



ADVANCING  
CONSERVATION  
THROUGH  
**EMPATHY FOR  
WILDLIFE™**

# Using Empathy in Wildlife Trafficking and Exotic Pet Education

2025

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## Executive Summary

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Effective empathy practices can be utilized by individuals and organizations to deliver effective messaging related to wildlife trafficking and/or responsible pet ownership education. The content within this toolkit can be used as a framework or guide for individuals and organizations looking to create more robust, empathy-informed, wildlife trafficking and exotic pet ownership educational messaging. Further elaboration on how each practice can be utilized, either through techniques or program resources and templates, can be found in the later pages of this document.

### Framing

*Presenting animals to audiences as individuals with names, personalities and preferences. This includes the words chosen by the interpreter or on the signage, the physical setting, and how interpreters are interacting with an animal.*

- Avoid using the word “it” when talking about an animal. This can unintentionally lead to objectification.
- Share the personal story of the animal(s) and how their lives were impacted by the wildlife trade. What is the role that you and/or your organization play in the animal’s story?

### Modeling

*Acting as role models for guests by serving as examples of how to demonstrate empathy skills and encouraging caregivers to do so as well.*

- Establish yourself and your organization as a trusted source of animal care and conservation knowledge. This may include talking about the training or relationship building you’ve done with the animal(s) and breaking down the animal care standards set by the Association of Zoos and Aquariums (AZA) and demonstrating what that looks like for guests.
- Be aware of how your behaviors, or the behaviors of other staff and guests around or towards an animal, may impact people’s perceptions of appropriate animal interactions. Always respect an animal’s space and prioritize animal choice and control.

### Increasing Knowledge

*Sharing accurate information about animals in an organization’s care.*

- Establish a shared organizational definition of domestication and/or exotic pet.
  - Provide people with questions they can ask breeders or pet stores when acquiring a pet.
  - Provide people with easy-to-follow instructions for identifying trafficked or illegal wildlife products.
  - Build in time to stay up to date on the latest news and research in wildlife trafficking or the pet trade as it relates to animals at your organization to keep yourself informed.
-



## Practice

*Providing a variety of opportunities for guests to exercise empathy skills and receive positive feedback for doing so.*

- Create programs, experiences, and/or resources at your zoo for guests to learn about commonly trafficked animals or items in an engaging way.
- Host a pet surrender event at your zoo or aquarium.
- Encourage and support learning moments.

## Activating Imagination

*Facilitating opportunities for guests to take the perspectives of others.*

- Utilize prompts like “imagine if...”, “what if...”, “how do you think it would feel/must be like...” as long as their addition to the guest interaction is productive and responsible.
- Tell stories from the perspectives of the animal or others involved in the animal’s story, as long as doing so is productive, accurate, and responsible.

## Providing Experiences

*Giving guests opportunities to interact with animals and/or the environment. This can be directly through animal ambassador programs or animal encounters, or indirectly through interactive signage or enrichment creation activities.*

- Create programs or experiences at your zoo for guests to learn about commonly trafficked animals or items in an engaging way.
- Provide opportunities for guests to meet animals at your zoo or aquarium that were involved in the pet trade or trafficked before living at your organization.





## Introduction

The Advancing Conservation through Empathy for Wildlife (ACE for Wildlife™) Network's vision is a "conservation-minded community, motivated by empathy for animals and the environment that sustains them." Through achieving our mission of "sharing knowledge, experiences, and data to drive conservation change" we can: foster empathy for wildlife, promote conservation missions, and motivate their visitors to take conservation action. This resource, created in 2024 – 2025 by the Conservation Action Committee, provides readers with an introduction of the landscape of wildlife-trafficking focused, empathy-informed education in a zoo or aquarium setting.

The ACE for Wildlife Network defines empathy as "a stimulated emotional state that relies on the ability to perceive, understand, and care about the experiences or perspectives of another person or animal".<sup>1</sup> To learn more about the effective empathy practices, we recommend familiarizing yourself with the following resources on the [ACE for Wildlife Network's Resource Library](#):

- Akerman, S. (2019). Best Practices for Building Empathy Through Live Animal Encounters. *Journal of Museum Education*, 44(1), 89–95. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10598650.2018.1496388>
- [Empathy Primer](#), Woodland Park Zoo
- [Empathy Wheel Handout](#), Woodland Park Zoo
- Young, A., Khalil, K. A., & Wharton, J. (2018). Empathy for Animals: A Review of the Existing Literature. *Curator: The Museum Journal*, 61(2), 327–343. <https://doi.org/10.1111/cura.12257>

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\*Indicate that the individual left the committee before the completion of this document.



