 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 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 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.

### Background

It has been estimated that almost 60,000 cetaceans are killed throughout the world every year as a result of becoming tangled in fishing gear<sup>1</sup>. Common dolphins and harbour porpoises are the most frequent casualties of the UK fishing industry<sup>2</sup>; in 2008 it was estimated that 600 porpoises and 300 dolphins die per year in set net fisheries waters off the south-west coast<sup>3</sup>. 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<sup>4</sup>. 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<sup>4</sup>.

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<sup>5</sup>. The 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 die as by-catch each year in that fishery alone<sup>5</sup> – 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 two dolphins every 100 hours of fishing<sup>6</sup>.

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 at reducing porpoise by-catch by up to 90 per cent in trials in North America and south-west England<sup>7</sup>. More recent research into whether aspects of netting (such as tension) attract porpoises to nets has suggested some correlation but further work is needed<sup>3</sup>. Pingers, while promising, are not seen as the definitive solution to the problem<sup>8</sup> and further fishing gear development is required.

Ongoing work in the UK<sup>9</sup> 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



**THERE IS LITTLE CHANGE FROM THE PREVIOUS YEAR.**

extremely high and indicate that more than 900 common dolphins died in the UK bass fishery between 2000 and 2005<sup>11</sup>. Many more French than UK boats use this fishery, so total mortality will be significantly greater. 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<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>12</sup>, 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<sup>13</sup>, some fishermen are failing to comply with pinger requirements, as they believe that pingers are unreliable, costly and potentially dangerous<sup>14</sup>. 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 indicator figures

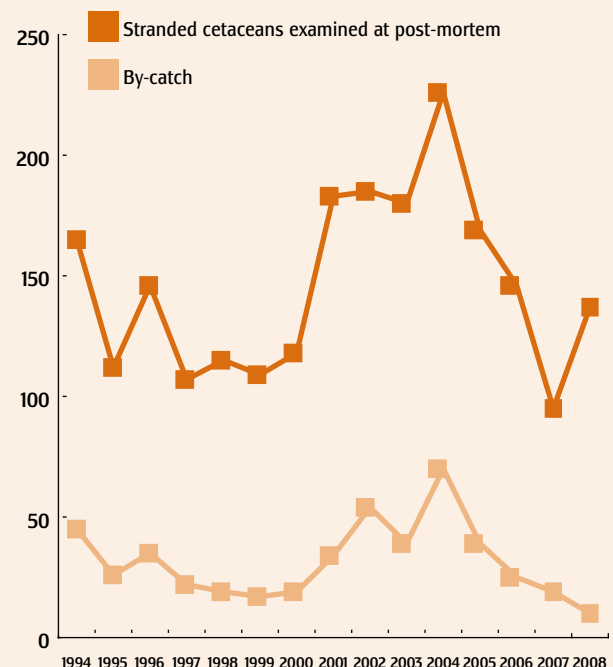
The actual death toll of cetaceans in fisheries is unknown, but estimates can be made from observer programmes that sample a small proportion of fishing fleets, and from the analysis of carcasses found on beaches. The total number of cetaceans stranding on UK shores doubled over the 13 years between 1994 to 2006, from 360 to 719<sup>15 16</sup>. This is possibly due to the growth in a method of fishing known as pair trawling, used largely to catch sea bass. Since then however, the total number of cetacean strandings has decreased by almost 20 per cent, to 583 in 2008<sup>2</sup>.

Post-mortem examinations were conducted on stranded cetaceans that were not badly decomposed in order to try and determine the cause of death<sup>2 15 16 17</sup>. 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. Until 2008, the proportion of deaths attributed to by-catch remained relatively consistent at around 20 per cent. However, just 7.3 per cent of animals post mortemed in 2008 were found to have been by-caught. This included eight harbour porpoises and two common dolphins – the lowest numbers recorded of both species for 18 years<sup>2</sup>. Many factors could be responsible for this decrease, including changes in distribution of prey, fishing effort and weather conditions, and/or cetaceans themselves<sup>2</sup>. It is also worth noting that two mass live stranding events occurred in 2008<sup>2 18</sup>,

which will have affected the proportion of deaths attributed to by-catch. These post mortem figures don't provide information on the scale of the problem, as most discarded carcasses never reach the beach<sup>19</sup>.

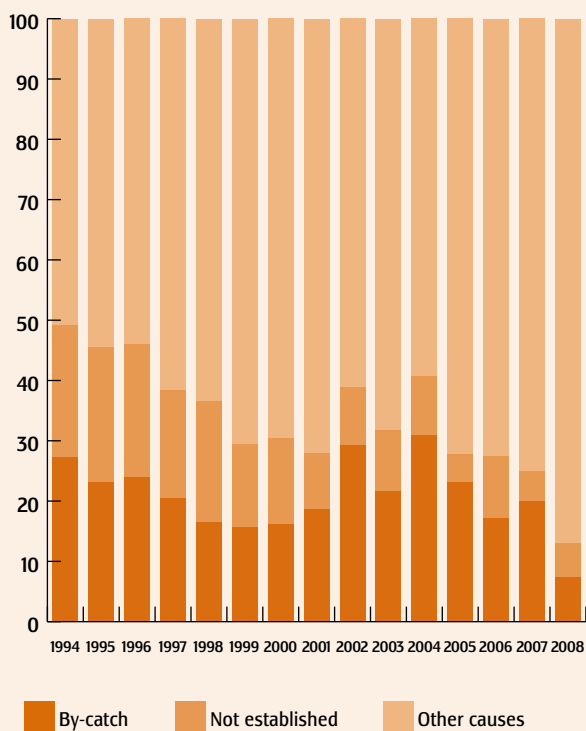
There is no doubt that enforcement of UK and EU cetacean by-catch legislation could bring a reduction in the frequency of their entanglement in nets. The government must take action to enforce the legislation, and must be proactive in supporting research into alternative fishing technology and by-catch 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 is likely to be due to normal inter-annual variation in UK waters<sup>17</sup>. The proportion of cetaceans by-caught, meanwhile, has remained consistently high over the last 10 years and, despite a fall in 2008, shows no sign of a significant decline.

