THE HUMANE SOCIETY
OF THE UNITED STATES

February 16, 2024

Representative Judy Aron, Chair
House Committee on Environment and Agriculture
The General Court of New Hampshire
107 North Main St
Concord, NH

Chair Aron, Vice Chair Creighton, and members of the House Committee on Environment and Agriculture,

On behalf of the Humane Society of the United States and our New Hampshire members, we respectfully request that members of the New Hampshire House of Representatives **oppose House Bill 1325-FN, which would allow private ownership of small-tailed monkeys, raccoons, foxes, otters, skunks, and kangaroos.**

House Bill 1325-FN would allow individuals to keep wild animals as pets, specifically small-tailed monkeys, raccoons, foxes, otters, skunks, and kangaroos. We share the concerns of the Association of Zoos and Aquariums that wild animals should not be kept as pets because the practice is inhumane for the animal, dangerous to people, and supports a cruel industry. Similarly, the National Association of State Public Health Veterinarians does not recommend ownership of non-domesticated animals by the general public "because of the potential for human injury or disease as well humane considerations for the animals."[1]

Individuals who lack the expertise and resources to provide proper care often buy exotic pets on a whim at exotic pet stores and expos, from out of state online dealers, and at cruel exotic animal auctions. When these still-wild animals inevitably become too complex to care for, too difficult to handle, or simply too smelly, noisy, destructive, or aggressive, owners abandon exotic pets, turn them loose where they will either perish or threaten native ecosystems, or lock them in a cage where they suffer from neglect.

Wild animals kept as pets frequently suffer from a poor quality of life. They are typically kept in a barren environment that deprives them of the ability to express natural behaviors and where they suffer from insufficient exercise, poor nutrition, inadequate veterinary care, boredom, and improper social groupings.

[1] "Comments from the National Association of State Public Health Veterinarians (NASPHV) on 'Proposed Revision of HHS/CDC Animal-Importation Regulations'", November 30, 2007, https://www.nasphv.org/Documents/CorrespondenceANPRM-Exotic.pdf

Rabies Vector Species

Besides the physical dangers of bites and scratches, the species listed in this bill present serious zoonotic disease risks. For example, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention categorizes raccoons, skunks, and foxes as among the wild animal species that most commonly carry rabies. Further, no rabies vaccine is legally approved for use in captive wild animals.

In November 2023, three state agencies in Michigan, working with health departments across the state, were required to alert residents who had purchased skunks from a Michigan breeder that a skunk, sold by this breeder, had tested positive for rabies.[2] The health agency warned that even if purchasers had their pet skunk vaccinated for rabies, they could still be at risk as "there is insufficient evidence on the effectiveness of rabies vaccine in skunks." Because rabies is fatal to humans once someone becomes ill with the disease, the agency attempted to reach individuals who had purchased the animals. The extraordinary effort associated with this event for a single animal likely cost significantly more than the $10,000 annual fiscal impact estimated in New Hampshire's bill. Further, if someone were exposed to rabies, the lifesaving shots they would require could cost as much as $10,000.[3]

Painful surgical mutilations to facilitate the pet trade

Some wild animals are subjected to painful surgical mutilations, such as declawing, tooth extraction, and scent gland removal, just to make it easier for people to handle them, and this is true of skunks bred for the pet trade. The U.S. Department of Agriculture documented that an Ohio wild animal breeder and dealer who bred and sold raccoons, skunks, foxes, lemurs, and squirrels, performed surgical procedures on skunks by removing their scent glands without general anesthesia, pain control, veterinary supervision, and using dirty instruments in a non-sterile room.[4]

Kangaroos

Kangaroos are growing in popularity in the exotic pet trade and so are the problems associated with keeping them, particularly escapes. Nearly half of the 46 kangaroo, wallaby, and wallaroo escapes documented by HSUS since 2018 involved animals who were apparently kept as pets. These animals may never be found or are sometimes found dead. It is also not unusual for the local police and animal control to expend countless resources attempting to locate and capture escaped kangaroos. For example, in 2020, an 8-month-old kangaroo purchased as a pet a day earlier from a breeder in Washington escaped from a van he was being kept in. After a 7-hour search that included using a drone and going door-to-door, police found the kangaroo in what they described as "pretty bad shape" in a neighbor's carport and transported the kangaroo to an animal hospital.

With their long, muscular tail, powerful hind legs, and dagger-like toenails that can inflict serious injury to people, kangaroos can be quite dangerous. In 2017, a little girl visiting an Alabama petting zoo learned how dangerous kangaroos can be when one grabbed her through the fence and started biting her head,

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[2] Michigan departments of Health and Human Service, "State warns Michigan residents about possible rabies exposure from skunks purchased from Rose's Skunks or Chesterfield Township/New Baltimore location," December 6, 2023. https://www.michigan.gov/mdhhs/inside-mdhhs/newsroom/2023/12/06/skunk-rabies-case.

[3] Sarah Kliffsarah, "Why a simple, lifesaving rabies shot can cost $10,000 in America; Untreated rabies is always fatal — but key drugs leave families with thousands in medical debt," Vox, February 7, 2018.

[4] U.S. Department of Agriculture, Inspection Reports, Craig Kokas, license # 31-A-0031, September 16, 2021, August 31, 2022.

causing lacerations that required 14 stitches.[5] In another case, a visitor went to an urgent care center to receive a tetanus toxoid vaccine after being bitten while petting a young kangaroo. And, an Ohio man was hospitalized following a 15-minute attack by his 6-foot tall, 200-pound kangaroo.

