

# Morbidity and Mortality of Invertebrates, Amphibians, Reptiles, and Mammals at a Major Exotic Companion Animal Wholesaler

Shawn Ashley,<sup>1</sup> Susan Brown,<sup>2</sup> Joel Ledford,<sup>3</sup> Janet Martin,<sup>4</sup>  
Ann-Elizabeth Nash,<sup>5</sup> Amanda Terry,<sup>6</sup> Tim Tristan,<sup>6</sup> and  
Clifford Warwick<sup>7</sup>

<sup>1</sup>*Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, Dallas, Texas*

<sup>2</sup>*Midwest Bird and Exotic Animal Hospital, Elmwood Park, Illinois*

<sup>3</sup>*Department of Plant Biology, University of California at Davis*

<sup>4</sup>*Shelter Medicine, College of Veterinary Medicine, University of Georgia*

<sup>5</sup>*Colorado Reptile Humane Society, Longmont, Colorado*

<sup>6</sup>*Oso Creek Animal Hospital, Corpus Christi, Texas*

<sup>7</sup>*Emergent Disease Foundation, Tonbridge, Kent, United Kingdom*

The authors formally investigated a major international wildlife wholesaler and subsequently confiscated more than 26,400 nonhuman animals of 171 species and types. Approximately 80% of the nonhuman animals were identified as grossly sick, injured, or dead, with the remaining in suspected suboptimal condition. Almost 3,500 deceased or moribund animals (12% of stock), mostly reptiles, were being discarded on a weekly basis. Mortality during the 6-week “stock turnover” period was determined to be 72%. During a 10-day period after confiscation, mortality rates (including euthanasia for humane reasons) for the various taxa were 18% for invertebrates, 44.5% for amphibians, 41.6% for reptiles, and 5.5% for mammals. Causes of morbidity and mortality included cannibalism, crushing, dehydration, emaciation, hypothermic stress, infection, parasite infestation, starvation, overcrowding, stress/injuries, euthanasia on compassionate grounds, and undetermined causes. Contributing factors for disease and injury included poor hygiene; inadequate, unreliable, or inappropriate provision of food, water, heat, and humidity; presumed high levels of stress due to inappropriate housing leading to intraspecific aggression; absent or minimal environmental enrichment; and crowding. Risks for introduction of invasive species through escapes and/or spread of pathogens to naive populations also were identified.

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