

## **The BVZS Position Statement on the Breeding of Non-Traditional Companion Animals**

Recent husbandry and scientific advances have led to significant success in the captive breeding of Non-Traditional Companion Animals (NTCA), predominately in the avian and herpetological arenas. The BVZS welcomes this advance as the vast majority of NTCA CITES species now maintained in the UK are being sourced from captive breeding programmes.

In addition, BVZS acknowledges that certain keepers maintaining private collections of NTCA species have contributed significantly to conservation through the sharing of their knowledge and expertise in captive husbandry and breeding techniques.

In principle, the BVZS is not opposed to the selective breeding of NTCA species to produce desirable colour or pattern mutations (phenotypes) where there is no scientific evidence to suggest the phenotypic variants (morphs) are genetically inferior to the normal (wild type phenotype) of the same species. However, we would encourage breeders to produce normal forms, particularly in rarer species, rather than morphs, recognising the private sector's role in the conservation of scarcer species.

Hereditary defects and excessive interbreeding have been well-known problems affecting the welfare of traditional companion animals for many years. The BVZS considers that lessons should be learned from this experience.

The BVZS is concerned that selected breeding of NTCA species, predominately, but not isolated to, the avian and herpetological arenas, has produced a number of phenotypic variants (morphs) which, whilst seemingly desirable for the purposes of showing or commercial fashion, are associated with significant genetic disorders. These include neurological deficits in reptiles and birds with a reduced ability to fly. These would be expected to prevent the individual animal from exhibiting the five freedoms enshrined in the Animal Welfare Act 2006.

Where exhibition or show standards exist for a particular NTCA species the BVZS considers the relevant breed society has a duty to ensure the health and normal behaviour of the species will not be compromised by the standards set.

In the interest of animal welfare and to ensure long term viability of NTCA breeding programmes the BVZS consider NTCA morphs with hereditary defects known to be associated with welfare problems should not be bred or made available for sale or exchange.

The BVZS considers the owners of NTCA would be best advised to consult with a suitably qualified veterinary surgeon about the potential welfare issues of known hereditary defects before considering breeding NTCA morphs.

The BVZS encourages breeders of NTCAs to maintain adequate written breeding records, co-operate to create stud books for all NTCA species maintained, and participate in out-breeding programmes regularly, to ensure the long term genetic viability of captive stock.