

LIVES OVER-THE-COUNTER

A Review of Scottish Pet Shops



SCOTTISH PET SHOPS



African Grey parrot



Newts in a barren tank



Chinchilla in a barren cage



Kitten



Rat sniffing at a glass crack

In its Manifesto for Animals, Advocates for Animals stated that it was opposed to the keeping of companion animals by individuals who have neither the knowledge, housing conditions nor the time nor inclination to meet the animals' needs.

Advocates for Animals is now seeking the commitment of the Scottish Executive to review the Pet Animals Act 1951 and other relevant legislation, in order to reflect modern animal welfare practices and to take account of new and emerging ways of selling animals. The pet trade has changed considerably since the enactment of the current legislation. The increase in the numbers of pet superstores, the emergence of Internet sales, the growth in the trade of exotic species and the modern approach to animal welfare, all call for an in-depth review of the legislation governing the sale of pet animals.

However, for such a review to take place, it is important to have a clear understanding of the current pet shop industry and the trade in companion animals.

During the Summer of 2003 Advocates for Animals commissioned an independent animal welfare researcher to undertake a thorough investigation into Scottish pet shops. The results are contained in a report entitled '***Caged to Sell: A study of animal related problems found in Scottish pet shops in the year 2003***'.

This document summarises the main findings of the *Caged to Sell* report, and records in detail what Advocates for Animals requires the Scottish Executive to undertake in order to properly address the concerns that the report has raised.

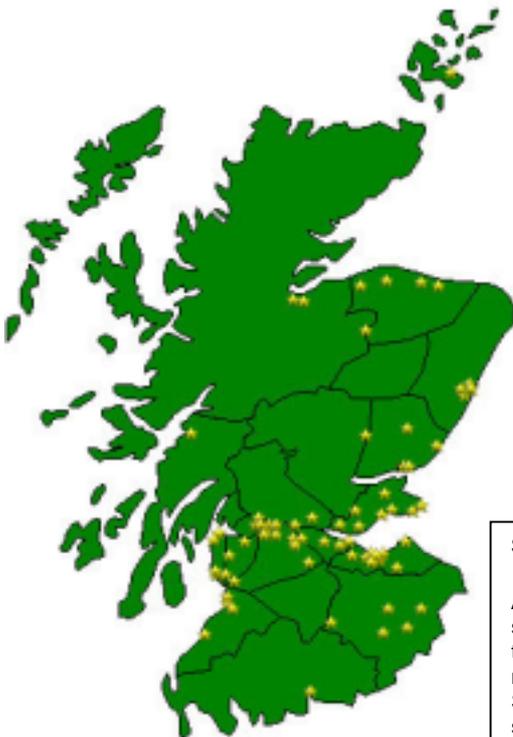
Ross Minett,
Advocates for Animals' Campaigns Director

THE INVESTIGATION

More than 100 Scottish pet shops visited

More than one-third of all Scottish pet shops investigated

The housing conditions for several thousands of individual animals assessed



Methods

The study used two main methodological approaches, scientific research and investigative journalism. The first was based on developing general descriptive statistical analysis from data obtained through a randomly selected sample of pet shops. The second was based on covert visits to pet shops posing as a prospective customer. Both approaches were carried out in the public interest.

Sampling

A computer generated random sample of 87 establishments (37%) taken from a total of 233 known to require a Pet Animals licence in Scotland was the base for the study. Beside these, a further 20 additional establishments were visited, making a total visited of 107.

Types of pet shops:

Big Chain = Pet shop belonging to a chain of stores with more than 5 branches in Scotland, where the average branch size is bigger than the average High Street shop

Small Chain = Pet shop belonging to a chain of stores with more than 5 branches in Scotland, where the average branch size is not bigger than the average High Street shop.

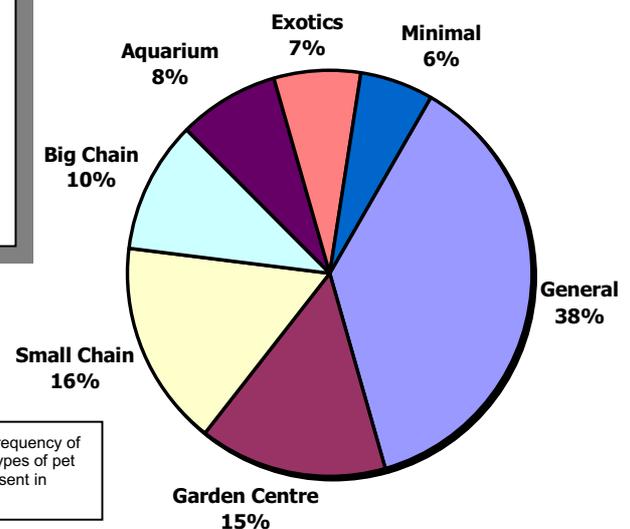
Aquaria = Pet shop mainly in the business of selling aquatic vertebrates and their accessories.