**Figure 1: The number of stranded cetaceans examined and number of deaths caused by by-catch, 1994–2008**



Data source: Institute of Zoology.

**Figure 2: Proportion of total deaths (%) known to be caused by by-catch and other causes, 1994–2008**



Data source: Institute of Zoology.

#### FOOTNOTES AND REFERENCES

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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<sup>1, 2</sup>. To prevent the suffering of these animals, the Society advocates far stricter regulations to stop their importation into the EU – the largest global market for reptiles. Stopping 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

Many pet keepers in the UK 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 untrue. International trade in wild animals is only regulated for species that are endangered or threatened by trade, and which are consequently 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<sup>3</sup> and enforced through the UK COTES (Control of Trade in Endangered Species) legislation<sup>4</sup>. Of the approximate 10,000 species of birds<sup>5</sup> and 7,700 species of reptiles<sup>6</sup> 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. An added data complication now exists. Since deregulation<sup>7</sup> in 2007, bird movements into the UK from the EU are apparently no longer recorded – making it almost impossible to monitor trends in total bird trade. Figures for CITES-listed reptiles and birds 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 captive environment of specimens, such as eggs or hatchlings, which have been taken from the wild.



**TOTAL NUMBER OF WILD-CAUGHT, LIVE CITES-LISTED REPTILES IMPORTED INTO THE EU. LITTLE CHANGE.**



**NUMBER OF WILD-CAUGHT REPTILES AS A PROPORTION OF THE TOTAL TRADE IN LIVE CITES-LISTED REPTILES IMPORTED IN THE EU. INCREASE.**



**TOTAL NUMBER OF WILD-CAUGHT, LIVE CITES-LISTED REPTILES IMPORTED INTO THE UK. SLIGHT INCREASE.**



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

For a more detailed explanation of CITES source codes used in this report and in-depth results, please refer to the Animal Welfare Footprint website: [www.animalwelfarefootprint.com](http://www.animalwelfarefootprint.com)

## The indicator figures – live reptiles

### Total live reptile trade (TRACES and Eurostat data)

In terms of trade in all live reptiles, the Society estimated in 2006 that between 3.6 and 5.9 million live reptiles were imported into the EU that year<sup>8</sup>. This was based on 2005 EU data indicating that 1,613,842 reptiles were imported<sup>9</sup>.

178,244<sup>9</sup> animals entered the UK from outside the EU in 2006, but only 1,470<sup>9</sup> arrived from other EU member states. This means that 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<sup>10</sup>.

Unfortunately, comparable data on the total number of individual reptiles imported into the EU in 2006/7, and into the UK in 2007/8, were not provided by the government so the latest trends cannot be shown<sup>11 12</sup>.

### Source of reptiles (CITES data)

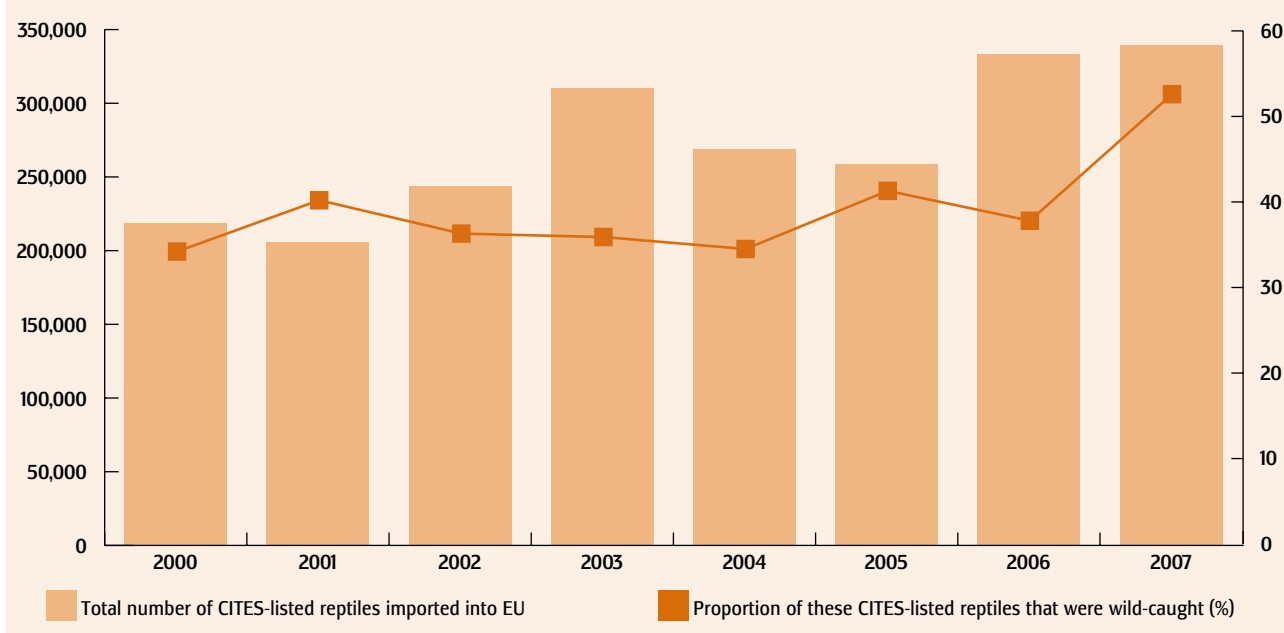
The number of live reptiles imported into the EU under CITES, and the proportion of these that were wild-caught, for 2000–2007<sup>13 14</sup>,

are shown in Figure 3. At the time of writing, 2008 data were not available. Overall, the number of imports has increased slightly from 2006 to 339,209 animals. Reptiles taken from the wild accounted for 52.6 per cent of all imports in 2007 – an increase of 14.8 per cent on the previous year. There are now more than twice as many reptiles being caught from the wild and imported into the EU as there were in 2000. In the last two years alone, the number of wild-caught animals (i.e. removed from wild but not ranched) has more than doubled.

