

Garden centre digs itself into a hole over reptile market

Tuesday 10 June, 2025

Woodbank Garden Centre & Nurseries in Bingley has been warned by Bradford City Council that it would be in breach of its pet shop licence if it allowed a large-scale reptile and amphibian market to take place on its premises on 22 June 2025. Despite the prospect of being stripped of its licence and potentially facing prosecution, the Garden Centre has advised the Council that it will allow the event anyway.

The market, organised by the International Herpetological Society (I.H.S.), is notoriously associated with unlawful animal trading and animal suffering. Bradford City Council has warned that the event, which would involve the sale of thousands of reptiles, would violate the Animal Welfare (Licensing of Activities Involving Animals) (England) Regulations 2018 and the Pet Animals Act 1951.

Woodbank Garden Centre & Nurseries is licensed as a pet shop by Bradford City Council, and the licence limits the Garden Centre to the offering for sale of no more than 6 tortoises, 12 guinea pigs, and 6 hamsters alongside tropical and cold-water fish. The sale of any animals on the premises other than those for which a licence has been issued would be outside the scope of, and therefore in breach of, the licence conditions.

Animal suffering is part and parcel of reptile and amphibian markets. Sensitive and vulnerable wild animals such as lizards, snakes and frogs are typically confined in tiny, plastic, takeaway containers and treated like inanimate objects. Little or no thought is given to the species-specific welfare needs of the animals. Animals are denied food, water, shelter and, in many cases, the ability to move around.

Says Elaine Toland, Director of the Animal Protection Agency:

"The sight of stressed and fearful animals in tiny plastic tubs naturally sparks public outrage, which is why most venues refuse to host these events. Woodbank Garden Centre needs to seriously consider the long-term reputational damage it would sustain by its association with the I.H.S. and by facilitating animal suffering."

Says Laura Walton, Campaigns Manager, Freedom for Animals:

"These reptile markets are breeding grounds for cruelty and illegal wildlife trade. Allowing such an event to proceed sets a dangerous precedent and demonstrates a blatant disregard for animal welfare."

Says Charlotte Regan, Wildlife Campaigns Manager, World Animal Protection:

"Reptiles and amphibians are sentient beings capable of a range of complex emotional states including pain, fear, stress, and suffering. Treating them as mere commodities to be bought and sold at market stalls is utterly unacceptable."

Bradford City Council has been praised for doing all it can to caution the Garden Centre about the market, and this is not the first time that the Council has encountered an I.H.S. event. In 2003, the I.H.S. took the Council to court for refusing to issue a licence for its event, and lost. The District Judge ruled that a proposed market at the Dudley Hill & Tong Social Club could not be licensed and the I.H.S. responded by publicly threatening to stage its event anyway.

The Animal Protection Agency, World Animal Protection and Freedom for Animals are working together towards an end to the inhumane trading of wild animals at markets.

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