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◆ WILDLIFE

# Cruel to be kind to exotic pets

THE Sabahat Alam Malaysia (SAM) compliments the Selangor Wildlife and National Parks Department for the recent seizure of wildlife in a condominium unit in Desa Pandan, Kuala Lumpur.

However, the fine of RM3,000 or a jail sentence of up to two years or both is dismal compared to the gravity of the crime which would not deter those responsible from continuing with their fetish again.

SAM agrees with the department's deputy director that the case is only the tip of the iceberg. It seems to be a craze now to keep wildlife as pets.

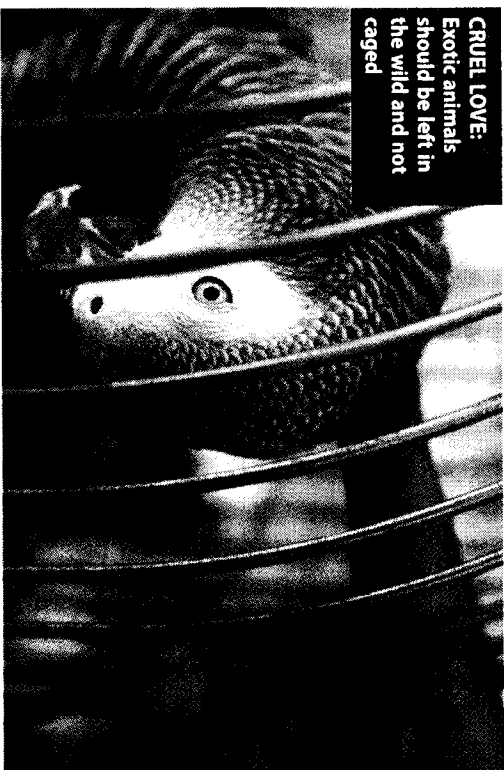
One can easily source for wildlife just by logging on to the Internet or scan the classified sections of trading and specialist magazines or via a number of pet shops.

Pet shops may not openly sell endangered species but they have the potential to source from dealers or by putting a customer in touch with a contact.

Many species targeted as pets are highly endangered and the desire to own these exotic animals is pushing them closer towards the brink of extinction.

In addition, every animal, whether or not it belongs to an endangered species, will suffer as a result of this unethical trade.

Many people apparently fail to inform the authority of a 'dangerous' animal in their possession due to



**CRUEL LOVE:** Exotic animals should be left in the wild and not caged

either ignorance on the part of the owner, or the unwillingness of the owner to subject themselves to the licensing process and the terms of the licence or the cost of the licence application.

Thus, the actual number of wildlife pets is unknown.

Of particular concern to conservationists is how the pet trade is adding to the problem of dwindling wildlife worldwide and the impact of this loss of diversity on their environments.

Yet it is not just the threat to wildlife in the wild that make this trade so disturbing, but also the effects on individual animals in captivity. The lack of regulation in the pet

trade of wild species would mean there is no guarantee of quality of care.

Wild animals are not suitable as companions in the home, in view of their obvious wild nature and behavior, and specific dietary needs, requiring a very high standard and longer duration of care than domesticated animals.

Keeping such animals as pets is, therefore, morally unjustifiable.

The scale and nature of the trade in "pet ownership" of endangered wildlife is an area which should be investigated.

There are considerable and very real concerns in relation to the welfare of wildlife kept in resorts,

such as, shockingly, a sole penguin kept in the pool of an executive suite in Kuala Lumpur as an added attraction.

For all these animals, little protection is afforded through the legislation governing the keeping of these individuals.

Resorts are only capitalising on their captive wildlife from entertaining tourists and locals with unnatural animal performances and earning profits from such exploitation.

Such shows are meaningless and even an embarrassment to the country with many foreigners questioning the rationale for shows that go against the animals' natural behavior.

Moreover, keeping of wildlife in resorts is merely an attempt to create a false impression that it is a noble cause that they are into conservation rather than simply human desire.

Such facilities have no lofty goals of biodiversity protection or other noble causes. It is simply a business that trades in cruelty.

The current legislative controls

are incoherent and inadequate, resulting in loopholes open to abuse, inconsistencies in enforcement and ultimately, serious concerns for the welfare and conservation of endangered wildlife species.

Prohibiting possession of endangered wildlife would greatly benefit enforcement efforts to combat the illegal trade in the range states and in those countries known to be transit routes for much sought-after wildlife.

This would, in turn, alleviate the pressure on wild populations and remove the welfare concerns associated with the trade.

Enforcement of animal welfare and conservation regulations should be made a priority in the wake of the proposed amendment to the Wildlife Protection Act.

Good legislation is vital but can mean little without effective and well-resourced enforcement to back it up.

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