## Purpose

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Wildlife trafficking, or the illegal wildlife trade, is a global threat to conservation.<sup>2</sup> In this toolkit, we are using the definition used by the International Fund for Animal Welfare (IFAW). It is as follows, “all illegal crimes that involve the illegal trade, smuggling, poaching, capture, or collection of animals that are protected by law”.<sup>3</sup> Because of the threat wildlife trafficking poses to conservation initiatives, zoos and aquariums often have messaging, campaigns, or programs focused on educating their guests on what wildlife trafficking is and/or lead efforts to eliminate the illegal wildlife trade.<sup>4,5</sup> Despite this effort, a variety of factors, including legislative differences at local, national, and international levels, social media, and cultural shifts, make discussing this topic and suggesting effective actions guests can take difficult.

However, it is that nuance that makes the intersection of wildlife trafficking and exotic pet education and empathy practices particularly relevant to those within the ACE for Wildlife Network. Interest in the intersection of wildlife trafficking education and empathy practices became prevalent in the ACE for Wildlife Network in late 2023. Interest was, and remains, focused on the motivators of exotic pet ownership and the role of empathy practices in driving that motivation during a zoo or aquarium visit. In addition to concerns about exotic pets not receiving adequate care from well-meaning individuals, concerns exist across the zoo and aquarium industry about people acquiring illegal and/or endangered animals as pets. To address this, Kelly White-Singleton and Dr. Jeffrey Skibins [wrote a literature review](#) for the ACE for Wildlife Network. To address the continued interest in the topics of responsible (exotic) pet ownership as well as wildlife trafficking education, the Conservation Action Committee created this resource.

This toolkit is not intended to be a comprehensive overview of the scope of wildlife trafficking and/or pet ownership education within the AZA, nor is it intended to provide recommendations for how a zoo or aquarium should approach this topic or more specific issues within it. It is also not intended to replace or duplicate work already being done in AZA through the [Wildlife Trafficking Alliance](#) and [Not a Pet Campaign](#). Instead, the content within this toolkit can be used as a framework or guide for individuals and organizations looking to create more robust, *empathy-informed*, wildlife trafficking and exotic pet ownership educational messaging. Any future Network resources created on these topics should examine specific conservation issues within the larger topic of wildlife trade. If there is a topic you are interested in seeing included in this, or related Network resources, in the future, please contact [empathy@zoo.org](mailto:empathy@zoo.org).





## Goals

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The Conservation Action Committee hopes that usage of this toolkit will help those within the ACE for Wildlife Network understand how effective empathy practices can be applied to guest interactions focused on wildlife trafficking and relevant conservation actions. Their goals for this toolkit are as follows:

- 1** *Help users understand how empathy can inform a zoo or aquarium's wildlife trafficking and/or exotic pet ownership messaging and be a strategy for having those conversations with guests.*
- 2** *Provide users with examples of how effective empathy practices can strengthen wildlife trafficking and/or exotic pet ownership focused messaging and guest interactions.*
- 3** *Provide users with Network supported and external resources on wildlife trafficking and/or exotic pet ownership education.*

## Toolkit Creation Process

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After an initial brainstorming of topics to include, the Conservation Action Committee hosted two listening sessions for Members and Affiliates within the ACE for Wildlife Network to narrow down the toolkit's scope. These listening sessions were facilitated by Bethanie West and Toby Seegert, with notes taken by the Empathy Network Specialist. Individuals who were unable to attend the listening sessions were able to provide their input to the committee via a Google Form. After the listening sessions concluded, notes from each session were shared with the Conservation Action Committee. In the meetings that followed, the committee decided to create an annual expansion of this resource, starting with an introduction to the intersection of empathy practices and wildlife trafficking education messaging.

This narrowed scope for the 2025 edition was for two reasons: to build expertise on the topic and to report from the listening sessions conducted in 2024. The outline of the toolkit was created by Erica Carnes and Kelsey Raffel, with content collaboratively created and reviewed by committee representatives. The final draft of this toolkit was shared with the ACE for Wildlife Network in advance of the 2025 Empathy Summit. During the 2025 Empathy Summit, representatives from the Conservation Action Committee led discussions about the toolkit to gather feedback and expertise on topics to focus on in the resource. In-person Empathy Summit attendees were asked the following:

- 1** **What about this toolkit do you like?**
- 2** **What about this toolkit is unnecessary or would you not use?**
- 3** **What is missing from this toolkit?**
- 4** **Do you have resources that you would like to share for inclusion in the final 2025 edition?**

If there is a topic you are interested in seeing included in this, or related toolkits, in the future, please contact [empathy@zoo.org](mailto:empathy@zoo.org).

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## What is Wildlife Trafficking?