Data for CITES trade into the UK from outside the EU between 2000 and 2008<sup>15 14</sup> are shown in Figure 4. Since 2000, the trade in live CITES-listed reptiles has increased, particularly between 2005 and 2006 where numbers jumped from 12,128 to 24,872 respectively. The total number of imports is now more than five times what it was in 2000, with an increase of 67 per cent between 2005 and 2008. While the proportion of animals taken from the wild decreased to 61 per cent in 2008, this is more likely due to a rise in the number of captive-bred reptiles rather than a fall in the number of animals taken from the wild. In actual fact, the number of wild-caught animals increased by four per cent between 2007 and 2008. It will be interesting to see whether the increase in captive-bred animals continues in the coming years.

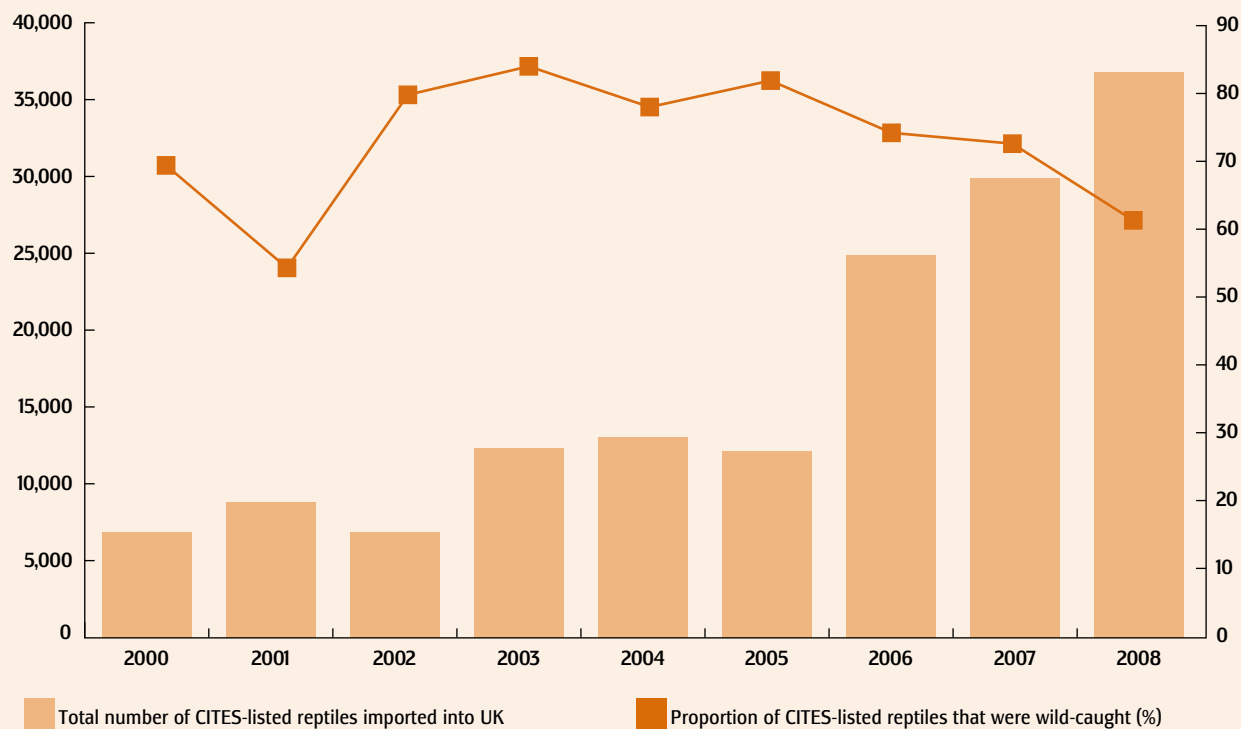
Reptile trade seems to have been increasing steadily since 2000, possibly due to a rise in popularity of keeping these animals as pets. The greatest impact on wild animal trade since October 2005 is probably the introduction of EU-wide legislation that stopped the

**Figure 3: Total number of CITES-listed reptiles imported into 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 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.

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<sup>15</sup>. 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 three years (Figure 3) could therefore have occurred following a shift from exporting wild birds towards wild reptiles. To support such a shift, 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 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.

Following the implementation of the US import ban of wild CITES-listed birds in 1992<sup>16</sup>, 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<sup>17</sup>. 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 controls on the numbers exported for the pet market – raising concerns about how few reptile species are protected from international trade. While 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 taxa 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, trade into the EU of over a 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 once captured and removed from the wild should be restricted. Reptile traders and keepers also have a responsibility to carefully consider the source of the animal to be acquired; to choose species in the trade that can be supplied from 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)

Obtaining data regarding the total trade of birds into the EU and UK is extremely difficult. 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<sup>18</sup> in 2005 cf. 524,850 CITES-listed birds)<sup>9</sup>. It was not possible to obtain current figures on the number of birds imported into the EU between 2000 and 2008<sup>12</sup>.

Looking at the trade of all bird species into the UK shows that only 54 birds were imported in 2006 for conservation purposes, compared to over 50,000 in previous years<sup>9</sup>. Unfortunately, comparable figures for 2007 and 2008 were not provided by the government<sup>11,12</sup>, however due to the current import ban it is highly likely that this trend has continued. Despite the deregulation of birds moving from the EU into the UK being cited as the reason for lack of data in our 2007 report, the government this year was able to provide data on the import of birds into the UK between 2004 and 2008<sup>12</sup>. 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

