



Wildlife Justice
Commission

THE COST OF CUTE

How you can
fight the illegal
pet trade

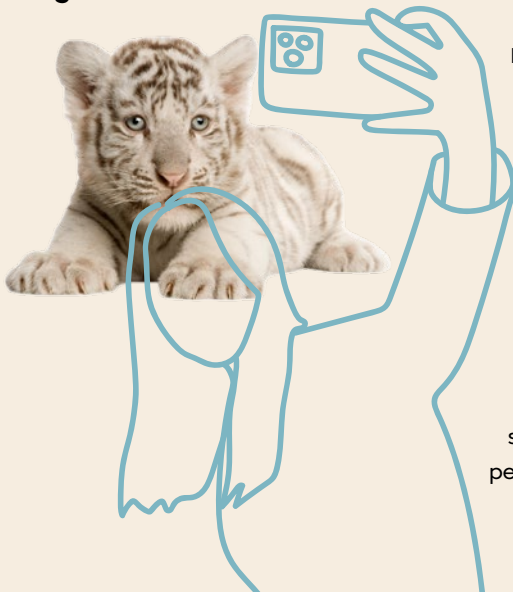


WHAT IS THE ILLEGAL PET TRADE?

The illegal pet trade (also known as the "exotic pet trade") is a growing global crisis, driven by greed, fuelled by social media, and supplied by sophisticated criminal networks. These networks are frequently involved in other serious crimes, including trafficking drugs, weapons, and people. The illegal pet trade is one of the lesser-known but fastest-growing forms of wildlife crime. Today, there are more tigers being kept as "pets" in the United States than there are living in the wild.

Criminals are exploiting threatened and endangered species for profit. Every day, thousands of animals—from tiger cubs to baby orangutans to ants—are taken from their natural habitats and sold for profit. These animals are often kidnapped as infants, in many cases after their mothers are killed. But with your help, we can keep wildlife where it belongs—in the wild.

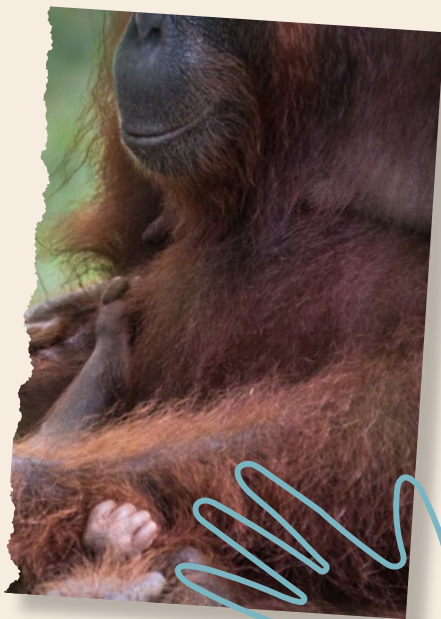
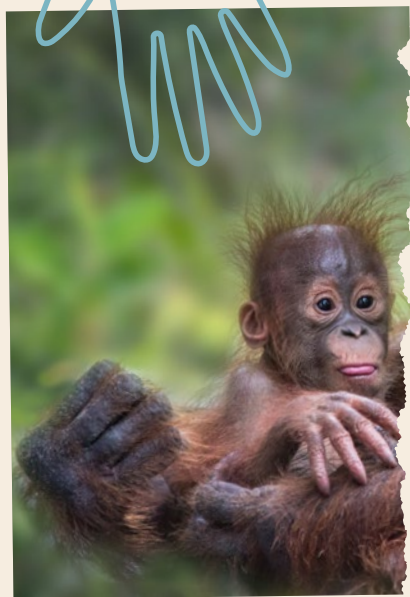
That cute, "exotic" animal you saw in someone's arms on TikTok was likely removed from its natural home and brought into the human world by criminals. The illegal pet trade is cruelty, dressed up as cuteness.



But there is good news: people and organisations are fighting back.

Around the world, efforts are under way to expose traffickers, support law enforcement, rescue and rehabilitate kidnapped animals, and protect species from extinction. Your support and donations drive these positive efforts.

Most importantly, there are simple steps you can take to fight the illegal pet trade.



Why is it harmful?

Those "cute" animals on your Instagram feed may seem so irresistible, but taking wild animals from their natural habitats has negative consequences for animals, people, and the environment. Participating in this illegal trade damages nature, contributes to the spread of zoonotic diseases such as Ebola, and

can put human "owners" at risk of injury or death. The animals themselves suffer horribly, enduring stress, poor conditions, and often early death. In the end, the only ones who truly benefit from the illegal pet trade are the criminals.

