

Before You Buy

Exotic reptiles, birds, and fish are popular pets. However, many species grow large and require special cages or become difficult to handle.

Many reptiles and birds require a much longer commitment for care than a hamster or even most dogs—they may even outlive their owners! Before you purchase an exotic pet, be sure you fully understand how big it will get and how long it will live, as well as its current and future housing and feeding needs. **Ask yourself, “Is this the best pet for my situation, or should I consider a different one?”**

Unfortunately, many well-meaning pet owners choose to release their pets into the wild when they tire of the animals or are no longer able to care for them. In addition to being against state laws, releasing a pet is inhumane, because many of these animals die. However, some released pets beat the odds and survive, and some even find mates and reproduce. These animals are not native to our area and some have the potential to cause serious harm to our environment and economy. If at some point you are no longer able to care for your exotic pet, you have several options that are discussed in this brochure—but releasing it is *not* an option. **Never turn a pet loose outside!**

Helpful Resources Online

Rescue Network provides a list of pet rescue groups by state—select your state and the type of animal from the drop-down lists for more info.

<http://www.rescuenetwork.org>

AnimalShelter.org provides a directory of animal shelters by state or zip code. Many shelters are only equipped to take mammals, but they may be able to connect you with local rescue groups who will help place exotic pets in new homes.

<http://www.animalshelter.org/shelters/states.asp>

LocalVets.com provides a directory of qualified exotic pet veterinarians, searchable by zip code. Contact them for advice or euthanasia services.

<http://www.localvets.com/services/exotic/>

The Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission Nonnative Species page has information on options for unwanted exotic pets in Florida—check out their Pet Amnesty Days.

<http://myfwc.com/wildlifehabitats/nonnatives/amnesty-day-events/>

Florida Exotic Bird Sanctuary provides permanent sanctuary for exotic birds that cannot be adopted.

<http://www.flabirdsanctuary.com/>

FloridaPets.net provides a list of localized pet rescue groups.

<http://www.floridapets.net/rescues.html>

Options for Unwanted Exotic Pets



UF UNIVERSITY of
FLORIDA
IFAS Extension

This document is UF/IFAS Publication Number WEC308. Visit <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu> “Be Responsible” logos courtesy of California Zoological Supply’s Do Not Release campaign.

What to do when you can no longer care for your exotic pet...

Keep It Anyway

If your pet is becoming difficult to handle, getting some advice from an expert may help. Contact your local animal shelter or rescue group for advice on dealing with behavioral problems and keeping your pet healthy (see the Helpful Resources Online section). Remember that you made a commitment to care for this animal.

Find It a New Home

The best option for dealing with an unwanted pet is to find it a new home. Use the resources listed in this brochure to locate rescue groups, animal shelters, or herpetological societies (for reptiles)—they will usually try to help you place your pet in a new home. You can also post a newspaper or internet ad or post fliers at local pet stores or animal shelters. Contact local science



Venomous lionfish have been reported along the entire Eastern Seaboard of the U.S. — many initial introductions were due to avoidable aquarium dumps!

teachers and nature centers—they may want a classroom pet.



Rescue groups and animal sanctuaries can usually help place problematic pets or exceptionally long-lived species such as parrots or tortoises in permanent, loving homes.

Return It to the Pet Store

If you are no longer able to keep your pet, contact the pet store where you purchased it. Because of the growing concern about the problems caused by pet releases, many pet stores may be willing to take back unwanted pets, rather than risk having them set free. However, you probably won't get your money back!

Contact Animal Control

Animal control agencies are usually only equipped to take mammals, but some may be able to take exotic pets temporarily or offer advice. However, these agencies rarely have no-kill policies and most of them usually can't place exotic pets in permanent homes.

Contact Your State Wildlife Agency

Although these agencies are not able to take in unwanted pets except during special events (such as Florida's "Amnesty Day"), contacting them for advice is always better than breaking wildlife laws and risking fines by turning your pet loose outside.



Euthanize It

Euthanizing a pet is never an easy choice. However, if you cannot find anyone to take your pet, you may have to consider humane euthanasia by a qualified veterinarian (see the Helpful Resources Online section). You should not release a pet into the wild under any circumstances.

Authors:

Steve A. Johnson¹, Monica E. McGarrity², and Dustin Smith³

¹ University of Florida/IFAS, Department of Wildlife Ecology and Conservation, 110 Newins-Ziegler Hall, P.O. Box 110430, Gainesville, FL, 32611

² University of Florida/IFAS, Gulf Coast REC – Plant City Center, 1200 N. Park Rd., Plant City, FL, 33563

³ Zoo Miami / Miami-Dade Park and Recreation Department, 12400 SW 152nd Street, Miami, FL 33196

Footnote

1. This document is WEC308, one of a series of the Department of Wildlife Ecology and Conservation, Florida Cooperative Extension Service, Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences, University of Florida. First published March 2011. Please visit the EDIS Web site at

<http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu>.

The Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences (IFAS) is an Equal Opportunity Institution authorized to provide research, educational information and other services only to individuals and institutions that function with non-discrimination with respect to race, creed, color, religion, age, disability, sex, sexual orientation, marital status, national origin, political opinions or affiliations. For more information on UF/IFAS Extension, visit <http://solutionsforyourlife.ufl.edu>. U.S. Department of Agriculture, Cooperative Extension Service, University of Florida, IFAS, Florida A. & M. University Cooperative Extension Program, and Boards of County Commissioners Cooperating. Millie Ferrer-Chancy, Interim Dean.

Copyright Information

This document is copyrighted by the University of Florida, Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences (UF/IFAS) for the people of the State of Florida. UF/IFAS retains all rights under all conventions, but permits free reproduction by all agents and offices of the Cooperative Extension Service and the people of the State of Florida. Permission is granted to others to use these materials in part or in full for educational purposes, provided that full credit is given to UF/IFAS, citing the publication, its source, and date of publication.