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Throughout this toolkit, we will be using the phrase wildlife trafficking as the umbrella term for various types of wildlife crime that zoos and aquariums address in their conservation messaging. This includes poaching, wildlife smuggling, the illegal animal trade, the capture or collection of wild animals, and the illegal animal parts trade. The committee is working off the following definition of wildlife trafficking:

***Wildlife trafficking is “all illegal crimes that involve the illegal trade, smuggling, poaching, capture, or collection of animals that are protected by law”.***<sup>7</sup>

While the content of this toolkit is focused on the trafficking of animals, wildlife trafficking does and can extend beyond animals to include organisms like plants. Wildlife trafficking is the world’s third-largest illegal trade,<sup>8</sup> touching all parts of the globe, but is pervasive across North America (specifically the United States), Europe, and Asia.<sup>9</sup> The internet provides traffickers access to a worldwide marketplace and opens opportunities for trade with unknowing individuals, particularly people looking for pets. A study conducted by the International Fund for Animal Welfare found 200+ online postings of protected species that were being sold as pets. When compared to a similar report conducted in 2008, data suggests that demand for live animals such as turtles, wild cats, and primates has increased in recent decades.<sup>10,11</sup> This makes wildlife trafficking a relevant topic for zoos and aquariums to address in their conservation education messaging.



## The Importance of Empathy in Wildlife Trafficking Messaging

Because of the complexity of the trade, it can be difficult to figure out your “lane” for wildlife trafficking education. We don’t want to perpetuate harmful or inaccurate assumptions of people fueling the trade, assume ill-intent or blatant ignorance of people purchasing trafficked animals, or shame people who may have inherited now-illegal items from deceased family members. This is where empathy comes in! By applying an empathic lens to our programming, talking points, signage, or the marketing of our events (e.g., [Toss the Tusk](#)), we can welcome people into the conversation as opposed to cutting them out. By applying empathy practices to this topic, we can not only have empathy for the animals who live in our facilities because of wildlife trafficking, but the people impacted by it as well. This will allow us to have more well-rounded, inclusive, and relevant messaging for the communities we reach.

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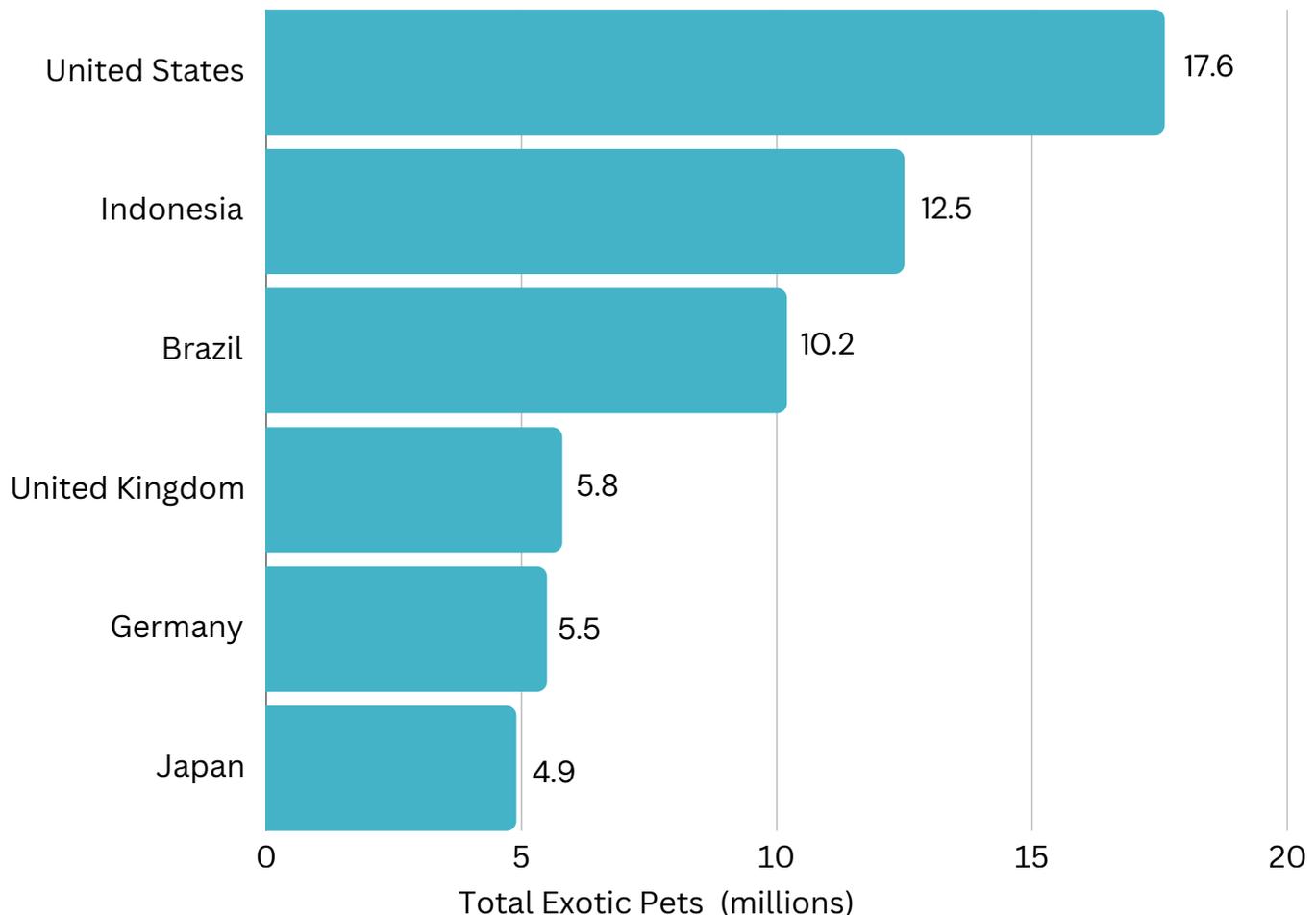