Kangaroos require special diets and can experience a variety of serious ailments in captivity. Lumpy jaw is a relatively common bacterial infection in captive kangaroos. This deadly and highly contagious disease is difficult to treat and can be caused by overcrowding, stress, poor hygiene, poor diet, and cold climates. Other problems associated with keeping kangaroos as pets include gastrointestinal obstruction due to ingestion of foreign material, injuries from running into walls and furniture, attacks from predators, salmonellosis, obesity, and pneumonia.[6] And dozens of kangaroos and wallabies have died from toxoplasmosis (which can be transmitted by cats) at zoos in seven states.[7] Kangaroos are highly social, wide-ranging, active, and curious animals. They can reach speeds of up to 43 miles per hour and are adept swimmers. They communicate by nuzzling and touching each other and often engage in play. Keeping them as pets denies all their natural and complex needs.

Otters

Otters are among the captive animals in the U.S. that have been infected with COVID-19. As a result, the U.S. Department of Agriculture has advised licensed facilities, such as zoos, to discontinue public contact with otters and other COVID-susceptible species, which clearly suggests that keeping otters as pets puts the otters at risk as well as people living in and visiting the household. Otters can also transmit dangerous bacteria such as *Salmonella* and *Streptococcus phocae* to people and other animals. Asian small-clawed otters, often seen in the exotic pet trade, are semi-aquatic animals who require a pool, substantial space, areas for climbing and digging, and companionship. They are noisy, aggressive (otters used for public handling at exotic animal pettings zoos have injured at least 19 people between 2019 and 2022), and destructive animals who smear feces to mark their territory.[8] There have also been reports of otters dying from the stress of transport[9] and handling by people.[10]

Monkeys

Primates fall under five categories: great apes, lesser apes, Old World monkeys, New World monkeys, and prosimians. It is unclear what is meant by "small tailed monkeys" in HB 1325-FN, but primatologists agree that no species of primate is suitable for keeping as a pet.[11] Primates are proportionately much stronger than people and, as a result, even smaller species can inflict serious injury. Primates can also

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[5] Video of the Alabama incident can be seen here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y_bIAYaEN8s.
[6] Cathy A. Johnson-Delaney, DVM, Dipl ABVP, "Practical Marsupial Medicine," Association of Exotic Mammal Veterinarians (AEMV) Sessions, Session #130, 2006 Proceedings.
[7] Mariano Carossino et al., "Pathologic and immunohistochemical findings in an outbreak of systemic toxoplasmosis in a mob of red kangaroos," *J Vet Diagn Invest.* (2021), Vol. 33(3) 554–565, available at https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC8120092/; "Vaccine made in Tenn. might save zoo animals," *The News and Observer*, March 8, 1989; "Zoo reopens kangaroo exhibit," *Dayton Daily News*, August 23, 2001; Jeremy D. Bonfiglio, "Veterinarian knows joys and sorrows of caring for animals at Potawatomi Zoo," *The South Bend Tribune*, April 3, 2005; Barb Ickes, "Eight wallabies die at Niabi Zoo," *Quad-City Times*, November 19, 2014; Amanda Oglesby, "Popcorn Park Zoo kangaroo dies," *Asbury Park Press*, February 8, 2016; Douglas Hanks, "Zoo wages battle against stray cats," *Rocky Mount Telegram*, May 18, 2016' Tim Eberly, "Most of Virginia Zoo's wallabies have died," *The Virginian-Pilot*, January 27, 2015.
[8] "Can I Have a Pet Otter?," WebMD, July 13, 2023, https://www.webmd.com/pets/can-i-have-a-pet-otter.
[9] "Another animal death uncovered at SeaQuest," KTNV, June 27, 2019.
[10] U.S. Department of Agriculture, Inspection Report, John Mark Johnson, 65-C-0566, October 26, 2020.
[11] "Private Ownership of Primates," Position statement by the American Society of Primatologists, amended 3 October 2001.

spread life-threatening diseases—in fact, more than a hundred zoonotic diseases have been identified in primates.[12] Primates, including small monkeys, are incredibly strong and become aggressive, dangerous, and unpredictable when they reach sexual maturity. Extracting their teeth, as many pet owners do, is cruel and no safeguard against injury.

Mother-infant relationships are essential to the healthy physical and psychological development of primate species, yet primates bred for the pet trade are pulled from their mothers when just hours or days old and develop into mentally disturbed individuals with self-destructive and neurotic behaviors. The stress of early parental loss in primates enhances fear and anxiety, increases mood disorders, and impairs cognition.[13] Most pet owners cannot provide these animals with basic care, such as spacious enclosures, the companionship of other nonhuman primates, an appropriate diet, and a stimulating environment. Monkeys are wild animals and keeping them in a home, dressing them in diapers and human clothing, restraining them with a collar and leash, controlling them with electric shocking devices, and treating them like surrogate children won't change that.

In light of the overwhelming public health and safety and animal welfare concerns associated with keeping wild animals as pets, we urge the committee to oppose HB 1325-FN.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

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[12] Sarah Cleaveland, M.K. Laurenson, L.H. Taylor, "Diseases of humans and their domestic mammals: pathogen characteristics, host range and the risk of emergency," *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society B: Biological Sciences.*, 356 (1411), 991-999, 2001.
[13] Karen J. Parker and Dario Maestripieri, "Identifying key features of early stressful experiences that produce stress vulnerability and resilience in primates," *Neuroscience & Biobehavioral Reviews*, Volume 35, Issue 7, June 2011, Pages 1466-1483.