

ALIVE AND KICKING



**THE EXOTIC MAMMAL TRADE
IN THE NETHERLANDS**



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Data collection and analysis by research team at AAP Animal Advocacy and Protection*



INTRODUCTION

There are an estimated 300 million pets in Europe, including mammals, birds, reptiles, fish and amphibians¹. However, many species, especially exotic animals, are unsuited to a life in captivity. Exotic pets have complex needs making it very difficult, if not impossible, for the average owner to provide specialised care, diet and housing to meet those. Some species may have a negative impact on local biodiversity when they are released by their owners or when they escape into the wild. Last but not least exotic pets pose considerable risks to public health and safety. Many zoonotic diseases (transmissible from animals to humans) originate in wildlife. Some of the most serious zoonosis are those associated with non-domesticated, exotic or imported animals. Therefore, the impacts of keeping exotic pets can have high costs across many sectors.

Regardless of all the problems attached to it, the keeping of exotic animals as pets is a largely uncontrolled trend which benefits from unclear, incomplete or inexistent regulation and/or enforcement in most EU Member States. Rescue centres are often left to pay the bill: owners may

no longer want their pet because it was an unsuitable match from an impulsive and poorly-informed purchase. Since 2010 the number of rescue requests to AAP Animal Advocacy and Protection has tripled, and the diversity of the species on offer has increased. To have a better understanding of the market, AAP is conducting a series of investigations into the exotic pet trade in different EU Member States.

This report contains the findings for the Netherlands.

METHODOLOGY

The aim of this research was to find out which exotic mammal species² could be found in the Dutch trade at a specific moment in time. The focus was on the legal trade, although illegality (i.e. selling species forbidden by law) would also be recorded and included in the analysis if and when found. A large number of points of sale ('sales channels') were identified and scoped in early 2019. The two most promising channels in the categories fairs, pet shops and internet platforms, in terms of diversity of species offered, were consequently selected and monitored between February 2019 and May 2019 (see Table 1).

**Given the undercover nature of part of the investigative work conducted, the identities of the researchers will remain anonymous.*

¹ FEDIAF, European Pet Food Industry, Fact & Figures 2018, http://www.fediaf.org/images/FEDIAF_Facts_and_Figures_2018_ONLINE_final.pdf

² Exotic mammal species are for the purpose of this research those not native to the place where found or sheltered, in this case the Netherlands.



The **online sales platforms** selected were Marktplaats and Facebook, two nationally active sites allowing individual accountholders to offer a large variety of services and goods among which live animals. The ads were checked to determine whether they were real and not scams. In case of doubt the ad was not included. Also, in addition to the sales ads, both platforms included ads requesting exotic mammals. The animal species in those requests have not been included.

On Marktplaats most mammals were found in the group "Dieren en Toebehoren" (Animals and accessories) under the rubric "Overige dieren" (Other animals).

On Facebook the mammals were found in the closed groups "Exotische dieren Vraag en Aanbod" (Exotic animals Supply and Demand) and "Tamme Exotische Dieren" (Tame Exotic Animals), where people post pictures of their exotic pets and offer young homebred individuals. These pictures indicate that there are far more species kept by private owners than the ones recorded in this inventory.

The selected **pet shops** were Welle Diertotaal and Zoo-logisch. Both the species at the physical shop and on the shop's website have been recorded and included in the analysis. The visits to the shops were done without stating the objective of the visit, thus as an interested and

potential buyer of an exotic mammal. This way the employees would treat us as a regular customer and provide information that might not have been revealed if the visit was done on behalf of an enforcement authority or animal welfare organisation. During the visits, it was requested and allowed to take pictures. This way an estimate of the number of species for sale could be recorded.

Lastly, the animal **fairs** selected were Terraria-Hasselt, visited on the 3rd of February 2019, and Exopet-Houten, visited on the 21st of April 2019. Even though Hasselt is in Belgium, the organizer is the Dutch company VHM-events. Terraria-Hasselt was selected because organizers indicated prior to the fair that they would largely have the same animals on offer as they would later in the month have in Zwolle, the Netherlands. In addition, Hasselt lies relatively close to the Netherlands, so the clientele of this fair was partly Dutch. Terraria-Hasselt was a tiny fair compared to Exopet-Houten in terms of the number of vendors and visitors. At Exopet-Houten loads of thermostabile styro-foam containers were used as packing material for the pre-ordered and pre-paid live exotic animals. This made inspection of the animals, and determination of the species, impossible. Therefore the actual number of exotic animal species on offer at fairs might be higher than documented and reported in this investigation.