## What does “exotic pet” mean?

We are using the definition of an exotic pet provided by the American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA). The AVMA defines an exotic pet as “a wide range of pet species other than domestic dogs, cats, and equids, which may be native or nonnative to the United States,” (AVMA, n.d.). This is also the definition used in the literature review written by Kelly White–Singleton and Dr. Jeffrey Skibins. It is important to note that the definition above was written to provide guidance on an exotic pet within the United States of America. Thus, definitions of what constitutes an exotic pet globally will differ due to cultural and geographic differences. However, a common theme is that exotic pets are animals that are not domestic dogs or cats.<sup>12</sup> Popular exotic pets vary by country, with animals like hedgehogs being common in the United Kingdom, capybaras being sought after in Brazil, while reptiles and songbirds are highly sought after in the United States and Indonesia respectively.<sup>13</sup>

Ownership of exotic pets is on the rise worldwide. The graphic below from the World Population Review’s December 2024 newsletter shows the six countries with the highest numbers of total exotic pets. The United States has the highest total number of exotic pets, clocking in at 17.6 million (see the graph below from the World Population Review).<sup>14</sup>

**Total Exotic Pets By Country (in millions), Various Sources, 2024**





## The Importance of Empathy in Exotic and Responsible Pet Ownership Messaging

By applying an empathic lens to our programming, talking points, signage, or the marketing of our events (e.g., zoo hosted pet surrender events), we can welcome people into the conversation as opposed to cutting them out. We should also be mindful to avoid hypocrisy in the messaging we provide to guests. Many individuals who work in the zoo or aquarium field own animals that would be classified as exotic pets under the AVMA's definition. In those instances, is it right to tell guests they cannot, or should not, own that same species? With pet-related messaging, it's important to remember that we as educators likely have the same underlying goal as the person who desires the animal as a pet; a healthy and happy life for the animal(s) in question and reciprocal companionship. What likely differs is the level of knowledge and understanding of the nuances of the wildlife trade that makes it possible to own exotic pets. This is where empathy comes in! As conservationists and advocates of animal wellbeing, we can combine our knowledge and compassion to provide guests with ways to make responsible pet ownership decisions that prioritize conservation initiatives and animal/species wellbeing.





# Applying Empathy Practices to Wildlife Trafficking Discussions with Zoo and Aquarium Guests

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## Framing

*Highlight that animals are individuals with their own unique experiences and unique needs.*

By recognizing and highlighting that many animals have their own inner lives, experiences, preferences, and needs like we do, we can help our guests to see them as individuals worth helping, as opposed to a part of a monolithic species. This practice works best with animals that live at your facility because of the wildlife trade, as the connections guests can make with the animal can be immediate and up-close. Some techniques for doing so include:

- 1 Use the animal's name and pronouns like she, he, or they any time you refer to them. Most importantly, avoid the objectifying word "it".**
- 2 Share the personal story of the animal(s) and how their lives were impacted by the wildlife trade. What is the role that you and/or your organization played in the animal's story?**
- 3 When appropriate, make connections between the way that an animal experiences the world with the ways humans do.**

*Address complex questions and topics in age-appropriate ways.*

Topics like wildlife trafficking and responsible pet ownership can be difficult to break down for younger audiences. While responsible pet ownership is an easier topic to parse apart and relate to their lives, wildlife trafficking and its consequences can often seem depressing, daunting, or beyond the comprehension of young children. Framing these topics appropriately for young audiences often means we need to "double dip" into other effective empathy practices. We have included some resources used by the Zoological Society of Milwaukee that utilize framing and activating imagination in the "Activating Imagination and Perspective Taking" section of this toolkit.

