Large- scale reptile dealer issued with formal caution for illegal sale of snakes at reptile market

Monday 25 September, 2023

A formal caution was issued last week by Doncaster City Council to a snake dealer for illegally trading animals at a reptile market held at Doncaster Racecourse on 19 September 2021. Paul Milner of Urban Constrictors, based in York, was one of several reptile sellers identified by the Animal Protection Agency for a coordinated investigation. Footage taken by World Animal Protection captured Paul Milner in the act of illegally offering snakes for sale at the event. The reptile market has now moved to Rotherham where campaigners claim that more illegal selling has recently taken place.

Under the Pet Animals Act 1951 it is an offence to 'carry on a business' of selling pet animals over market stalls. However, sellers at reptile markets pose as private individuals selling a few of their own surplus pets, claiming they are not carrying on a business and are therefore not breaking the law. Amongst them was Paul Milner, a regular stallholder at the Doncaster Racecourse event, who openly boasted on his YouTube channel three years ago of a £100,000 target for his snake breeding business, Urban Constrictors.Conditions for reptiles at these events are inhumane. Snakes, lizards, tortoises and turtles are typically displayed and sold in small, plastic, takeaway boxes in which they can barely turn or move around. Little or no consideration is given to the basic welfare requirements of reptiles, including their need for finely controlled temperature, humidity and light levels. Scientists have described the treatment of animals at reptile markets as 'tantamount to animal abuse'.

Campaigners are calling on the national government to do more to prevent reptile markets, at which they say criminal activity is rife. The Animal Protection Agency claim they have secured evidence, yet again, of widespread law-breaking at a large reptile market that took place at the Magna Science Adventure Centre in Rotherham on 17 September 2023.

Says Doncaster Cllr Dave Shaw:

"I am immensely grateful to the legal team at Doncaster City Council for pursuing the case and securing this outcome. The clear purpose of the law is to prevent animal suffering, but local councils are having to grapple with Defra-issued guidance that is overly complex and confusing, and often allows animal suffering to continue. The government needs to give local council inspectors better tools to prevent this type of illegal animal selling."

Says Elaine Toland, Animal Protection Agency:

"To any right-minded person, trading sensitive wild animals in tiny plastic tubs is deplorable at the best of times, let alone in bustling markets where the animals are even more stressed. This case sends a message that anyone trading reptiles at these markets does so at risk of prosecution. We need more local councils to take legal action against such sellers, and venues to refuse to accommodate the events."

Says Peter Kemple-Hardy, World Animal Protection:

"We are pleased that Doncaster City Council examined ourevidence, conducted their own investigation and concluded that the law had been broken. But this is by no means an isolated case. Illegal selling of animals at reptile markets is widespread, blatant and unchecked, and animals are suffering in their thousands. I am convinced that without commercial sales of animals, these events simply would not exist."

Animal protection groups are concerned that Paul Milner of Urban Constrictors, who has admitted to trading animals unlawfully, is offering business help and advice, via paid subscriptions. Despite breaching animal welfare legislation, Milner is offering to help snake breeders 'level up' and turn their snake breeding and selling 'hobby' into a full-time business.

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• For more information, please contact Elaine Toland on 01273 674253 or out of hours on 07986 535024.
Images available on request.

Company Contact:

Animal Protection Agency Foundation

T. 01273 674253
E. info@apa.org.uk
W. https://www.apa.org.uk

Additional Contact(s):
kat@apa.org.uk
elaine@apa.org.uk

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