IMPORT & KEEPING OF EXOTIC ANIMALS IN EU

Existing concerns and risks - Current challenges to meet

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BENEFITS AND RISKS RELATED TO THE IMPORT AND KEEPING OF EXOTIC ANIMALS

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DEFINITIONS

- “Non-native (or alien) animal”: An animal that is not a native to the country or ecosystem to which it could be intentionally or unintentionally introduced (OIE)

- “Domesticated species”: Species in which the evolutionary process has been influenced by humans to meet their needs (Convention on Biological Diversity)

- Domesticated VS Non-domesticated species
INTRODUCTION (1)

- The EU is one of the largest wildlife consumer markets worldwide alongside the USA and Japan (TRAFFIC Europe)

- A great unknown number of exotic / non-domesticated species of animals are kept either in specific facilities or by private owners

- The number of animals kept (especially by private owners) is much greater and also unknown
INTRODUCTION (2)

- Where exotic animals are kept / found
  - Zoos
  - Circuses
  - Other Bodies, Institutes or Centres (e.g. laboratories, animal sanctuaries, etc)
  - Dedicated facilities / Holdings (farms)
  - Pet shops / Pet trade facilities
  - Private animal collections
  - In the domestic environment as pets
  - In the natural environment (invasive alien species)
INTRODUCTION (3)

- Lack of EU harmonized approach (regulatory framework / set of standards / guidelines) covering the whole spectrum of trade and keeping of exotic animals with regard to animal health, animal welfare, identification and registration of animals and public health and safety

- Lack of knowledge, information, resources, facilities, ...
BENEFITS RELATED TO THE IMPORT AND KEEPING OF EXOTIC ANIMALS (1)

- Ex-situ conservation, captive breeding, reintroduction of endangered species (e.g. via programmes such as the European Endangered Species Programme - EEP)
  - Mostly zoos and other dedicated facilities
  - Supplementary to in-situ conservation
  - Effort needed to maintain genetic diversity
BENEFITS RELATED TO THE IMPORT AND KEEPING OF EXOTIC ANIMALS (2)

- Acquisition of knowledge about the species (input from hobbyists)
- Maintenance of genetic diversity (preservation of gene pools)
- Use for scientific / education purposes
  - Consideration of the principles of replacement, reduction and refinement
BENEFITS RELATED TO THE IMPORT AND KEEPING OF EXOTIC ANIMALS (3)

- Satisfaction to the owners (improved quality of life)
- Certain species may be more suitable / easier to keep in some occasions (e.g. low maintenance species)
- Depends on the needs of both the human and the animal
- Responsible ownership
RISKS RELATED TO THE IMPORT AND KEEPING OF EXOTIC ANIMALS (1)

- Biological diversity
  - Population decline in natural habitats (wild-caught animals)
  - Collateral damage to non-target species (destruction of natural habitats, use of indiscriminate means of capture)
  - Environmental consequences due to invasive alien species
  - Loss of genetic diversity due to breeding & inbreeding for specific traits
RISKS RELATED TO THE IMPORT AND KEEPING OF EXOTIC ANIMALS (2)

- Animal & human health
  - Possible transmission of diseases to livestock (direct or indirect exposure)
  - Zoonotic diseases (e.g. Rabies, Salmonellosis, Monkeypox, Hepatitis A, Herpesvirus simiae-B, Psittacosis, Tuberculosis)
  - Lack of harmonized health and/or identification requirements for the (commercial or not) movement of some categories of animals (e.g. reptiles, amphibia)
RISKS RELATED TO THE IMPORT AND KEEPING OF EXOTIC ANIMALS (3)

- Animal & human safety
  - Dangerous / hazardous animals
  - Inappropriate (not safe) facilities
  - Inexperienced keepers
  - Escape / release of the animals (accidental or intentional)
RISKS RELATED TO THE IMPORT AND KEEPING OF EXOTIC ANIMALS (4)

- Animal welfare
  - Lack of knowledge / expertise in the handling and care of exotic animals (owners, traders, transporters, veterinarians, competent authorities)
  - Lack of available and reliable information in the husbandry of many exotic species
  - Inadequate dissemination of the existing information
Abandonment / euthanasia when the animal is not wanted anymore, has lost its novelty, has grown in size or its maintenance is higher than expected

Lack of suitable facilities for the keeping of confiscated / released animals (zoos not always willing to accept them or don’t have specific facilities, sanctuaries overstocked or not existing)

Increased mortality (especially in wild-caught animals)
RISKS RELATED TO THE IMPORT AND KEEPING OF EXOTIC ANIMALS (6)

- Inappropriate capture, transport and handling practices resulting to increased morbidity and mortality
- Inappropriate keeping conditions by the owners not satisfying the physiological and ethological needs of the animals
RISKS RELATED TO THE IMPORT AND KEEPING OF EXOTIC ANIMALS (7)

- Economic impact
- Control programmes for invasive alien species
- Control / eradication programmes for livestock diseases
Thank you!