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Photo courtesy of Seattle Aquarium

## Examples of framing in signage relevant examples in signage

- News story covering the Los Angeles Zoo's Wildlife Trafficking Signage Installation at Los Angeles International Airport: [LA Zoo Wildlife Trafficking Signage at LAX](#)
- Summary of reasons why animals may live in a zoo: [ZooMT "Where do AZA Animals Come From?" Sign](#)

## Examples of framing in program resources

### Zoological Society of Milwaukee

- [The Story of Penny.docx](#)
  - **Description:** Penny, a Fly River turtle at the Zoological Society of Milwaukee, was rescued from illegal wildlife trafficking after being confiscated at LAX. Her story is featured in the family class How a Zoo Becomes a Home. In this activity, adults read the story of Penny while children illustrate.

### ZooMontana

- [Pet Surrender Examples ZooMontana](#)
  - **Description:** Small table folds were created for their pet rehoming event to showcase different types of surrendered pets that live at ZooMontana and the reasons they don't make good pets.
- [ZooMontana Animal Acquisition Stats](#)
  - **Description:** A visual representation of how the animals at ZooMontana came to live there. This was also used for a pet rehoming event.



## Modeling

### *Ensure wellbeing – why zoos have animals vs anyone being able to have one.*

By communicating all that your organization (and/or you) does to maintain the high standards of animal wellbeing required by AZA, you can establish yourself and your organization as a trusted source of animal care knowledge.

- 1** Establish yourselves, your coworkers, or your organization (the correct person/persons will differ depending on the interaction) as practiced and trained professionals. This can include talking about the training or relationship building you've done with the animal(s) or describing the amount of food that is prepped for and consumed by the animal(s) in a day, as some examples.
- 2** Break down animal care standards set by AZA, particularly those relevant to your current guest interaction, and why those standards are important.
  - It can be helpful to include how these standards have changed in the field over time and why those standards have changed.
  - If possible, use a publicly shareable example of how this has looked at your organization. For example, a common change educators and keepers at Woodland Park Zoo use is the [transition to naturalistic-looking habitats](#); and calling them habitats as opposed to exhibits.
- 3** When ensuring animal wellbeing, assume good intent of the guest you're interacting with. If they are serious about wanting to own (or interact) with the focal species, they likely currently believe that they can provide the care necessary for that animal. Try and redirect their positive emotions into actions more productive for conservation or care of the species (e.g. community science initiatives or volunteer opportunities).

To see an example of what this can look like in static interpretation, see ZooMontana's "Where do AZA Animals Come From" sign in the Framing section.

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***Examine the way that you are interacting with animals in front of guests. Could any of the interactions send mixed messages?***

Be aware of how your behaviors, or the behaviors of other staff and guests around or towards an animal, may impact people's perceptions of appropriate animal interactions. Always try to respect animals' space and prioritize animal choice and control. Below are some tips from ZooMontana on how they monitor their animal interactions.

- 1** Can the animal encounter be facilitated safely in a hands-off manner? If so, prioritize doing so.
- 2** If an animal must be held for an animal encounter, especially with small children, clarify expectations by saying something along the lines of, "Only [Insert handler(s) name(s) here] will be touching/holding [insert animal name here] because we are the only ones trained to do so."
- 3** If someone makes a comment about wanting to touch or pet the animal, respond with something like "Notice how [Insert handler(s) name(s) here] is not petting our guest today. This is because [Insert animal's name] doesn't enjoy being pet like our dogs or cats at home. We want to make sure that we are helping [Insert animal's name here] feel as comfortable with us as possible today."

Considering the impact of your animal interactions can happen both in-person and on social media. Examine the intended photos, videos, and/or captions in your post and ensure that nothing in them could accidentally send unintended messages.



## Increasing Knowledge

***Provide clarity on what it means to be a domesticated pet. We recommend creating a shared definition at your organization.***

It is difficult to find a universally shared definition of domestication or an accessible definition that addresses the relational and genetic nuances of domestication. Additionally, humans are not the only species that have demonstrated behaviors that could be classified as domestication.<sup>15,16</sup> The definition below is an anthropocentric definition of domestication created after referencing multiple sources.<sup>17,18,19,20</sup>

***Domestication is a sustained, multigenerational relationship where humans have exerted control and care over another species to obtain a predictable and/or steady supply of a resource of interest such as food, meat, companionship, and/or labor. This exertion of control and care results in artificial selection, altering the genotypes of the domesticate and thus influencing their physical and/or behavioral phenotypes in ways desirable to humans (e.g. reduced aggression). Domestication should not be confused with taming or habituation. Taming and habituation impact phenotypes (e.g. behaviors) but not genotypes and while habituation can happen to populations, taming is only in reference to an individual.***

***Provide clarity on what an exotic animal is.***

We recommend the definition below, which was used in the literature review done by Kelly White-Singleton and Dr. Jeffrey Skibins in 2024.

