

Classified Information: what's lacking from online herpetofauna sales?

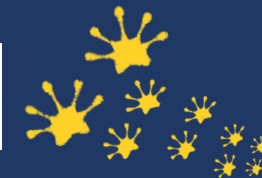
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Introduction

- ✦ Massive rise in the sale of pets, including herpetofauna (reptiles and amphibians), via online classified websites in the last decade¹
- ✦ PAAG (Pet Advertising Advisory Group) established to encourage the legal and ethical sale of pets prompted by concerns surrounding irresponsible advertising²
 - ✦ Classified website members agree to adhere to 26 rules on advert content and self-regulate information provided by sellers
 - ✦ PAAG volunteers spot check adverts
- ✦ Thousands of adverts uploaded every day means rule violations could go unnoticed

Methods

- ✦ All adverts selling herpetofauna were downloaded from 3 PAAG member classified websites every week throughout 2019 (n= 26,378) and checked against 13 relevant PAAG rules using an SQL database and a bespoke Expert System software (PetExSys)

Results

- ✦ 12 PAAG rules were violated across the 3 member websites (total of 7986 adverts)- see table 1

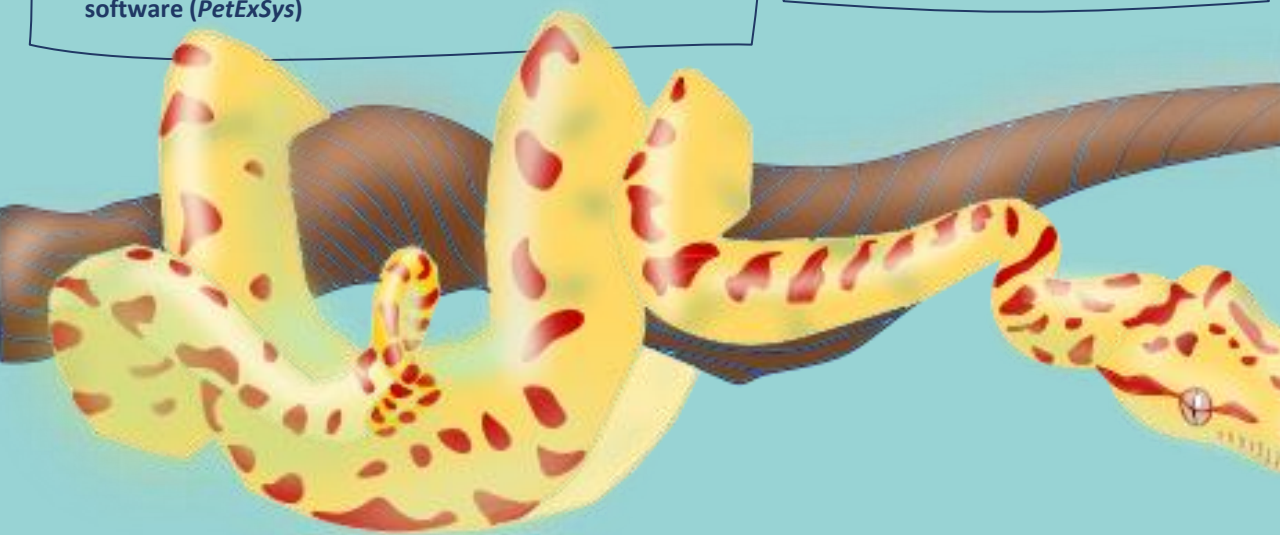


TABLE 1	PAAG Rule	Specific rule violations
	"Label each advert clearly as to whether it is a private sale, commercial sale, or from a rescue / rehoming centre"	Only 1 out of 3 websites were compliant, rescue / rehoming labels specifically lacking
	"Ban adverts offering pregnant animals for sale"	10 adverts described animal as 'gravid' or 'pregnant'
	"...ban frequent / repeat vendors if they are unable to provide <u>local authority licence</u> "	7301 adverts consisted of 675 frequent sellers, of which only 102 adverts mention a council licence
	"Require all commercial vendors to provide <u>local authority licence</u> information when submitting an advert"	Of the 3379 adverts that specified they were a breeder only 26 mentioned a council licence
	"Exclude any advert where there is reasonable concern for the health and welfare of the animal involved"	104 adverts said the animal had a neurological issue (' <u>head wobble</u> ' (82 ads), ' <u>corkscrewing</u> ' (18 ads), ' <u>Enigma syndrome</u> ' (4 ads))
	"Ensure that species scheduled under the <u>Dangerous Wild Animals Act</u> are clearly marked ... and make clear ... that it is an offence to offer a species covered by <u>EU Wildlife Regs Annex A</u> and listed by <u>CITES</u> for sale without a valid <u>Article 10 certificate</u> "	DWA- 7 adverts failed to mention the need for a licence EU Regs- 147 adverts failed to mention the need for an Article 10 certificate
	"Ensure that no pets are advertised for swapping with other pets, services, or goods"	72 adverts offered to swap with another pet
	"Require all vendors information relating to the species name and ... the sex of the animal"	371 adverts did not give species name Approx. 3900 did not state the sex. Is this a realistic rule for herpetofauna?
	"Require all vendors to display the age of the animal(s) they are advertising..."	6 adverts did not state age in mandatory field, although many sellers said in advert description that they were unsure of age
	"Run automated checks for blacklisted words / terms, including for banned breeds and prohibiting species"	16 adverts selling <u>banned slider turtles</u> (<i>Trachemys scripta</i>)
	"Ensure that every view item page includes prominent links to PAAG advice on buying and selling an animal"	Only 1 out of 3 websites were compliant
	"Ensure that every view item page includes prominent links to PAAG approved care information... for the animal being advertised"	No websites were compliant

Conclusions / Recommendations

- ✦ 70% of adverts compliant
- ✦ Further promote PAAG to raise buyer awareness
- ✦ Member websites could invest in a software solution to flag rule violations

References: 1. Blue Cross and Born Free Foundation (2014) *One Click Away* (online) Available from: <https://www.bluecross.org.uk/one-click-away-investigation-online-sale-exotic-animals-pets> (Accessed 12th December 2020); 2. PAAG (2020) *How to buy a pet* (online) Available from: <https://paag.org.uk/> (Accessed 12th December 2020)