Table 1 - Selected sales channels for exotic mammal trade in the NL and data collection method

	PHYSICAL VISIT	SEARCH ON INTERNET
S1 = Welle Diertotaal	X	X
S2 = Zoo-logisch	X	X
F1 = Terraria – Hasselt	X	
F2 = Exopet – Houten	X	
W1 = Marktplaats		X
W2 = Facebook		X



ANALYSIS

A total of 55 exotic mammal species were found in the Dutch pet trade between February and May 2019 (see Annex I). Many of those are completely unsuitable to be kept as pets due to severe animal welfare risks, among other reasons. For example, some of those currently allowed to be kept legally in the Netherlands, such as the yak or the zebra, need a spacious outdoor area to enable them to express their natural behaviour. Other commonly sold species, like degoes, live in complex social structures and require very specific care and management knowledge which most pet owners are unable to provide.

It is assumed that the number of species found in the trade would vary depending on the season, because of the breeding cycles. At the latest monitoring moment of the study (in May 2019), significantly more animals species were offered than in the beginning (in the winter month February). It is expected that the number of exotic species offered for sale would increase before and during the summer, when newly bred animals turn old enough to be separated from their mother.

Illegality

The researchers also encountered cases of illegal trade. Primates were offered for sale (in orange in Annex I), while

all primate species are prohibited under the Dutch nature conservation regulation (Regeling Natuurbescherming). The Indian mongoose (in green in Annex I), is considered an invasive alien species in the European Union, prohibited to be imported, bred, kept, traded, released or sold in European Member States under article 7 of EU Regulation 1143/2014 on the prevention and management of the introduction and spread of invasive alien species.



Table 2: Overview of the number of exotic mammal species on offer during the three timeframes T1, T2, T3 and the whole snapshot period for all sales channels. Totals reflect total number of species, thus excluding double counts of same species found in different channels. NR = not recorded / not visited.

	Channel	Number of mammal species T1	Number of mammal species T2	Number of mammal species T3	Total number of mammal species T1+T2+T3	Total number of mammal species T1+T2+T3	Total number of mammal species T1+T2+T3
Internet site	Markt-plaats	26	26	25	39	45	55
	Facebook	7	8	4	14		
Pet shop	Welle Diertotaal	10	11	NR	12	12	
	Zoo-logisch	NR	0*	NR	0		
Fair	Terraria - Hasselt	2	NR	NR	2	17	
	Exopet - Houten	NR	NR	17	15		

*Two exotic mammal species (common Southern dwarf mongoose and common genet), were observed on display at Zoo-logisch. However, according to a statement from the owner after the publication of this research, the animals were not for sale.

Sales channels

The largest variety of exotic species was recorded on online platform Marktplaats, offering 39 of the 55 species found in the trade. On Facebook a total of 14 different mammal species were offered for sale. Of all species recorded, 81% could be found on these two online channels.

At the two fairs visited, 17 different mammal species were recorded. However, the actual number of species for sale was likely to be higher, since many animals are pre-ordered and not identifiable.

Lastly, the two pet shops included in the investigation offered a total of 12 species. As opposed to websites and fairs, where very little or inaccurate information about the

animals was offered, the employees in the shops did take time to explain the needs and care requirements of the species on sale, gave tips and inquired on the motivation of the client and the housing conditions the potential purchaser would be able to provide to the animals. They stated that they did not sell animals to impulsive buyers³. However, no one warned the buyer that although buying an exotic animal can be very cheap, its maintenance and care can be expensive.

Employees of pet stores were asked whether exotic species other than the ones on sale at that moment could be ordered upon request, and if so, which ones. The answers seemed to suggest that nearly every animal could be found, ordered and purchased.