***Exotic pet: "a wide range of pet species other than domestic dogs, cats, and equids, which may be native or nonnative to the United States," (AVMA, n.d.).***

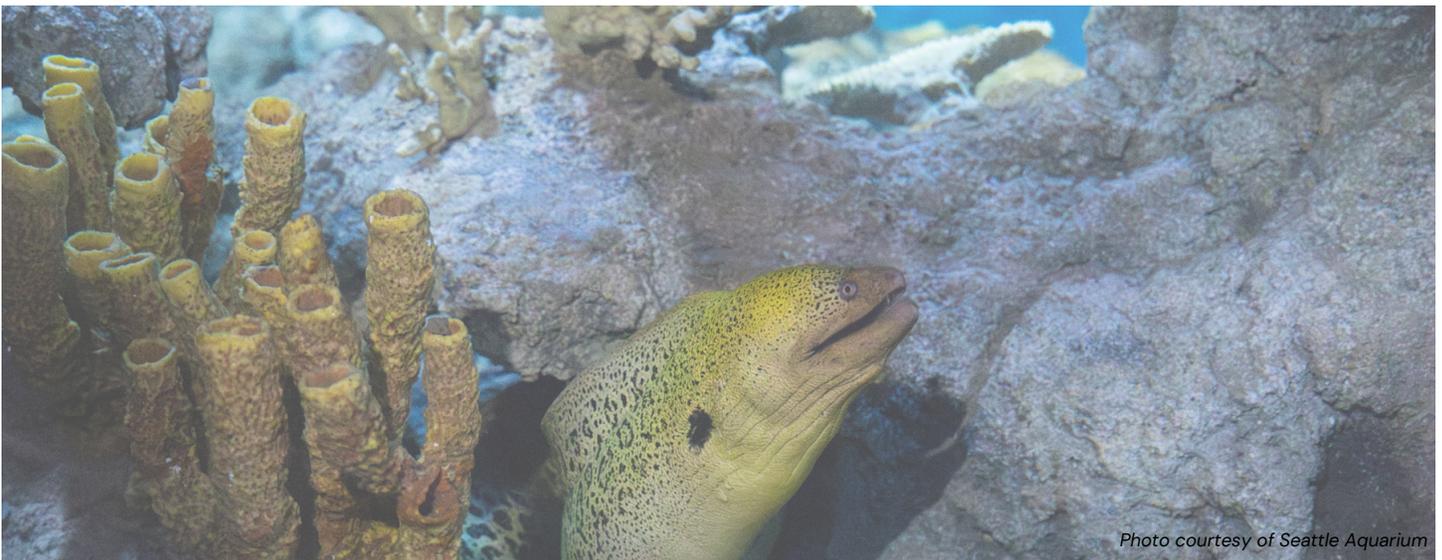


Photo courtesy of Seattle Aquarium



Another way to provide clarity on this would be to create state-specific guides on restricted and prohibited species like those created by the [Invasive Species Action Network](#). The information needed for creating documents like these is publicly available, and they can function similarly to the various animal fact sheets that multiple organizations in the Network have created. Currently, the Invasive Species Action Network has only created these guides for the state of Montana. However, they are open to partnering with zoos and aquariums in the Network to create them for other states. Reach out to Jennifer Riddle ([jennifer@stopais.org](mailto:jennifer@stopais.org)) to learn more.

- [Montana Prohibited Species Guide](#)
- [Montana Controlled Species Guide](#)

For more information on animal fact sheets that have been created in the ACE for Wildlife Network, we recommend you check out these resources:

- [Learning Group: Infusing Empathy Practices into Animal Fact Sheets](#)
  - **Description:** Hear from both new and familiar voices (Henry Vilas Zoo, Conservation Society of California Oakland Zoo, Woodland Park Zoo) as they share their processes of creation and learnings from the use of empathy-infused animal fact sheets at their organization.
- [Empathy Training Toolkit: Empathy Infused Animal Fact Sheets](#) (page 7)
  - **Description:** Four organizations (NEW Zoo & Adventure Park, Point Defiance Zoo & Aquarium, Racine Zoo, ZooMontana) whose fact sheets are included in this toolkit have provided additional information about the content and utilization of their fact sheets to help those who want to create similar documents for their organization.





***Provide people with questions they can ask breeders or pet stores to ensure that they are purchasing a pet that wasn't supplied by the illegal wildlife trade. Below are some examples.***

- 1** How does your store acquire pets?
- 2** What sort of health care has the animal received and can their medical history be provided?
- 3** Is the store licensed? By whom?
- 4** What is the family history of this animal (if they are coming from a breeder)?
- 5** Does your store work or partner with conservation or other animal-focused organizations (e.g. zoos, aquariums, nature centers, etc.)?