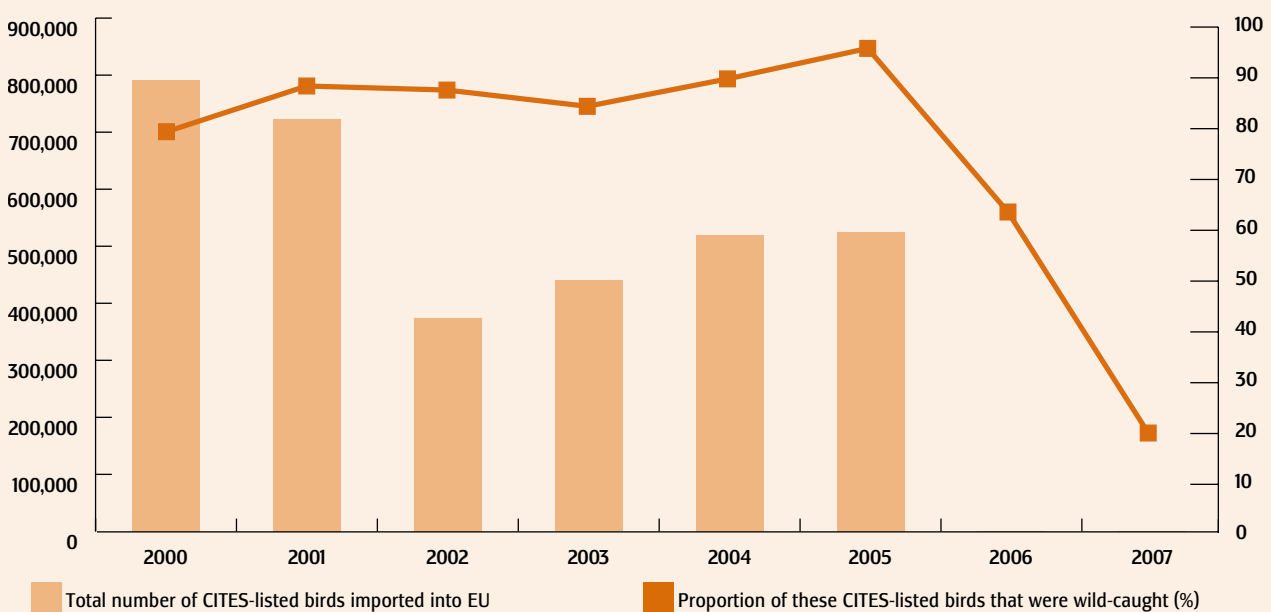
decreased by 99.8 per cent between 2004 and 2008. The largest fall was in 2006, again following the introduction of the bird import ban. Numbers fell from a high of 71,898 in 2005 to 291 animals the next year; this decrease appears to have continued, with the number imported in 2008 being 89.

### Source of reptiles (CITES data)

Figures 5 and 6 show the CITES-listed birds imported into the EU as a whole and into the UK from outside the EU, and the proportion of these birds that were wild-caught. Thousands of wild-caught CITES-listed birds were imported annually into the EU between 2002 and 2005<sup>14</sup>, but following the EU-wide ban on imports of wild birds<sup>15</sup>, the trade in CITES-listed species has all but ceased (Figure 5). Looking at CITES-listed bird imports into the UK, the figures show a similar trend (Figure 6).

From UK and EU bird import figures, it seems that, while overall trade remains high, the import ban on wild birds has effectively ended the legal 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. 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.

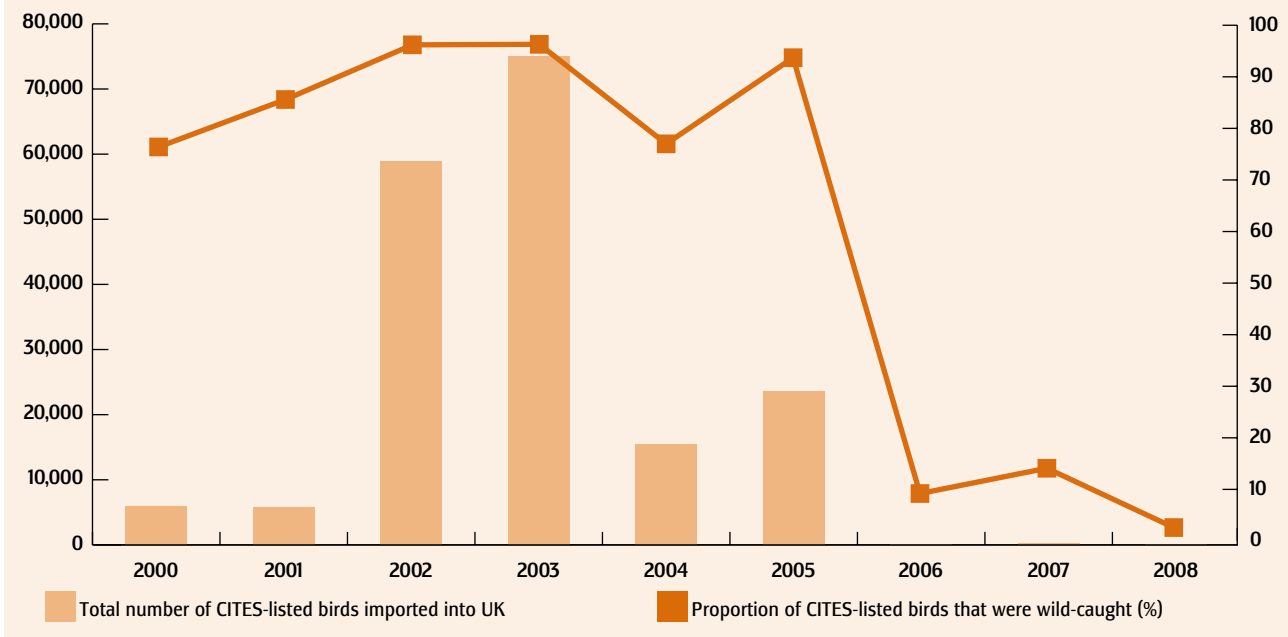
**Figure 5: Total number of CITES-listed birds imported into the EU, and proportion (%) of these birds that were obtained from the wild, 2000–2007**



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



**Figure 6: Total number of CITES-listed birds imported into the 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.

**TOTAL NUMBER OF WILD-CAUGHT, LIVE CITES-LISTED BIRDS IMPORTED INTO THE EU. LITTLE CHANGE, TRADE HAS VIRTUALLY CEASED.**