CONCLUSIONS

- The exotic mammal trade in the Netherlands is alive and kicking, with 55 different species for sale in a period of only three months, ranging from a Djungarian hamster to a zebra.
- There is trade in prohibited species, such as primates.
- The internet, especially online platforms with little control over what is sold and how it is sold, is confirmed to be the main trade channel for exotic pets.
- Many of these pets end up under the care of rescue centres. Eight out of the top ten of the most frequently offered animals to AAP from Dutch private owners, are among the 55 species found in the trade.
- The research period is according to the traders not the most popular period for the trade in exotic mammals. Therefore, the number of exotic mammal species traded is likely to be higher on an annual scale.
- Impulsive purchasing of exotic pets was discouraged in the two selected pet shops. Customer information in pet shops is much better than in the other channels.

³ One pet shop had been considered for the study but not selected after they claimed not to sell exotic animals to private individuals. However, they were later present at Exopet Houten, presumably dealing with private owners.



RECOMMENDATIONS

The trade in exotic mammal species that are not suitable as pets is flourishing in the Netherlands, with potential for growth. The negative impacts of this trade, for animals, humans and the environment, are likely to keep increasing unless preventive legislation is introduced and properly enforced. Rescue centres like AAP will never be able to take in all animals discarded from this trade, as the rescue requests consistently and increasingly surpass the available capacity⁴. A Positive List of species allowed as pets based on their suitability as such is imperative. It is the most com-

prehensive, effective, concise, transparent, enforceable and economically feasible way of regulating the trade and keeping of exotic animals as pets.

At the moment of writing, the Dutch Ministry of Agriculture, Nature and Food Quality is finalizing a new assessment methodology which will provide the basis for the drafting and implementation of a new Positive List for mammals in the Netherlands. The results of this investigation clearly underscore the urgent need for this instrument.

⁴ In 2018 AAP received 1377 rescue requests for exotic mammals, out of which 'only' 95 could be taken in due to severe limitations in the available resources.

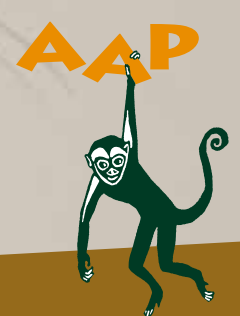


Annex I Exotic mammal species found for sale in the Netherlands (all 6 channels from February – May 2019)

	Taxonomy name	Species name	Dutch name
1	<i>Acomys dimidiatus</i>	Eastern spiny mouse OR Arabian spiny mouse	Sinaïstekelmuis
2	<i>Aonyx cinerea</i>	Asian small-clawed otter	Kleinklauwotter
3	<i>Atelerix albiventris</i>	Four-toed hedgehog	Witbuikegel
4	<i>Ateles fusciceps</i>	Brown-headed spider monkey	Bruinkopslingeraap
5	<i>Bos grunniens</i>	Yak	Jak
6	<i>Callosciurus prevostii</i>	Prevost's squirrel	Prevost eekhoorn
7	<i>Camelus bactrianus</i>	Bactrian camel	Kameel
8	<i>Camelus dromedarius</i>	Dromedary	Dromedaris
9	<i>Cavia porcellus</i> (varieteit)	Skinny pig, skinny cavia or Baldwin	Naaktcavia of skinny cavia
10	<i>Cebuella pygmaea</i>	Pygmy marmoset	Dwergzijdeaapje
11	<i>Cebus capucinus</i>	Capuchin monkey	Kapucijnaap
12	<i>Civettictis civetta</i>	African civet	Afrikaanse civetkat
13	<i>Chinchilla lanigera</i>	Chinchilla	Chinchilla
14	<i>Cynomys ludovicianus</i>	Black-tailed prairie dog	Zwartstaartprairiehond
15	<i>Dasyprocta azarae</i>	Azara's agouti	Azara's agoeti
16	<i>Dolichotis patagonum</i>	Patagonian mara	Mara
17	<i>Echinops telfairi</i>	Lesser hedgehog tenrec	Kleine egeltenrek
18	<i>Equus burchellii</i>	Burchell's zebra	Steppezebra
19	<i>Felis domesticus</i> / <i>Felis silvestris</i> x <i>Leptailurus serval</i>	Savannah cat (HYBRID)	Savannahkat
20	<i>Felis domesticus</i> x <i>Prionailurus bengalensis</i>	Bengal cat (HYBRID)	Bengaal
21	((<i>Felis domesticus</i> / <i>Felis silvestris</i> * <i>Lepitailurus serval</i>) * (<i>felis domesticus</i> * <i>prionailurus bengalensis</i>))	Savannah cat * Bengal cat (HYBRID)	Savannah cat * Bengal cat
22	(<i>Felis domesticus</i> * <i>prionailurus bengalensis</i>) * <i>Felis catus</i>	Cheetoh (Bengal cat * Ocicat) (HYBRID)	Cheetoh (Bengaal * Ocicat)
23	<i>Genetta genetta</i>	Common genet	Gewone genetkat
24	<i>Gerbillus cheesmani</i>	Cheesman's gerbil	Cheesman's gerbil
25	<i>Graphiurus murinus</i>	Woodland dormouse	Penseelstaartslaapmuis
26	<i>Helogale parvula</i>	Common southern dwarf mongoose	Dwergmangoest
27	<i>Hemiechinus auritus</i>	Long-eared hedgehog	Grootooregel
28	<i>Herpestes javanicus</i>	Javan Mongoose OR small Asian mongoose	Indische mangoeste

