Exotic pets are deprived of basic freedoms

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A least 13,000 species and over 350 million animals are traded annually worldwide for the exotic pet industry, and most are kept in small cages or aquaria that severely restrict their behaviour and life-quality - commonly with tragic consequences.

In an article in this month's issue of *Veterinary Practice*, biologist and medical scientist Dr Clifford Warwick writes about 'Animals, space and welfare', and reports that 'snakes and many other animals are commonly confined to overly restrictive environments that do not allow for normal behaviour, physical exercise and mental stimulation' - with pet shops and their suppliers among the 'worst offenders'.

"Too often, spatial provisions are decided by what is thought convenient for owners rather than what is better for animals – simply because someone occupies a small apartment is no excuse for confining wild animals in a glass box the size of a plant pot."

Numerous scientific studies show that animals - whether snakes, birds or fishes - suffer in small enclosures and the need for them to have control over their spatial environments is key to welfare.

Says Dr Warwick: *"Space is vital to welfare. Improving the lives of animals through greater space offers at least one welfare-progressive dimension, and there should be no room for overlooking the spatial needs or wants of captive animals."*

Foundational legal and ethical principles, such as the 'Five Freedoms'* state that all animals should be afforded certain minimum liberties and protections to experience 'a Life Worth Living'.** Also, objective and independent scientific evidence-based guidance makes clear that all animals must have environments at least 10 times their body size and be able to fully stretch, exercise, and behave with reasonable normality (e.g. climb, swim, jump, burrow).

Says Elaine Toland, biologist and Director of APA: "*It seems clear that exotic pets that are confined to cages in peoples homes are being grossly deprived of basic abilities to move around and behave in ways important to their health and welfare, and that legal and moral protections for these animals are not being properly applied."*

- For further information or to interview Clifford Warwick, please contact Elaine Toland on 01273 674253 or out of hours on 07986 535024.
- Link to full article 'Animals, space and welfare': https://veterinary-practice.com/article/animals-space-and-welfare

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*The Five Freedoms.

- Freedom from hunger and thirst - by ready access to fresh water and a diet to maintain full health and vigour;
- Freedom from discomfort - by providing an appropriate environment including shelter and a comfortable resting area;
- Freedom from pain, injury, or disease by preventing animals from getting ill or injured and by making sure animals are diagnosed and treated rapidly if they do;
- Freedom to express normal behaviour - by providing sufficient space, proper facilities, and company of the animal's own kind;
- Freedom from fear and distress - by ensuring conditions and treatment, which avoid mental suffering.

Farm Animal Welfare Council Press Statement. 1979 [Available from:

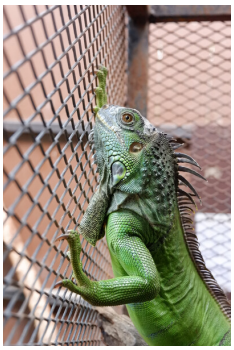
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**A Life Worth Living. Mellor DJ. Updating animal welfare thinking: Moving beyond the "Five Freedoms" towards "a Life Worth Living". Animals. 2016;6(3):21.

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