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

**FOOTNOTES AND REFERENCES**

- 1 Alther S and Freyer D. 2001. Mortality and morbidity in private husbandry of reptiles. RSPCA.
- 2 Maas B. 2000. Prepared and shipped – A multidisciplinary review of the effects of capture, handling, housing and transport on morbidity and mortality. RSPCA.
- 3 Council Regulation (EC) No 338/97 (and subsequent amendments).
- 4 The Control of Trade in Endangered Species (Enforcement) Regulations 1997.
- 5 Birdlife International website: [www.birdlife.org](http://www.birdlife.org)
- 6 CITES website: [www.CITES.org](http://www.CITES.org)
- 7 Animal Health. July 2008. Pers comm.
- 8 *The welfare state: Measuring animal welfare in the UK 2006*. RSPCA.
- 9 Lord Rooker, House of Lords written answers, 26 January 2007.
- 10 CAWC. 2003. The report on the welfare of non-domesticated animals kept for companionship.
- 11 Jonathan Shaw, Defra minister, Hansard, 30 April 2008.
- 12 Huw Irranca-Davies, MP, Hansard, 14 July 2009.
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- 14 CITES trade statistics derived from the CITES Trade Database, UNEP World Conservation Monitoring Centre, Cambridge, UK.
- 15 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.
- 16 Wild Bird Conservation Act in 1992.
- 17 Franke J and Telecky T. 2001. Reptiles as pets – An examination of the trade in olive reptiles.
- 18 Lord Rooker, Minister of State (Lords), Hansard, 18 December 2006.

## **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 it is essential for the animal's welfare that the person responsible for its care is fully prepared and understands the animal's long-term needs in captivity, whether it be a dog, rabbit or less common pet such as a snake or a terrapin.

There is a diverse range of animals available to keep as pets, which can be acquired from many different sources. These include 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.

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.

### Background

The Animal Welfare Act 2006 in England and Wales clearly recognises the responsibility of any pet keeper to take reasonable steps to meet the 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, both domestic and non-domestic species. 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<sup>1</sup>.

In 2002, the RSPCA commissioned research to investigate the ownership of non-domestic pets or 'exotics' (that is, animals such as reptiles and amphibians), including where the animals were acquired<sup>2</sup>. The 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.

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 good-quality written information, appropriate for the non-domestic animals on sale in the pet shops.



**THERE IS LITTLE CHANGE FROM THE PREVIOUS YEAR.**

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, A SUITABLE DIET, OPPORTUNITIES TO EXHIBIT NORMAL BEHAVIOUR PATTERNS, ANY NEED TO BE HOUSED WITH, OR APART, FROM OTHER ANIMALS, AND ITS NEED TO BE PROTECTED FROM PAIN, SUFFERING, INJURY AND DISEASE.

### The indicator figures

A sample of pet shops in England and Wales were surveyed between January and May 2009. 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 and in a form that can be taken away for reference by those considering or intending to buy an animal.

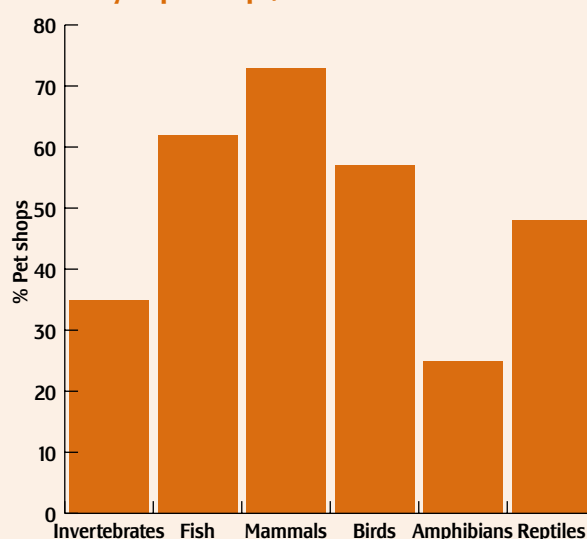
#### ■ Information scoring

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/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 to seek veterinary advice).

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

Further details on the survey methods and more detailed results are available at: [www.animalwelfarefootprint.com](http://www.animalwelfarefootprint.com)

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



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	24 (2–97)	2,837	6,803
Birds	39 (1–147)	3,548	8,512
Reptiles	48 (2–410)	3,817	8,934
Amphibians	10 (1–70)	498	1,070
Fish	675 (7–3,000)	67,518	161,661
Invertebrates	74 (1–2,500)	4,160	9,937
<b>Total</b>		<b>82,378</b>	<b>196,917</b>

Data source: RSPCA.

### ■ Animals on sale

Out of 226 pet shops spread across England and Wales that were investigated 168 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.

As in last year's survey, mammals were sold in the largest proportion of shops, followed by fish, birds, reptiles, invertebrates, then amphibians (see Figure 7). An estimated 10,700 animals belonging to the four target groups (mammals, birds, reptiles and amphibians) were on sale. On top of this, around 67,500 fish<sup>3</sup> and 4,200 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 (74 per cent), and in similar proportions (see Figure 7), it

is estimated that more than 25,000 mammals, birds, reptiles and amphibians were on sale across England and Wales, and a further 162,000 fish and 10,000 invertebrates (see Table 1).

The most common species on sale, across the four groups, are shown in Table 2. The distribution of species has changed little from last year. 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 17 to 24 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 crocodylians (e.g. caimans).

