

Statement of the British Veterinary Zoological Society's (BVZS) Position on Non-Traditional Companion Animals

1. The priority of the BVZS is to ensure the welfare of Non-Traditional Companion Animals, whilst respecting the freedom of individuals, within reason and the law, to choose from the range of species whose welfare needs can be met in this context.
2. At the current time, the BVZS is opposed to blanket UK or EU-wide bans on the keeping or trade in Non-Traditional Companion Animals. We believe these would be disproportionate, difficult to implement effectively and likely to give rise to illegal and un-regulated trade, compromising animal welfare.
3. The BVZS accepts that there are some species whose welfare needs cannot reasonably be met, and that should not be kept as Non-Traditional Companion Animals, and others that should be kept only under licence. These would include, but are not necessarily limited to, those listed in the Schedule of the Dangerous Wild Animals Act 1976 (as amended 2007).
4. The BVZS is opposed to the keeping of wild caught animals of any species as companion animals except for conservation reasons or within recognised *in situ* breeding programmes.¹
5. Nevertheless, the BVZS currently accepts that certain species of Non-Traditional Companion Animals may make more suitable pets than the traditional companion animals in contemporary society, assuming their welfare needs are met.
6. Furthermore, the BVZS acknowledges that certain keepers maintaining private collections of Non-Traditional Companion Animals have contributed significantly to conservation through the sharing of their knowledge and expertise.
7. The BVZS accepts that keeping Non-Traditional Companion Animals leads to welfare problems if there is a lack of basic knowledge of species biology and husbandry requirements. There is, however, a deficiency of scientific data on the extent of such welfare issues in Non-Traditional Companion Animals. BVZS has therefore commissioned an independent research report from the Companion Animal Welfare Council (CAWC). Until an appropriate evidence base has been established, the BVZS believes that a prohibition on the keeping of such species would be disproportionate.
8. The BVZS supports the concept of the Five Welfare Needs as an appropriate basis for the assessment of the welfare of all species kept as Non-Traditional Companion Animals.
9. The BVZS accepts there is an urgent need for greater education to improve the welfare of Non-Traditional Companion Animals, including for pet keepers, the pet trade and the veterinary profession. BVZS firmly believes this should be developed through mutual co-operation and sharing, and the development of the evidence base by all stakeholders to endorse and promote agreed welfare standards.
10. BVZS supports the concept that any individual considering keeping a Non-Traditional Companion Animal should provide evidence, prior to purchase, that they understand and intend to meet the welfare needs of the species they propose to keep. The BVZS will advance policy development towards a practical mechanism by which this could be achieved.
11. BVZS is unconvinced of the need for the introduction of species lists (either positive or negative) given the lack of appropriate scientific evidence on which to base them. Instead, we propose that a long term solution may be the adoption of a naturally-evolving self-regulated (i.e.

by the pet industry under the guidance of appropriately qualified veterinary professionals) point-of-sale “traffic light” system based on the degree of expertise required.

In outline: **red** (species that should never be kept except for specific conservation purposes),
amber (species that require a DWA licence and/or a greater degree of expertise),
green (species considered suitable species for all, provided the owner has demonstrated suitable education and ability to fulfil their welfare needs).

12. BVZS recommends the introduction of new Pet Vendor legislation to include licensing for all commercial importers of Non-Traditional Companion Animals, the introduction of specialist and non-specialist tiers of Pet Vendors depending on species sold and the regulation of all pet fairs, rehoming and rescue centres. Consideration is also required urgently into how sales using the internet for the purchase of animals can be regulated.

13. Apart from the changes recommended to Pet Vendor legislation, BVZS considers effective enforcement of existing Animal Welfare Legislation, specifically the Animal Welfare Act 2006, is an appropriate current response to ensure the welfare needs of Non-Traditional Companion Animals. This should be under-pinned by the development of Taxonomic Group Welfare Codes and mutual education for all stakeholders. Until effective implementation of existing legislation has been achieved, BVZS believes additional legislation would be disproportionate. We remain unconvinced that the welfare issues relating to Non-Traditional Companion Animals warrant discriminatory treatment in law.

Note

For this statement the BVZS has used Non-Traditional Companion Animal in place of ‘exotic’.

¹ For this point the BVZS has excluded all invertebrate and fish species

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