Minimal = Pet shop selling only one or two different types of live non-exotic vertebrates (namely fish, birds or mammals).

Exotics = Pet shop mainly in the business of selling live exotic wild vertebrates other than fish (namely amphibians, reptiles, and/or exotic birds).

General = Pet shop selling more than two different types of live vertebrates (namely fish, amphibians, reptiles, birds or mammals), and mainly non-exotic.

Garden Centre = Commercial establishment mainly selling garden plants and accessories, or a pet shop that is an integrated part of such an establishment.



Relative frequency of different types of pet shops present in Scotland

Pet shop definition:

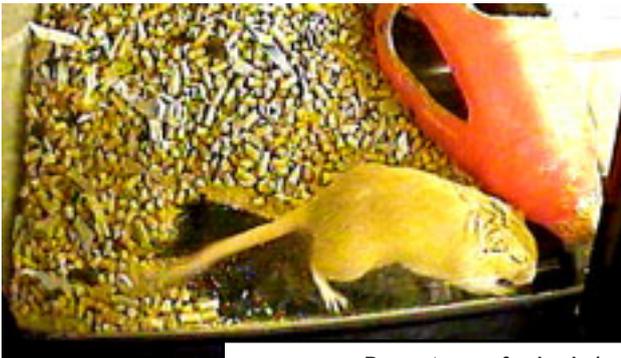
The Pet Animals Act 1951 defines the business of a pet shop as:

"the carrying on at premises of any nature (including a private dwelling) of a business of selling animals as pets, and as including references to the keeping of animals in any such premises as aforesaid with a view to their being sold in the course of such a business, whether by the keeper thereof or by any other person" (...) "animal" includes any description of vertebrate" (...) "as respects any animal, such references shall be construed as including references to selling or keeping, as the case may be, for ornamental purposes"

ABNORMAL BEHAVIOUR

The *Caged to Sell* report concluded that in 2003:

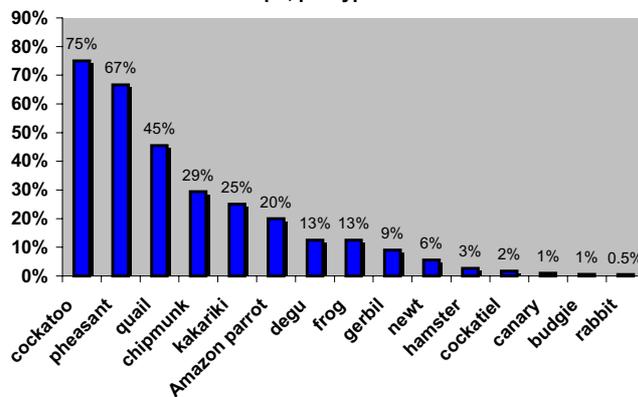
- The majority (55%) of Scottish pet shops were keeping animals* that were showing abnormal behaviour.
- More than three quarters (76%) of the animals (excluding fish) showing abnormal behaviour in Scottish pet shops were exotic animals.
- Three out of four cockatoos kept in Scottish pet shops showed abnormal behaviour.



Gerbil digging stereotypically

Repetitive and stereotyped behaviours are one of the most important indicators of long-term welfare problems. Odberg (1978) defines stereotypy as “*morphologically similar patterns or sequences of behaviour, performed repetitively, and having no obvious function*”.

Percentages of animals (excluding fish) seen showing abnormal behaviour from individuals seen in Scottish pet shops, per type of animal



Fish showing ITB (Interaction with Transparent Boundaries) behaviour



Cockatoo looping stereotypically



Lizards showing ITB (Interaction with Transparent Boundaries) behaviour

* vertebrates, including fish

ENCLOSURES

The *Caged to Sell* report concluded that in 2003:

- The majority (at least 60%) of Scottish pet shops had animal enclosure/cages that were too small or overcrowded.
- 43% of the individual mammals kept in Scottish pet shops were being housed in enclosures that, as the animal grew bigger through natural growth, would not provide sufficient space in accordance with the minimum standards officially recommended.
- 22% of birds kept in Scottish pet shops were being kept in enclosures with perches that did not provide enough space to allow all birds to fully stretch their wings without touching each other or the cage walls.