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

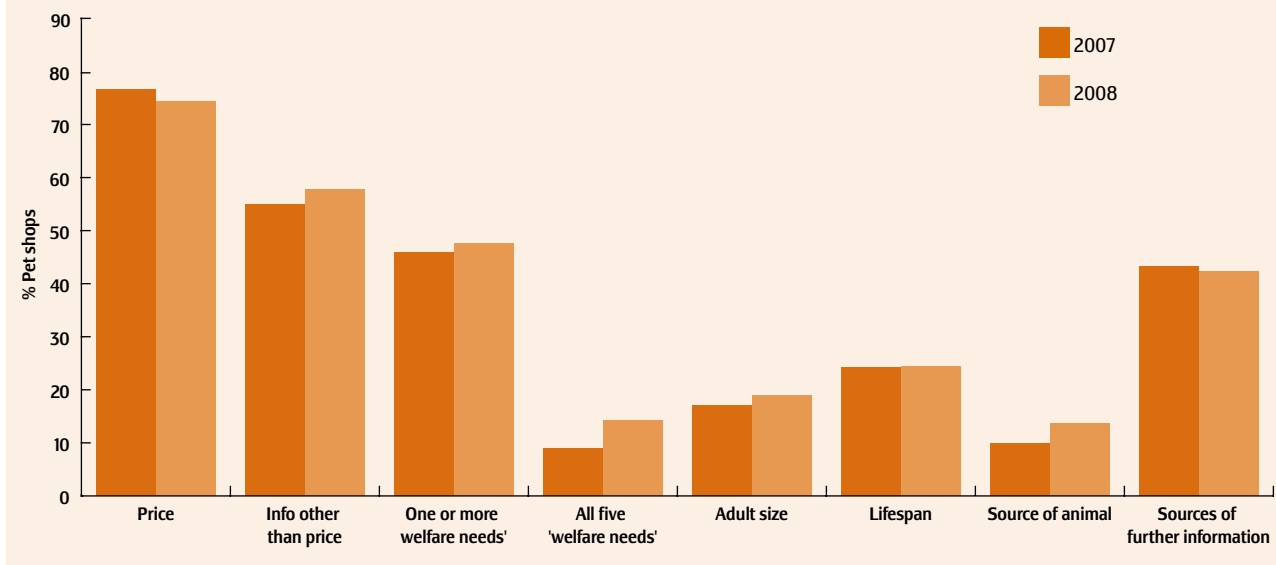
Table 2: Number of surveyed pet shops that sold each animal type

Animals on sale	No. of shops	%	Animals on sale	No. of shops	%	Animals on sale	No. of shops	%
<b>Mammals</b>	<b>122</b>	<b>72.6</b>	<b>Birds</b>	<b>96</b>	<b>57.1</b>	<b>Reptiles</b>	<b>80</b>	<b>47.6</b>
Hamster	102	60.7	Budgie	82	48.8	Lizard	77	45.8
Mouse/rat	92	54.8	Canary	62	36.9	Snake	65	38.7
Gerbil/jird	74	44	Finch	62	36.9	Tortoise/turtle	58	34.5
Chinchilla	43	25.6	Cockatiel	41	24.4	Terrapin	24	14.3
Degu	21	12.5	Macaw/large parrot	32	19	Crocodylian	4	2.4
Chipmunk	10	6	Parakeet	29	17.3	<b>Amphibians</b>	<b>42</b>	<b>25</b>
Sugar glider	3	1.8	Lovebird	21	12.5	Frog	31	18.5
Primate	1	0.6	Conure	8	4.8	Toad	19	11.3
Other	46	27.4	Other	36	21.4	Salamander	12	7.1
<b>Fish</b>	<b>104</b>	<b>61.9</b>	<b>Invertebrates</b>	<b>58</b>	<b>34.5</b>	Newt	7	4.2

Data source: RSPCA

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 GOOD-QUALITY WRITTEN INFORMATION, APPROPRIATE FOR THE NON-DOMESTIC ANIMALS ON SALE IN THE PET SHOPS.

**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 (83.3 per cent) displayed some sort of written information about at least one of the four species surveyed. However, the cost of the animal was most commonly on display, and only about half (57.7 per cent) of shops displayed information in addition to price, which is similar to 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 (47.6 per cent) of pet shops displayed this information on signs for at least one of the surveyed species, but just over one in 10 (14.3 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 35.7 and 39.9 per cent of shops, which is slightly higher than last year.

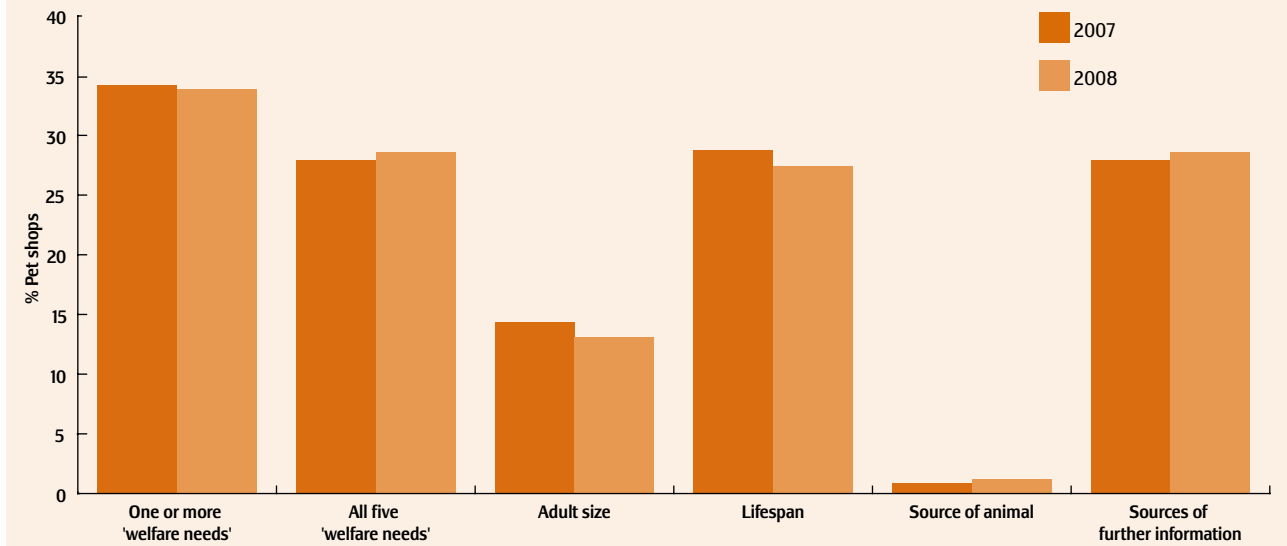
Health-related information, such as signs of ill health to look out for and mention of the need to take the animal to a vet if it became ill was the least often provided (21.4 per cent of shops, compared to 16.2 per cent recorded last year). No change was seen in the proportion of shops that displayed information about the lifespan of the species, and therefore the degree of commitment required of buyers, which was reported on signage in around a quarter of shops (see Figure 8).

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 (26.2 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 always 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 (21.3 per cent of shops).

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.