For specific resources on increasing people's knowledge about responsible pet purchasing, check out some recommended resources below.

- Henry Vilas Zoo likes to point guests to: [J&R Aquatic Animal Rescue](#)
- Pet Place: [A Guide to Buying from an Ethical Pet Store](#)
- Best Exotic Pet Stores in Texas: [10 Essential Questions to Ask](#)
- International Fund for Animal Welfare: [Test your Knowledge of the Exotic Pet Trade Quiz](#)
- The Spruce Pets: [Types of Exotic Pets](#)
- World Wildlife Fund: [Pet Sustainability Guide](#)

***Provide people with easy-to-follow resources or instructions on how to identify instances of illegally trafficked wildlife products so they don't accidentally purchase animal goods or participate in unethical animal experiences on vacations.***

- See Christine Ness describe Minnesota Zoo's lab ivory program under Providing Experiences.
  - Create state-specific guides on restricted and prohibited species like those created by the [Invasive Species Action Network](#) linked on the previous page.
-



## Providing Experiences

*Create programs or experiences at your zoo for guests to learn about commonly trafficked animals or items in an engaging way.*

Below are some examples of programs at Partner Organizations that do just that.

- **Minnesota Zoo Ivory Lab**
  - [Presentation from Christine Ness](#) (5:04-16:12)
  - [Minnesota Zoo Ivory ID activity](#)
  - [Feature in AZA Connect](#)
- Program and outreach resources.
  - See the ZooMontana pet surrender examples under “Framing”.



## Practice

***Provide people with easy-to-follow resources or instructions on how to identify instances of illegally trafficked wildlife products so they don't accidentally purchase animal goods or participate in unethical animal experiences on vacations.***

- Encourage guests to be savvy travelers by creating organization-relevant lists of commonly trafficked items or illegal souvenirs. [This resource from AZA](#) is a great starting point. Are there stories you can tell that tie any of the items or activities on that list to animals at your zoo or aquarium? If so, tell those stories as a part of your programs and conservation calls to action using other effective empathy practices.
- Encourage guests to take the pledge linked on the web page above! Are there ways you or them can share the pledge publicly?

***Encourage responsible pet ownership.***

- [Responsible Pet Ownership - American Veterinary Medical Association](#)
- See the ZooMontana pet surrender examples under "Framing."

***Host a pet surrender event at your zoo or aquarium.***

ZooMontana partnered with the Invasive Species Action Network and hosted a pet surrender event at their zoo. Linked below is the Action Plan document that they used to prepare for the event and includes information such as the types of species expected, pre-event registration recommendations, timeline of operations, and post-event action items.

[Plan of Action: Billings Pet Rehoming Event](#)

At this event they received three glofish, two African dwarf frogs, one unidentified snail, and one red-eared slider turtle. All pets were successfully rehomed!





## Activating Imagination and Perspective Taking

When combined with other effective empathy practices, activating imagination or perspective taking can be a powerful tool for educating people about complex topics. This section includes a variety of resources created and used by the Zoological Society of Milwaukee that activate this effective empathy practice!

- [Choose your Character!](#)
  - **Description:** Perspective-taking activity for children to understand the consequences of different choices from the Zoological Society of Milwaukee from the “How A Zoo Becomes a Home” program. This activity prompts the participant to take the perspective of a farmer who is impacted by wildlife activity on their land and/or a parent seeking a pet for their family.
- Book: [Pat the Great Cat](#)
  - **Description:** This is a children’s book about a “problem” jaguar that came to live at the Milwaukee County Zoo.
- [#Pets](#)
  - **Description:** This Kohl’s Wild Theater Program follows a dog and cat who run a meme site and learn about the illegal pet trade after ordering a cotton top tamarin online to try to boost page views.
  - [Accompanying Conservation Action Guide](#). Page 13 of this resource highlights how to navigate good and bad information online in relation to wild animals.
- [An Elephant Never Forgets](#)
  - **Description:** This Kohl’s Wild Theater Program follows a young elephant on a journey to return to their herd after being separated from their mother during an ambush by humans. They meet a rhino whose horn was removed by conservationists and lost his mother to poachers.





## How can you evaluate your impact?

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Evaluating your programs, messaging, or initiatives can help you determine if the work is having the impact you intended. There are a variety of empathy-related evaluation tools created and used by folks across the ACE for Wildlife Network. Many of the resources are adaptable and can be used by anyone regardless of their prior evaluation experience.

