

Venues in the South West warned against hosting reptile and amphibian events

Monday 22 July, 2024

Tewkesbury Borough Council's Licensing Team has been praised for taking prompt and decisive action that resulted in the cancellation of a reptile and amphibian market at Churchdown Community Centre, Gloucester on 3rd August 2024. Licensing Officers examined evidence showing the likelihood of illegal animal trading at the planned event and forewarned the Community Centre, which then took the responsible decision to cancel. As it is common for reptile and amphibian market organisers to seek out new venues at short notice, animal welfare groups are now contacting venues in the South West to caution them against hosting any reptile-related events.

Venues, particularly in Gloucestershire and surrounds, are being warned that reptile market organisers typically misdescribe their events as 'breeders meetings', 'shows' or 'exhibitions'. It is often not until the events take place that venues and local councils realise that they are actually commercial exotic animal markets. Trading in pet animals over market stalls was banned via a 1983 amendment to the Pet Animals Act 1951 to prevent the suffering to animals that results from being sold in temporary and makeshift environments.

Reptiles and amphibians are subjected to very poor conditions at markets. Animals are displayed and sold in small, plastic takeaway tubs; denied the ability to move or stretch; deprived of food, water and hiding spaces; and subjected to the stresses of inappropriate lighting, temperature and humidity. Scientific research has shown that behavioural signs of stress and suffering are common in reptiles at these events.

Says Elaine Toland, Director, Animal Protection Agency:

"We are very grateful to Tewkesbury Council and the Churchdown Community Centre for the action they took to dislodge this market. We would now like to hear from any venue owners who are approached by the 'South West Reptile Club' to host this event. Hopefully we can ensure that wild animals are spared the ordeal of being traded in these abhorrent conditions."

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

"We welcome the news that the planned reptile market at Churchdown Community Centre will no longer be taking place. Reptiles and amphibians are sentient animals with complex welfare needs, not commodities to be exploited by the pet trade. Other venues and local authorities across the UK should be extremely wary of hosting these markets - they are outdated events that should have no place in our society."

Says Laura Walton, Campaigns Manager, Freedom for Animals:

"Freedom for Animals applauds the Churchdown Community Centre for making the right call to cancel the commercially-driven reptile market and Tewkesbury Council for ensuring the Centre could make an informed decision. We call on other venues to turn away these events when their organisers come knocking and, in doing so, prevent animal suffering and uphold the law."

Reptile and amphibians carry Salmonella bacteria, which cause disease in humans, particularly in vulnerable groups such as children. It was of particular concern that organisers of the cancelled event targeted their advertising to attract families with small children by including activities such as face-painting and colouring in. It is not just attendees of reptile and amphibian markets that are exposed to health risks, as subsequent venue users can also potentially be affected once the general environment is contaminated.

Anyone who is approached to host the South West Reptile Club event is urged to email the Animal Protection Agency at info@apa.org.uk.

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