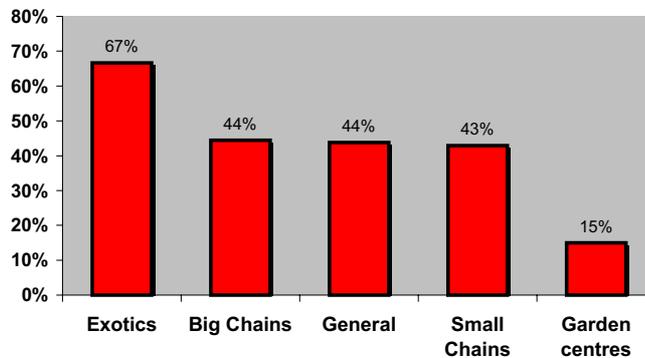
Section 8 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 makes it an offence "to confine a bird in a cage which is not sufficient in height, length or breadth to permit the bird to stretch its wings freely".

Overcrowded cockatiels



Overcrowded rabbits

Percentages of Scottish pet shops that kept birds in cages that do not provide enough perch space for full wing stretching, per type of shop



Degus in small enclosure



Bird cages in a dark and unventilated part of a pet shop



Parrots' and rabbits' cages over-crammed in the cellar of a pet shop

ADVICE FROM SHOP ASSISTANTS

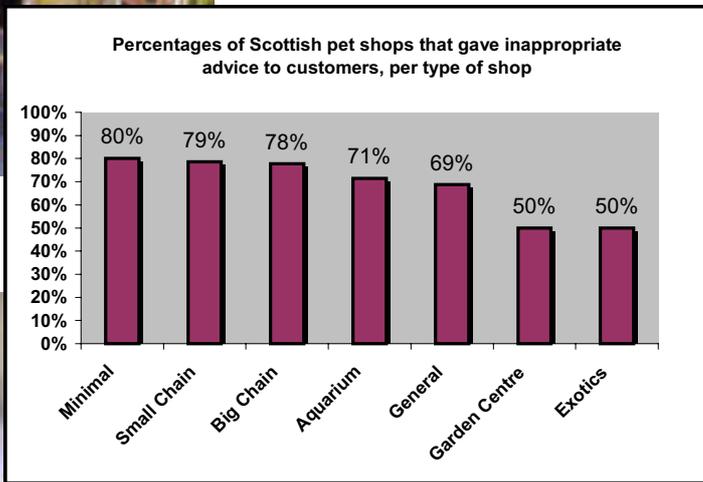
The *Caged to Sell* report concluded that in 2003:

- Assistants in the majority of Scottish pet shops (at least 71%) were giving wrong and often misleading advice to customers.
- Assistants in the majority of Scottish pet shops (51%), when asked whether a pet should ever be bought for someone as a surprise present, failed to answer unequivocally 'No'.
- Shop assistants in the majority of Scottish pet shops (55%), when asked about any possible problems that might arise from giving a pet as a surprise present to someone with a ten-year-old child, failed to mention any potential risk to either the animal or the child.
- The vast majority (98%) of Scottish pet shop assistants failed to mention that zoonoses* were potential health hazards.



Shop assistant talking to the investigator

In 1991 an outbreak of *Chlamydia* infection in Grampian was believed to have originated in a pet shop. Today at least one Scottish local authority provides leaflets about this disease to whoever applies for a pet shop licence. However, no information about the disease was ever seen during the visits to over 100 Scottish pet shops.



Shop assistant picking up a parrot, whilst claiming that it can be fed anything, including "meat on the bone, pizza, pasta, etc".

Shop assistant in a long room full of tropical birds, including a wild-caught African Grey parrot



*Infectious diseases that can be transmitted from vertebrate animals to humans, and vice versa

COMPLIANCE WITH REGULATION

The *Caged to Sell* report concluded that in 2003:

- At least 9% of Scottish pet shops were trading illegally by not being in possession of a valid pet shop licence.
- Many local authorities were issuing pet shop licences that did not adhere to *The Pet Animals Act 1951 Model Standards for Pet Shop Licence Conditions*, published by the Local Government Association*. This resulted in the licences of the majority of Scottish pet shops failing to meet the Model Standards.
- It is believed that the majority (at least 60%) of the Scottish pet shops could to some degree be in breach of their pet shop licence conditions.