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



Data source: RSPCA

### ■ Care information provided to potential buyers – free written information to take away

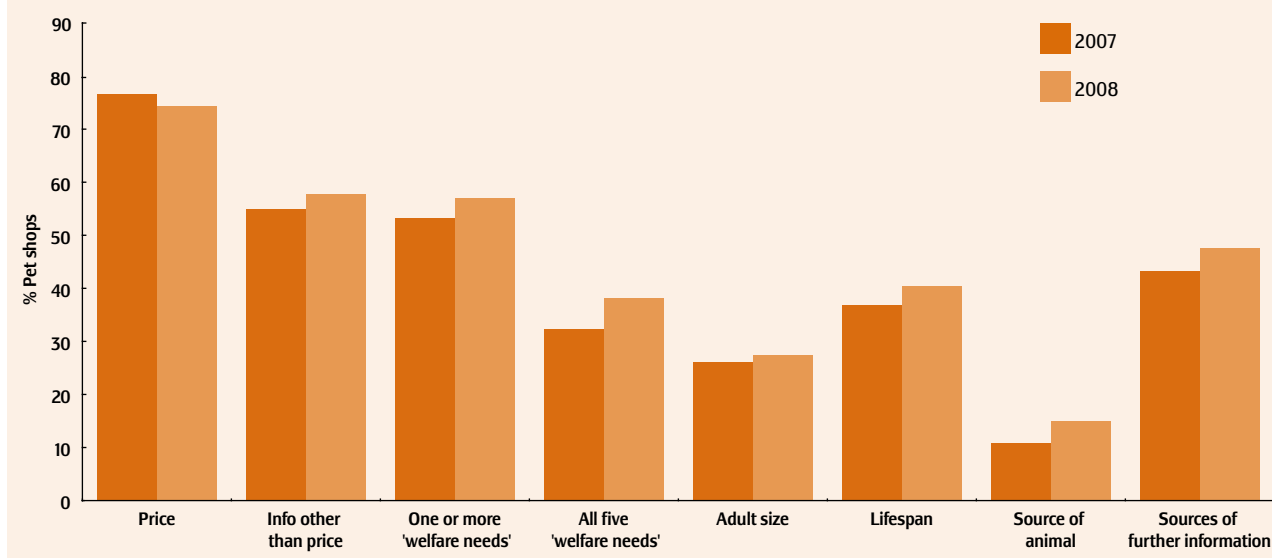
Results relating to the availability of free care sheets are presented in Figure 9. Care sheets were available to members of the public in a third of shops surveyed (33.9 per cent), which is very similar to last year (34.2 per cent). An additional 3.6 per cent of shops usually did hold care sheets but they were unavailable at the time of the survey (e.g. because they were being updated) and another 9.5 per cent held care sheets on some species, but not those selected for the survey. Therefore, around half of shops surveyed usually held care sheets of some description.

However, as with previous years, most care sheets were collected in a single chain of pet stores – Pets at Home – and discounting these brought the proportion down to just 14.3 per cent (compared to seven per cent last year). Of these, most appeared to produce their own care sheets, although some provided care 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 84.2 per cent contained information on all five aspects, which is very similar to the situation reported last year. There is thus much more information provided in care sheets, when they are available, than on signage. A high proportion of sheets also provided valuable information about the expected lifespan of the animal (80.7 per cent of sheets).

Overall, free information in some form (either on signs in store or in care sheets) was available in 84.5 per cent of shops surveyed, compared to 82 per cent last year. Excluding the price of animals on sale brings this down to just over half of the shops surveyed, around 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 just over half of the animals surveyed, but only about a third covered all five 'needs'. Most shops did not provide specifics on the source of animals or the number of years they 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 of course from staff in store. Members of staff approached surveyors in over half of the shops surveyed (52.4 per cent of shops), which is around the same as last year (59.5 per cent). Staff were very helpful and knowledgeable in several stores, and in some cases made it clear that they would not sell an animal unless they were confident the buyer fully understood the animal's needs and the level of commitment required.

Overall, the availability of free written information has changed little compared to last year. Around half of surveyed shops provided information other than the price of the animal on sale, and only a third provided free care sheets (14 per cent if a major pet chain is discounted). More encouragingly, when written care information is provided, the scope of the information is quite wide.

Improvements could still be made, though, in both signage and the availability of free care sheets. Staff represent an important source of information and can check 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.

Pet shop regulations under the Animal Welfare Act (2006) have not yet been drafted. It is hoped that the regulations will improve the availability of care sheets. The Welsh Assembly Government has produced codes of practice on the care of dogs, cats and horses. It is expected that others will follow. These codes are not yet available in England. Without any codes of practice, pet shops are reliant on care sheets produced by their own trade association, their head office or their staff. Therefore, different advice and information will be available.

#### FOOTNOTES AND REFERENCES

- 1 [www.defra.gov.uk/foodfarm/farmanimal/welfare/act/secondary-legis/petsales\\_fairs.htm](http://www.defra.gov.uk/foodfarm/farmanimal/welfare/act/secondary-legis/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 caution due to the difficulty in counting individuals, especially of smaller species.



## **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 and other 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.

### 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, discarded 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<sup>1</sup> and admissions to an RSPCA wildlife centre<sup>2</sup>. It has been estimated that 8,000 swan rescues take place each year in Britain, with 3,000 caused by fishing tackle<sup>1</sup>. This could of course underestimate the true scale of the problem, as many swans may go unnoticed and/or unreported.

