Reptile and amphibian market told to hop it, but has now gone to ground in Ashford, Kent

Wednesday 10 July, 2024

Animal welfare groups were delighted to learn that a reptile and amphibian market planned for this Saturday 13th July 2024 at the Leigh Academy Rainham school in Gillingham had been cancelled. Vivify Venues, a school lettings provider, was praised for withdrawing permission for the use of the school on receipt of evidence that criminal activity was likely to take place at the event. Medway Council was also commended for promptly looking into the issue. However, organisers announced yesterday that the animal market will now take place at an undisclosed venue in Ashford, Kent.

The trade in pet animals over market stalls is illegal because animal welfare cannot be safeguarded in such temporary and makeshift environments. At reptile and amphibian markets, animals are displayed and sold in small, plastic, takeaway tubs and denied even basic welfare requirements such as space to stretch, somewhere to hide, food and water - let alone carefully controlled temperature, lighting, and humidity.

Animal groups are appealing for any information that may be helpful in locating the underground market. The organisers call themselves the ARC (Amphibian and Reptile Club), which was founded and is run by animal dealers. Venues are warned that reptile and amphibian markets are commonly misdescribed as 'breeders' meetings', 'shows' or 'expos' in order to appear legitimate, so the best course of action is to refuse any of these activities.

Says Elaine Toland, Director, Animal Protection Agency:

"We're grateful to Vivify Venues, as a responsible venue provider, for taking such swift action to uphold the law. We are hoping that we can trace the new venue in time to alert the authorities and to prevent a venue from unwittingly facilitating criminal activities. Our undercover investigators have caught illegal animal dealers red-handed at every single reptile market they have filmed over the years. Sensitive and vulnerable wild animals suffer greatly in the hands of these traders."

Says Dr Charlotte Regan, Wildlife Campaign Manager, World Animal Protection:

"Reptiles and amphibians are sentient animals with complex welfare needs, not commodities to be exploited by the pet trade. These markets are outdated events that have no place in our society."

Says Laura Walton, Campaigns Manager, Freedom for Animals:

"The suffering caused to animals as a result of being transported in tiny plastic tubs, and put on display for hours on end at these events, often without any food or water, is an utter disgrace; and why the trading of animals at markets was rightly banned. So we welcome the news that Vivify Venues have cancelled this exploitative event, and applaud their proactive response to prevent animal suffering. These profit-driven markets must cease to exist, and the rights and wellbeing of all animals better protected."

Animal welfare groups are working together to lobby Defra for improved guidance to aid effective enforcement by local authorities. A recently published scientific study of reptile markets has highlighted the importance of robustly enforcing the ban on these events due to their serious animal welfare problems and the threats they pose to public health.

Anyone with helpful information about the location of the event in Ashford is urged to email the Animal Protection Agency at info@apa.org.uk.

- For more information, please contact Elaine Toland on 01273 674253 or out of hours on 07986 535024. Images and film of reptile and amphibian markets are available on request.

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