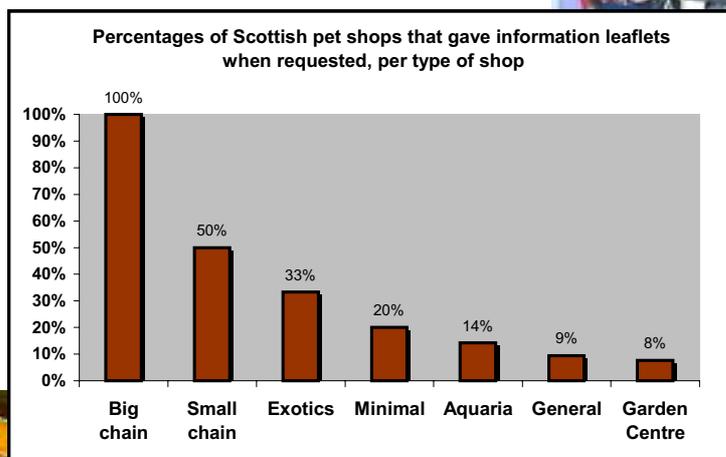
* In 1998, after consulting the British Veterinary Association, the Chartered Institute of Environmental Health and the pet shop industry itself (through the Pet Care Trust and the Ornamental Aquatic Trade Association Limited), the British Local Government Association (LGA) published *The Pet Animals Act 1951 Model Standards for Pet Shop Licence Conditions*.



Pet shop over-crammed with cages



Pet shop licence in a location that makes it difficult to read



Overcrowded and dirty budgerigar cage



Shop assistant with no protection picking up reptile excrements and leftovers with a sieve, while creating a cloud of dust very close to a child.

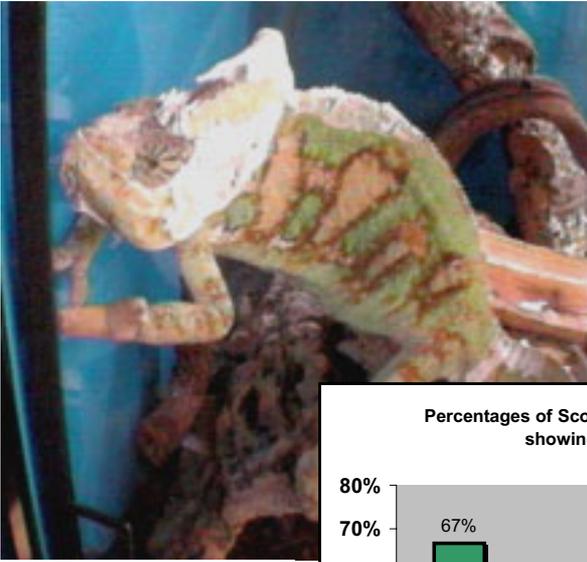
Example of a licence condition stipulated by a Scottish local authority:

"16.i As a safe working practice, all staff shall wear suitable respiratory equipment (i.e. dust mask), eye protection, gloves and a coverall at all times whilst cleaning out or handling reptiles. Bedding, faeces and other materials which have been in contact with reptiles shall be disposed of in sealed plastic bags before placing in impervious containers with close fittings"

EXOTIC ANIMALS

The *Caged to Sell* report concluded that in 2003:

- The majority (83%) of the main Scottish pet shops which specialised in selling exotic species housed animals that were showing abnormal behaviour.
- The majority (90%) of the animals showing abnormal behaviour in the main Scottish pet shops specialising in selling exotic animals were *exotic* animals.
- It appeared that more animals had difficulty coping with their lives in pet shops specialising in selling exotic animals than in other types of pet shops.

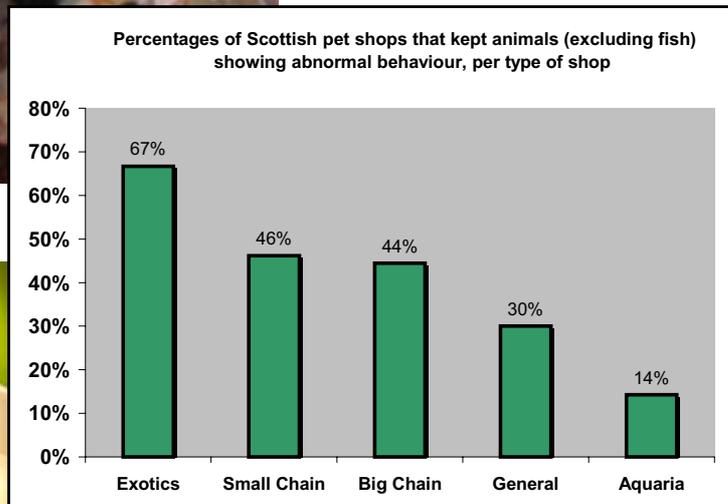


Chameleon stereotyping (ITB)



Python in a very small enclosure

A recent study of nest poaching for South American parrots (Wright et al. 2001) supported the hypothesis that the legal and illegal trades in parrots are positively correlated, rather than inversely correlated as has been suggested by the pet bird industry.