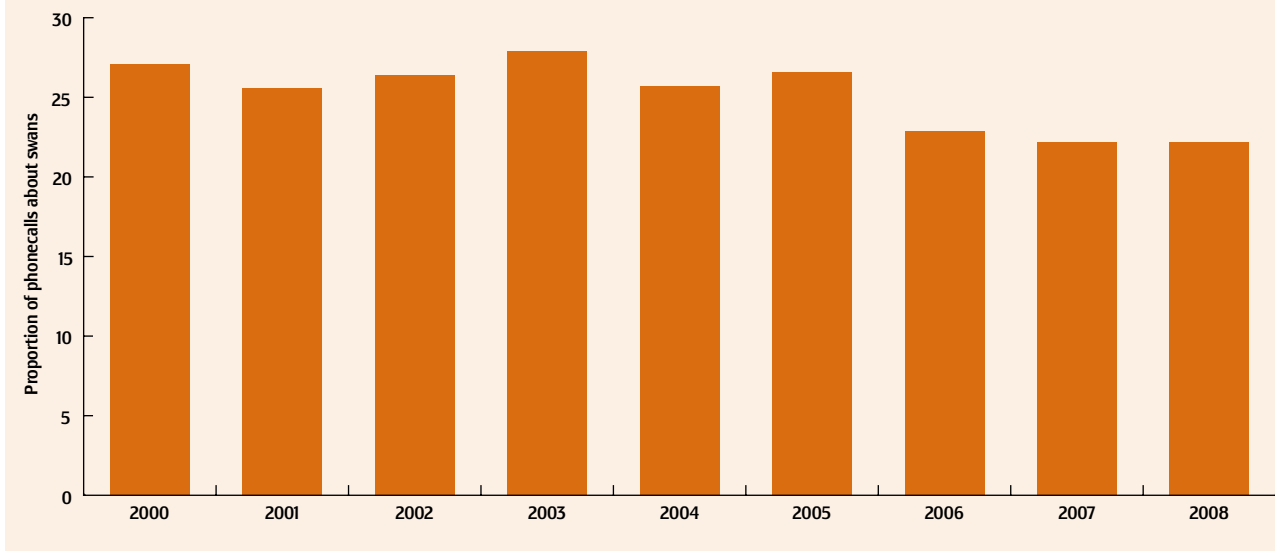
Lead poisoning resulting from the ingestion of fishing weights has also caused significant mortality in swans, although in recent years, as lead weights have been replaced, this appears to be a less significant, albeit lingering problem<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup>; unattended fishing rods thus pose a particular threat.

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<sup>1</sup>, 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 recorded by the RSPCA that involved fishing tackle, 2000–2008**

Data source: RSPCA.

### The indicator figures

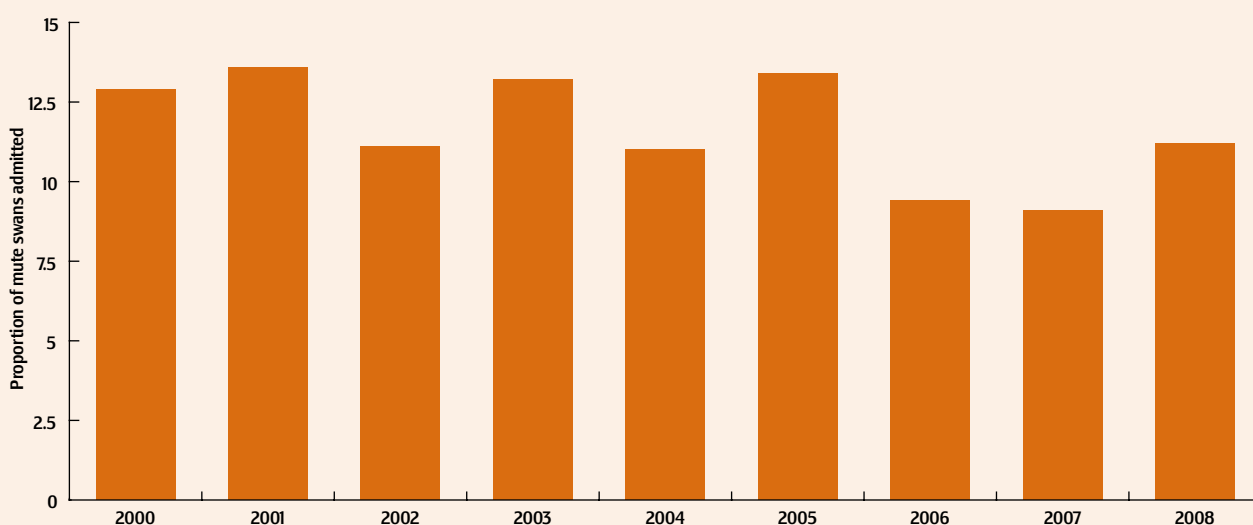
The proportion of swan incidents recorded by the RSPCA that involve fishing tackle has been monitored. Data indicate that the vast majority of incidents involve mute swans, but data on all species of swan are included. An increase in incidents could indicate more carelessness and less public concern, 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, covering 2000 to 2008, were used: 1) telephone calls made to the RSPCA's cruelty and advice line by members of the public regarding swans and fishing tackle (these include unconfirmed accounts but this should not affect any trends over time), and 2) admission records of mute swans from three of the RSPCA's four wildlife centres<sup>3</sup>.

Between 2000 and 2008, the number of calls about swans and fishing tackle fell by 45 per cent, from 3,590 to 1,959, most notably between 2003 and 2004; and by 10 per cent between 2007 and 2008. However, the RSPCA has seen a decline in all calls over the nine-year period (by 31 per cent), as well as between 2007 and 2008 (by seven per cent). The long-term pattern could be attributed to changes in the way calls were handled over this period, including the establishment of the RSPCA's National Control Centre.

There are various other 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 gives a more informative picture. Figure 11 shows a slight drop in the proportion of tackle-related calls received from 2006, when it went from 26–27 per cent (of 2,698–3,590 calls about swans) to 22–23 per cent (of 1,959–2,371 calls about swans) of calls each year. No change has been seen over the last year.

**Figure 12: Proportion of mute swans affected by fishing tackle admitted to three RSPCA wildlife centres, 2000–2008**



Data source: RSPCA.

Looking at admissions to RSPCA wildlife centres, recent years have seen fewer mute swans admitted in total (from 920 in 2000 to 823 in 2008) and fewer suffering from tackle-related injuries (from 113 in 2000 to 92 in 2008). More importantly, Figure 12 shows the proportion of swan admissions that involved fishing tackle. The slight drop seen in 2006 and 2007 (from 11 and 15 to nine per cent of admissions) might have been a normal variation in the data, as figures crept up to 11 per cent in 2008, which is comparable to proportions seen in 2002 and 2004.

The results to date are still somewhat inconclusive regarding long-term changes, but over the last year, no improvement has been seen in the proportion of swans affected by fishing tackle.

**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.**

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