



IS YOUR NATIVE ANIMAL FROM THE WILD

WildEnforce, a research group of scientists at the University of New South Wales - in collaboration with Taronga, University of Technology Sydney and the Australian Nuclear Science Technology Organisation (ANTSO) – have developed a revolutionary way to determine if a confiscated animal is being illegally trafficked!

This new technique identifies chemical markers in keratin (such as quills, feathers and hair) that establishes with more than 96% accuracy whether the animal has been eating a natural, wild diet or a captive diet. Dr Kate Brandis from UNSW Science - the lead author on the paper published in *Scientific Reports* (Oct 2018) and founder of the Australian Feather Map – said the next step is development of portable handheld devices and how best to put this science in the hands of wildlife conservation field workers and customs agents.

Paper co-author Dr Phoebe Meager from Taronga Conservation Society Australia said the new research finally offered evidence for long-held suspicions. “For wildlife conservationists, it’s been immensely frustrating knowing that animals are being caught in the wild and passed off as captive-bred with forged paperwork, but with no way to prove it,” she said.

Hopefully this test will help to stop illegal trade and its associated environmental, conservation and welfare impacts on the many and amazing species in Australia and around the world.

animals. He now takes every opportunity to educate the public about responsible ownership of these unique creatures.

“People who keep reptiles set up large naturalistic enclosures that bring nature into their homes,” he added. “People are fascinated by reptiles and develop an emotional connection to them, thus, are more willing to protect them.”

reptiles) are often more conscious about protecting native wildlife, he added.

“On numerous occasions, we’ve seen people with elevated fears and phobias against pets such as snakes have evolved their fear into admiration. They are then less likely to want to run over the next snake they see and stop and save that turtle from crossing the road,” he said.

Pets such as reptiles, birds and fish can also bring us back closer to nature, said Fraser.

Wildlife veterinarian and former president of the Australian Veterinary Association, Dr Robert Johnson, has been fascinated by reptiles since he was a child and has loved keeping all sorts of slithery and scaly companion

“Reptiles make wonderful pets and are good for a child to help understand the environment more,” he said. “In many cases, owners of native animals understand the needs of these pets more than dog and cat owners.”

Dr Johnson believes “keeping a reptile as a pet is not a right but a privilege and with that comes certain responsibilities (ie having a licence and being educated about the care of the animal). The animals’ welfare is paramount! They should be able to express their natural behaviours in captivity and have a diet very much like in the wild.”

LACK OF EDUCATION IN KEEPING NATIVE PETS

Clarke from WAP argued that once native animals are in people’s homes, there is no realistic way to replicate the space and freedom they would have in the wild.

“If you already have an exotic pet, do your research and learn how to give it the best life possible and make a commitment not to replace it with another wild animal,” she said.

Furthermore, a WAP-commissioned YouGov Galaxy polling of ‘Australian exotic pet owners’ revealed alarming insights into the lack of understanding the pet owners had of the animals in their care. The poll found the most common ‘exotic pets’ to be freshwater fish, exotic birds and small mammals.

The survey also revealed:

- 26% of exotic pet owners did no research before buying their pet.
- More than three quarters of exotic pet owners think that it’s true or true

in some circumstances that wild animals kept in captivity as pets experience stress.

- 13% admitted that it’s mostly or completely false to say that the needs of exotic pets can be fulfilled by their owners.
- More than half of exotic pet owners didn’t realise their pet is ‘exotic’.

In response to the poll results, some pet industry and wildlife experts are confused about World Animal Protection defining the word ‘exotic’ as “wild animals such as snakes, lizards, birds and ornamental fish, as opposed to common domesticated pets, such as dogs and cats.”

Government departments, such as the NSW Department of Primary Industries, refers to ‘exotic animals’ as non-native or non-indigenous animals. Dr Johnson defined the word ‘exotic’ as coming from somewhere else (ie another country). For instance, “Bearded Dragons, the most commonly kept reptile, is not exotic; it’s native to Australia and kept in captivity for years,” he said.

Sam Davis, President of the Canary and Cage Bird Federation of Australia (CCBFA), said World Animal Protection’s use of the term ‘exotic’ is misleading and not true. He also questioned the validity of the YouGov poll given the incorrect definition and subsequent portrayal of exotic pets as wild animals.

“In aviculture, exotic always refers to non-native species,” Davis explained. “There are no wild animals sold as pets in Australia and in general, we do not support keeping birds sourced from the wild as pets. In rare cases, native birds are taken legally from the wild in Australia for captive breeding and recovery efforts, exhibition in wildlife parks and zoos, or to refine and study their husbandry. These are Australian native species not exotic species.”

In response to the industry’s confusion, World Animal Protection issued a statement to provide more context on the terms used:

“The (YouGov) survey was an attempt to localise findings that were part of a global survey and investigation. Globally, exotic pets are more commonly defined as any animal that has not been domesticated and therefore remains ‘wild.’ In the survey, we gave clear examples of what, using this global definition, would constitute an exotic pet. Therefore, those participating would have had the shared understanding of what an exotic pet is in the broader global context. In our view, the survey