Shop assistant holding a bearded dragon

In 2000 the Chief Medical Officer for England warned about the risk of contracting *Salmonella* from pet snakes, lizards, terrapins and other reptiles. The warning was issued after laboratory figures showed that a recent increase in the number of cases of *Salmonella* associated with exotic pets had been found in children and infants.



Two African grey parrots in a very small cage

OTHER CONCERNS

The *Caged to Sell* report concluded that in 2003:

- At least 12% of Scottish pet shops permitted unsupervised interactions between customers and animals with potentially detrimental consequences for both animals and customers.
- The majority (55%) of Scottish pet shops keeping rabbits and guinea-pigs were keeping some of them together in the same enclosure, despite it being generally recommended not to do so.
- Indications are that an animal welfare charity was passing on a rescued animal to a Scottish pet shop for sale.
- Assistants in at least 16% of Scottish pet shops unnecessarily disturbed the animals' rest in order to show them to customers.



King snake rescued by an animal welfare charity, which ended up on sale in a pet shop



Shop assistant allowing a customer to enter the quarantine room



Rabbits and guinea-pigs housed together



Children shouting and tapping a lizard's tank for a long period of time, despite the sign asking for this not to be done

Shop assistant roughly handling a chinchilla



The Local Government Association 'Standards' state:

"2.4 In order to control the spread of disease, and to prevent injury, animals must not be kept in housing in such a way that they can be disturbed by other animals or by the public."

WHAT ADVOCATES IS CALLING FOR

Advocates for Animals, after having investigated the issue of Scottish pet shops, believes that the present regulatory system is inadequate because:

- **The guidance provided by the Local Government Association is not implemented by the local authorities.**
- **Breaches of pet shop licence conditions occur on a regular basis and go unchallenged.**
- **Many aspects of the pet trade remain unregulated, leading to animal welfare concerns.**
- **Too many animals in Scottish pet shops are confined in poor and inadequate housing thus causing welfare problems.**

For these reasons, Advocates for Animals is **calling for**:

1) The bringing forward of a *new* **Pet Animals Bill** – to replace the outdated Pet Animals Act 1951– containing the following:

- Making it an offence to sell an animal to a person under 17 years old, whether from a pet shop or elsewhere.
- Granting inspectors the power of entry to non-licensed premises if suspected of requiring a Pet Animals licence.
- Expanding the licensing requirements to cover all forms of pet sales, including Internet sales.
- Prohibiting the sale of pets from temporary premises or at day events, regardless of whether or not they are public events.
- Requiring the Scottish Executive to be responsible for:
 - compiling a centralised list of pet shops to include the date of when the licence was issued and the date and outcome of inspections;
 - compiling the compulsory 'Standards of Modern Pet Shop Practice' (SMPSP);
 - establishing and administering as necessary 'Pet Animals Advisory Groups';
 - compiling a list of specialist vets competent to carry out inspections;
 - issuing standard species-specific care sheets that provide information on the keeping of pet animals;
 - administering a training and accreditation system for pet shop inspectors;
 - appraising local authorities' implementation of the regulations;
 - banning the sale of any particular type of animals known to be unsuitable for pet keeping.
- Making compulsory the inclusion of all the conditions contained in the 'Standards of Modern Pet Shop Practice' in all pet licence conditions issued by local authorities.
- Making compulsory the requirement by pet shops to provide written information about zoonoses to all prospective buyers of pets.
- Removing the current exemption that allows a pet shop to keep dangerous wild animals without the need for a Dangerous Wild Animal licence.
- Stating explicitly that all animals kept on a licensed establishment, regardless of whether they are for sale or not, are governed by the licence remit.

