

Virtual Pet Store

OBJECTIVES

The student will be able to discuss the supply of common pet store animals, the disadvantages of buying animals captured from their natural environment, and pros and cons of breeding animals. The student will have the option of exploring careers in wildlife management or animal shelter rescues.

National Geography Standard: 16

MATERIALS

- Access to library or Internet
- Paper and pencils or pens
- Optional: tools for multimedia presentation (software to make slide show, video recorder, etc.)

BACKGROUND

Do students have pets at home? Many families share their living space with pets. Most people own **domestic pets**, such as dogs and cats—animals bred for centuries for select traits that make them well adapted for living with humans. Increasing numbers of people own **exotic pets**, or animals that have not been domesticated, such as boa constrictors, green iguanas, sugar gliders, parrots, and saltwater and freshwater aquarium fish.

Unfortunately, domestic and exotic pets face many problems. Most potential pet owners do not realize how long their pets (both domestic and exotic) can live, how big they get as adults, or where their pets come from. With proper care, some species of parrots can live as long as humans. Certain breeds of domestic dogs reach weights of 45.5 kg (100 lbs.) or more. Boa constrictors can grow in excess of 3.05 m (10 ft.). Most people are also unaware of the requirements to feed, house, and keep their pets healthy. Unwanted cats, dogs and other pets are often taken to animal shelters, euthanized, or abandoned or released into nonnative habitats.

Many animals are bred specifically for the pet trade. But most potential pet owners aren't aware that millions of birds, reptiles, fishes, and other animals are caught in their native habitats and sent to the U.S., often illegally.

ACTION

1. A few days before beginning the activity, ask students to visit a local pet store and remember or write down the common names of 10 animals they saw there.
2. Begin your Virtual Pet Store by making six columns on the blackboard with these headings: Bird, fish, reptile, amphibian, small mammal, invertebrate. Then ask students what animals they saw at the pet store and write their answers in the chart. Try to keep the lists fairly even, listing about 6 to 7 animals in each column. (See sample pet list on next page for suggestions.)
3. Divide class into student groups or pairs and have each group or pair choose an animal. (If you have "extras" students may choose more than one). Ask students to use the library or the Internet to research how that animal is raised (or caught) and arrives at the store. Tropical fishes, reptiles, and birds are more commonly collected from the wild than mammals. Dogs and cats are bred or "pre-owned" and up for adoption. For each animal, student groups should record country of origin and native habitat (if any) and the process by which the animal arrives at the store (breeder, distributor, private party donation, animal rescue group). Also have students list what is required to properly care for each kind of pet. What happens to unwanted pets (animal shelters, many are released into nonnative habitat)?
4. Discuss as a group how some animals come to be pets. Topics to cover: Illegal pet trade (birds, reptiles, fishes), puppy mills, destructive collection techniques (aquarium fish, live corals), and the role of responsible breeding and/or handling. What animals are popular pets? Why? (For example, Dalmatian dogs were popular after the movie *101 Dalmatians* was released. At Easter, people may buy a rabbit.) What pets do students have at home? How do they care for them?
5. Ask students if anyone is interested in a career with animals. Would they like to volunteer at a local animal rescue agency, humane society, or work at a pet store to get more experience? Professional animal careers include wildlife biologist, park ranger, wildlife veterinarian, exotic animal trainer, zookeeper, and more. Students can find out more information about careers working with exotic animals at the following Web sites:
 - SeaWorld/Busch Gardens ANIMALS: Guide to Zoological Park Careers**
[//www.SeaWorld.org/career-resources/info-books/zoo-careers/index.htm](http://www.SeaWorld.org/career-resources/info-books/zoo-careers/index.htm)
 - American Zoo and Aquarium Association**
[//www.aza.org/ForEveryone/Careers/](http://www.aza.org/ForEveryone/Careers/)

Saving My Wild

Have student groups prepare a 10-minute talk or video on responsible pet ownership and present this to younger grade levels. They can use animal puppets or stuffed animals to demonstrate, or, if school policy allows, they may want to bring a dog or other pet.

Online Sources

(Students may also want to look up Web sites for local animal shelters and animal sanctuaries.)

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)

www.cdc.gov/healthypets/animals/reptiles.htm

Florida Sea Grant

www.flseagrant.org/program_areas/coastal_habitats/publications/aquarium_hobby_sts_web.pdf

Marine Aquarium Council

www.aquariumcouncil.org/

National Geographic

www.nationalgeographic.com

National Wildlife Federation

www.nwf.org/

World Wildlife Fund

www.worldwildlife.org

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

www.international.fws.gov/permits/pets.html

Sample pet list for Action #2

Small mammals

domestic dog breeds: golden retriever, Dalmatian, fox terrier, boxer, etc.
domestic cat breeds: American shorthair, Persian, Siamese, manx, etc.
rabbits
sugar gliders
rodents: hamsters, rats, mice, chinchillas, Guinea pigs

Fish

freshwater: goldfish, molly, tetra, cichlid, guppy, arawana, catfish
saltwater: anemonefish, triggerfish, angelfish, lionfish, damsel fish, butterfly fish

Reptiles

snakes: rosy boa, Burmese python, king snake, garter snake
lizards: anole, green iguana, gecko, chameleon, African monitor lizard
turtles: box, mud, slider, painted

Amphibians

frogs: African clawed, American green, fire-bellied toad, pacman
salamanders/newts: tiger salamander, axolotl, fire-bellied newt

Birds

parrots: cockatiel, lovebird, parakeet, Amazon parrot, macaw, cockatoo
finch
toucan
canary

Invertebrates

land hermit crab, tarantula, scorpion, Madagascar hissing cockroach, live coral