Annex I Exotic mammal species found for sale in the Netherlands (all 6 channels from February – May 2019)

	Taxonomy name	Species name	Dutch name
29	<i>Herpestes ichneumon</i>	Egyptian mongoose	Egyptische mangoeste
30	<i>Jaculus jaculus</i>	Lesser Egyptian jerboa	Kleine woestijnspringmuis
31	<i>Lama glama</i>	Llama	Lama
32	<i>Lemniscomys barbarus</i>	Barbary striped grass mouse	Zebragrasmuis
33	<i>Leptailurus serval</i>	Serval	Serval
34	<i>Macropus parma</i>	Parma wallaby	Parma wallabie
35	<i>Macropus rufogriseus</i>	Bennett's wallaby	Gewone Bennett-walabie
36	<i>Mephitis mephitis</i>	Striped skunk	Gestreept stinkdier OF Gestreepte skunk
37	<i>Meriones unguiculatus</i>	Mongolian gerbil OR Mongolian jird	Mongoolse renmuis OF Mongoolse gerbil
38	<i>Micromys minutus</i>	Harvest mouse	Dwergmuis
39	<i>Microtus guentheri</i>	Günther's vole	Mediterrane woelmuis OF Levantijnse woelmuis Of mediterrane veldmuis
40	<i>Monodelphis domestica</i>	Gray short-tailed opossum	Huisbuidelspitsmuis
41	<i>Mus Minutoides</i>	African pygmy mouse	Afrikaanse dwergmuis
42	<i>Mustela lutreola</i>	European mink	Europese Nerts
43	<i>Octodon degus</i>	Degu	Degoe
44	<i>Pachyuromys duprasi</i>	Fat-tailed gerbil	Dikstaartmuis OF Dikstaartgerbil
45	<i>Petaurus breviceps</i>	Sugar glider	Suikereekhoorn
46	<i>Phodopus campbelli</i>	Campbell's dwarf hamster	Campbelli dwerghamster
47	<i>Phodopus roborovskii</i>	Roborovski hamster	Woestijndwerghamster OF Roborovski dwerghamster
48	<i>Phodopus sungorus</i>	Djungarian hamster OR winter white dwarf hamster	Russische dwerghamster
49	<i>Sciurus variegatoides</i>	Variiegated squirrel	Grote gevlekte boomeekhoorn
50	<i>Sekeetamys calurus</i>	Bushy-tailed jird OR bushy-tailed dipodil	Pluimstaartgerbil
51	<i>Suricata suricatta</i>	Suricate	Stokstaartje
52	<i>Tamias swinhoi</i>	Swinhoe's striped squirrel	Chinese gestreepte boomeekhoorn
53	<i>Thallomys paedulus</i>	Acacia rat	Thallomys paedulus
54	<i>Vicugna pacos</i>	Alpaca	Alpaca
55	<i>Vulpes lagopus</i>	Arctic fox, OR blue fox OR White fox	Poolvos



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