2) The creation of '**Standards of Modern Pet Shop Practice**' (SMPSP), which should include the following compulsory licence conditions:

- Compulsory registration of all commercial transactions of pet animals.
- Compulsory distribution of standard species-specific care sheets to all prospective pet buyers.
- Compulsory use of stand-off barriers or other methods to prevent customers physically interacting with animals in the pet shop.
- Prohibiting the keeping of animals under a pet shop licence at premises not included in the licence (i.e. licensee's home).
- Prohibiting the boarding of animals unless specifically authorised in the licence conditions.
- Prohibiting the sale of a pet without a reasonable guarantee that the purchaser will provide the minimum housing conditions needed.
- Prohibiting the sale of animals rescued by animal protection organisations.
- Requiring all pet shop assistants, including temporary staff, to provide proof of appropriate qualifications and expertise regarding pet shop practice.
- Prohibiting the trade of a particular type of pet if the local authority has not authorised the keeping of such a pet at the licensed premises.
- Prohibiting the advertising of unlicensed animal traders/breeders at the licensed premises.
- Making compulsory the display of the current pet shop licence, including the licence conditions and their schedules, in a prominent, easy accessible place in the public area of the licensed premises.
- Making it a requirement that, when issuing licences, the local authority includes specific minimum enclosure area and volume allowances for all types of animals kept, assuming they may reach adulthood whilst on the licensed premises.

3) The creation of **'Pet Animals Advisory Groups'** which:

- Will be established and administered by the Scottish Executive for the purpose of giving expert advice on the creation or modification of standards and codes of practice.
- Will be composed of a minimum of nine individuals: one third of whom will be representatives from the pet shop industry, one third representatives from animal protection organisations, and one third independent experts not connected with the industry or animal protection groups.
- Will have as their main function the drafting and updating of the guidance and statutory documents issued in relation to the standards of pet shop practice (including the SMPSP).
- Will be temporary and on an *ad hoc* basis.

4) An improvement in the **enforcement** of the pet shop regulations by the Scottish local authorities through:

- The issuing of comprehensive pet shop licence conditions which should include all points addressed in the SMPSP (or if still being created all points in the 'GLS Model Standards of Pet Licence Conditions').
- The use of properly trained inspectors to undertake all pet shop inspections.
- The use of unannounced thorough inspections of all pet shops on a regular basis.
- Encouraging the prompt prosecution of individuals found to be in breach of pet shop legislation.
- Refusing to grant a licence to any new shop unless it meets the requirements of the SMPSP.
- Investigating all cases where it is suspected that an individual requires a pet shop licence.

5) The prohibition of the sale of **exotic animals** unsuitable for keeping as pets through:

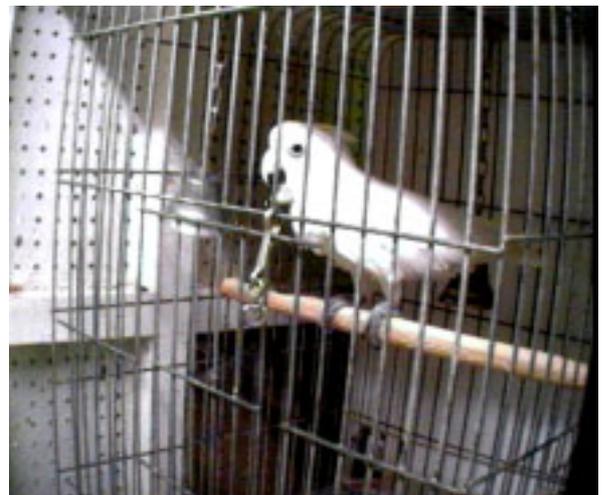
- Acting on recommendations from the 'Pet Animals Advisory Groups' regarding which exotic species are unsuitable for keeping as pets.
- The creation by the Scottish Executive of a schedule of species prohibited to be sold as pets, and its incorporation into the new Pet Animals Act.

6) Tougher legislation against the **illegal pet trade** by:

- Making the registration of all exotic pets compulsory.
- Making the marking of all captive exotic animals compulsory.
- Increasing the efficiency of customs controls.
- Making the punishment for illegally trading in live exotic animals much more severe.



Red-eared terrapin, the species that in the 1980s became the most bought and subsequently abandoned animal due to the popularity of the Teenage Ninja Turtles



Cockatoo vocalising in distress in a very small cage

The full report **CAGED TO SELL**, written by the Animal Welfare Consultant Jordi Casamitjana, can be obtained on line at <http://www.advocatesforanimals.org/petshops/>

A CD-ROM version of this document, including the full report and video clips, can be obtained on request from Advocates for Animals, 10 Queensferry St. Edinburgh EH2 4PG, Scotland, UK.

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All photographs taken in 2003 in Scottish pet shops during the investigation
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