WHAT IS THE WILDLIFE JUSTICE COMMISSION?

The Wildlife Justice Commission believes our wildlife is not for sale to the highest bidder and must be protected from traffickers who turn endangered species into trinkets, jewellery, and pets. Our investigators work undercover to drive the wildlife traffickers out of the shadows and bring an end to this multi-

billion-dollar illegal trade. Our approach combines intelligence-led investigations with high-level engagement with governments and law enforcement agencies to combat wildlife trafficking. Together with your support, we can protect wildlife and ensure justice for endangered species.

How does Wildlife Justice combat the illegal pet trade?

Wildlife Justice works to disrupt wildlife trafficking networks and help save species from extinction. Since 2016, our investigations have led to the arrest of nearly 400 high-level traffickers and the rescue of over 13,000 live animals.

Across our operations, we have helped rescue tiger cubs, leopard cat kittens, baby orangutans, and chimpanzees from

wildlife trafficking. In 2024, our work supported the arrest and conviction of ten traffickers in Madagascar for their role in trafficking 48 lemurs and 1,234 tortoises from Madagascar to Thailand. In this case, the lemurs and tortoises were returned to their home, where they have since reacclimated and reproduced. This is the ideal result for all seizures and rescues, but reintroduction is not always possible. Right now, our undercover operatives are infiltrating and disrupting wildlife trafficking networks around the world, targeting those who profit from the illegal trade in wildlife.

At Wildlife Justice, we focus on taking down the kingpins—the high-level network leaders and financiers driving wildlife trafficking. When our work leads to the arrest of a kingpin, the whole criminal network is disrupted. This is dangerous

work that should only be performed by highly trained professionals. To support that work, [click here](#).

But you don't have to be a professional investigator to fight the illegal pet trade.

WHAT CAN YOU DO?

When it comes to disrupting the illegal pet trade, everyone can play a role—it is not just the responsibility of law enforcement. Here are nine actions you can take:

1

Do not buy or sell illegal pets:

Be wary of suspicious words within an advertisement, such as “exotic/rare animals”. “DM for price” and “worldwide shipping available” are also indicators of illegal trade.



2

Do not support

(like, share, or participate in) animal orphanages, zoos, individuals, and organisations that are not transparent about their acquisition practices.



3

Support us and join the experts

who are fighting alongside you.



4

Treat fiction as fiction:

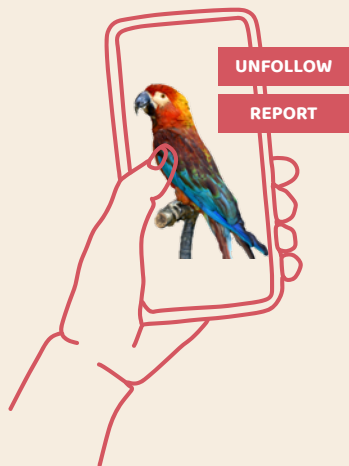
TV shows and movies that indirectly promote illegal pets are not an indication of what is possible in the real world.



5

Report suspicious online activities, including:

- Online pet traders and marketplaces; if you suspect illegal pet sales on social media, report it: [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#), or [TikTok](#).
- Petfluencers or other individuals showing wild animals without proper permits. And don't forget to unfollow them on all platforms.
- Social media platforms complicit in the illegal pet trade. Remember to screenshot evidence when possible. Learn. Speak up. Advocate.



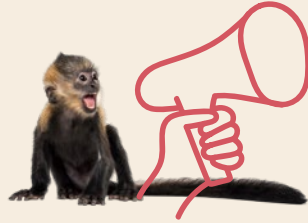
6

Do not believe AI images that show affection between wild animals and humans. Flag these images by commenting on them and reporting them.



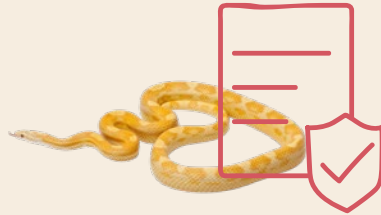
7

Advocate for stronger laws and a total ban of exotic pets in your country.



8

Always ask for official documentation before buying any pet.



9

Share this guide with animal and pet lovers, friends, and family.



Together, we can make a difference.

While disrupting criminal networks requires specialised expertise, the choices people make every day matter. By staying informed, speaking out, and refusing to support the illegal pet trade, you help protect wildlife and disrupt the systems that exploit it. **Stand with Wildlife Justice and be part of the solution.**

*Disrupting criminal networks,
saving species from extinction.*



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**Donate to help us stop these criminals and
save animals from this harmful, illegal trade.**