

Herps across England: investigating the scale of the reptile and amphibian trade



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Fig. 1: Blue poison dart frog (National Aquarium, ND)

INTRODUCTION

- Herpetofauna (reptiles and amphibians) have become increasingly accessible to pet owners in recent years, and herps are often found in general pet stores and online¹.
- There is limited knowledge of the full range of species traded and how many individuals are sold².
- Concerns have been raised about whether these animals can thrive in captivity due to specialist needs³.
- Previous research in 2014 by the Blue Cross and Born Free Foundation (The *One Click Away* Report) initially highlighted potential issues but had a limited sample size⁴.

AIMS

Quantify species variety and individual numbers of herpetofauna sold across England in pet shops (both physical and online) and online classified adverts over a three year period.

METHODS

- Visits made to 159 physical pet shops across 45 mainland English counties during 2017.
- Visits made to four online pet shops during 2017.
- Every week- sampled all herpetofauna adverts posted within last 7 days on four popular online classified sites (Preloved, Gumtree, Pets4Homes, Free Ads).
- Analysed factors such as species, numbers, location, and reason for sale

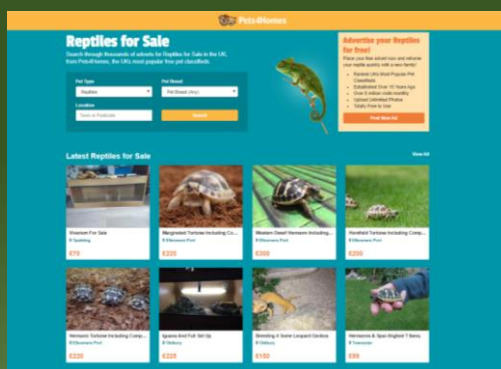


Fig. 2: example of classified website (Pets4Homes, 2020)



Fig. 3: green tree python (Manokwari, N.D)

PRELIMINARY FINDINGS

Species diversity:

- Pet shop (physical and online) visits in 2017: **168 reptile** and **72 amphibian** species
- Classified adverts during Aug 2017 (n= 2551), 2018 (n= 2665) and 2019 (n= 1295): **a further 263 reptile** and **50 amphibian** species
- **Total: 431 different reptile** and **122 different amphibian** species

Trade hot spots

- Classified website data (Fig. 4a- d) from Aug 2017, Aug 2018, and Aug 2019 per 100,000 of the population of England, trade 'hot spots' (by Local Authority)

- **Torbay**
- **Plymouth**
- **Gosport**
- **Norwich**
- **Stoke-on-Trent**
- **Fenland**
- **Rushmoor**

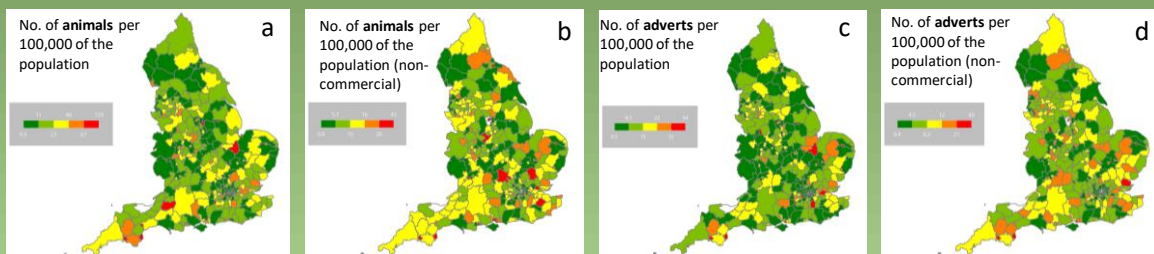


Fig. 4a-d: trade hot spots of herpetofauna by Local Authority

Top 10 reasons stated for relinquishment (excluding commercial sellers) from classified website data during Aug 2017, Aug 2018, and Aug 2019 show 'lack of time' and 'home move' are common factors.

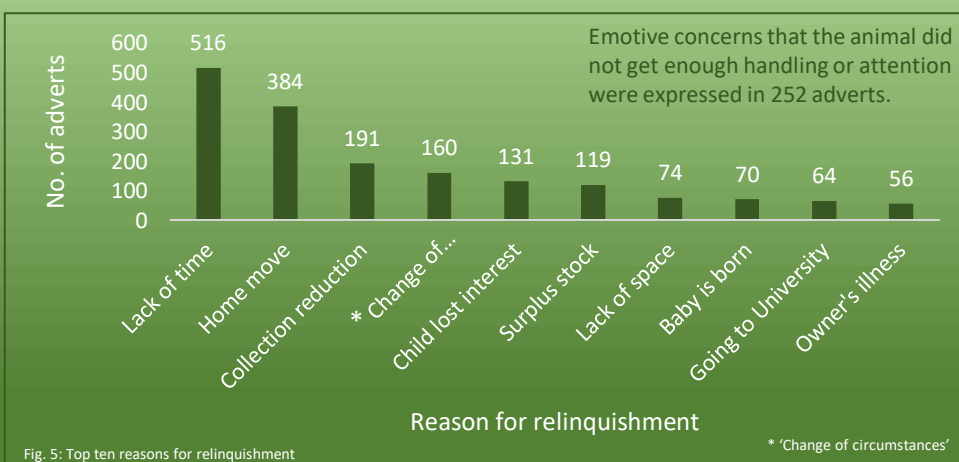


Fig. 5: Top ten reasons for relinquishment

Emotive concerns that the animal did not get enough handling or attention were expressed in 252 adverts.

CONCLUSIONS

- Large range of species for sale, all with individual specialist needs.
- South Devon appears to be a trade hot spot regardless of how data is analysed.
- 'Lack of time' the biggest reason for relinquishment, indicating more education is needed on time commitments required for pet herpetofauna.
- Findings could help inform welfare organisations as to where and how their efforts on education and rescue could be targeted.

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