



POSITION STATEMENT ON THE OWNERSHIP OF AMPHIBIANS AND REPTILES AS PETS

Herpetology is a branch of biology concerned with the study of the Amphibia (approximately 6700 species: frogs, toads, salamanders, newts, and caecilians) and Reptilia (approximately 9000 species: turtles and tortoises, crocodylians, tuatara, lizards, and snakes). The vernacular term “herps” is commonly used when referring to these animals. Of the two groups, the earliest records (approximately 2500 BC) of captive reptiles (cobras and crocodiles) come from the pictographs and hieroglyphs at the Saqqara cemetery near Memphis in Egypt. In the United States, while amphibians and reptiles were probably kept as pets prior to World War II, the growing economy following its end, and more leisure time, contributed to the increased popularity of amphibians and reptiles as pets. In the late 1940s and 1950s, relatively few species were available in the pet trade, and the knowledge of husbandry and care of these animals was in its infancy. Since the late 1950s, the presence of herps in captivity has steadily increased along with a shift more recently from wild caught to captive bred animals, as husbandry and reproductive requirements were better understood. A large market of herp pet products, including caging and foods that meet the nutritional requirements of specific species, has also developed to meet the needs of the breeder and pet owner. Captive bred animals fare much better and live far longer than their wild counterparts. Those that are captive bred may eventually replace all wild caught animals in the pet trade.

The Association of Reptilian and Amphibian Veterinarians (ARAV) is a professional organization promoting conservation and humane treatment of all reptilian and amphibian species through education. Members are dedicated to the advancement of veterinary medicine and surgery, preventative medicine, husbandry, and scientific research pertaining to the reproduction and conservation of reptiles and amphibians, both in the wild and captivity. Scientific information is disseminated through annual meetings of the ARAV and through the *Journal of Herpetological Medicine and Surgery*, the official publication of the Association. Many ARAV members can trace their interest in herps to their childhood when one was kept as a pet. This hobby was a major influence over the career of many members.

Today, herps are kept in captivity as display animals in zoological institutions, for educational purposes, for conservation projects, by the private owner, and by breeders who are producing animals for sale in the pet trade. Each practice has value which eventually translates into the persistence of many species that otherwise would disappear. Given this value, it is the position of the ARAV that many reptiles and amphibians are suitable as pets and can be bred in captivity without causing harm to, and in fact promoting, their well-being and the well-being of their owners, the community, and conservation. It is the position of ARAV, that the hobbyist and pet owner should seek out and prefer captive bred herps so they eventually replace wild caught animals still being sold in the pet trade. Many amphibians and reptiles are small and benign, and easily adapt to captive conditions. However, some such as the largest specimens of snakes, venomous species, and crocodylians do present a moderate occupational risk and accordingly, most states either require special permitting or do not allow such animals to be kept by the private owner. State rules and regulations are constantly changing and it is the obligation of pet owners to follow local, state, and federal regulations affecting the ownership and sale of these animals.