- [2025 Empathy Evaluation Toolkit](#)
  - **Description:** The instruments included can be used as is or adapted to meet the unique needs of the program, project, or experience being evaluated. The goal of this toolkit is to serve as a resource for all organizations and individuals interested in evaluating their use of empathy effective practices and/or their impact on audiences' empathy for wildlife, regardless of evaluation capacity or prior experience.
- Other empathy evaluation resources
  - [Empathy Evaluation Coffee Chat](#)
    - **Description:** Coffee chat attendees shared and discussed empathy-related evaluation tools.
  - [Learning Group: Introduction to Empathy Evaluation](#)
    - **Description:** Evaluators across the Network discuss different approaches to evaluating empathy practices, share examples and findings from evaluations they've conducted, and speak to the future of empathy evaluation and their organizations.





## Additional Resources

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### Wildlife Trafficking Alliance

- [Wildlife Trafficking Alliance, AZA](#)

### Responsible Pet Ownership & the AZA Not A Pet Campaign

- American Veterinary Medical Association: [Guidelines for Responsible Pet Ownership](#)
- Association of Zoos & Aquariums: [Not a Pet Campaign](#)
- Global Pets: [The Business of Exotic Pets: An Update](#)

### Wildlife Ownership Laws in the United States

- Animal Ethics: [Introduction to the legal consideration of wild animals in the United States](#)
- FindLaw: [Animal Ownership Laws by State](#)
- United States Fish & Wildlife Service:
  - [Laws & regulations](#)
  - [Library: Laws, agreements, and treaties](#)
  - [Rules and regulations open for public comment](#)

### Articles, News, and Reports on Wildlife Trafficking

- AZA: [Freshwater Turtle News Release](#)
  - This news release summarizes the threat of collection and trafficking of freshwater turtles in the US.
- The Collaborative to Combat the Illegal Trade in Turtles (CCITT): [CCITT](#)
  - They are a SAFE–North American Turtles partner and an initiative of PARC (Partners in Amphibian and Reptile Conservation)
- Mongabay: [Wildlife Trafficking News Article Library](#)
- National Geographic: [How you can help fight the illegal cheetah cub trade](#)
- United Nations: [World Wildlife Crime Report \(2024\)](#)
- United States Department of Justice: [Wildlife Trafficking News Article Library](#)

### Recommended papers on wildlife trafficking

Naito, R., Chan, K. M. A., & Zhao, J. (2024). Combating the exotic pet trade: Effects of conservation messaging on attitudes, demands, and civic intentions. *Conservation Science and Practice*, 6(2), e13078. <https://doi.org/10.1111/csp2.13078>

Rank, S., Nageotte, N. L., Pletcher, N., & Jackson, M. (2023). Educating the Public about Illegal Wildlife Trade: Commonalities in Investigating Messages for Visitors. *Journal of Museum Education*, 48(3), 315–328. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10598650.2023.2166732>

Sas–Rolfes, M., D. W. S. Challender, A. Hinsley, D. Veríssimo, and E. J. Milner–Gulland. “The Illegal Wildlife Trade: Scale, Processes, and Governance.” *Annual Review of Environment and Resources* 44 (2019): 202–203.

Schroepfer, K. K., Rosati, A. G., Chartrand, T., & Hare, B. (2011b). Use of “entertainment” chimpanzees in commercials distorts public perception regarding their conservation status. *PLoS ONE*, 6(10). <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0026048>

### Other, related articles

[The Conversation: Even scientists take selfies with wild animals. Here’s why they shouldn’t](#)

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## Notes

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1. Young et al., "Empathy for Animals: A Review of the Existing Literature"
  2. <https://www.aza.org/wta-illegal-wildlife-trade>
  3. <https://www.ifaw.org/journal/wildlife-crime-terms-definitions>
  4. Rank et al., "Educating the Public about Illegal Wildlife Trade: Commonalities in Investigating Messages for Visitors"
  5. White-Singleton and Skibins, "Exotic Pet Ownership: Drivers and the Role of the Zoo Experience". <https://www.aceforwildlife.org/resource/learning-group-influencing-factors-of-exotic-pet-ownership/>
  6. <https://www.ifaw.org/journal/wildlife-crime-terms-definitions>
  7. Ibid.
  8. <https://www.interpol.int/en/News-and-Events/News/2022/Stepping-up-the-global-fight-against-wildlife-crime-through-a-united-response>
  9. <https://globalinitiative.net/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/Wingard-and-Pascual-Digital-Dangers-Catch-me-if-you-can-July-2018.pdf>.
  10. <https://www.ifaw.org/resources/digital-markets-wildlife-trafficking-report>
  11. Wildlife Confiscations Network Media Talking Points
  12. White-Singleton and Skibins, "Exotic Pet Ownership: Drivers and the Role of the Zoo Experience".
  13. World Population Review Newsletter
  14. Ibid.
  15. Zeder, "Core questions in domestication research".
  16. Purugganan, "What is domestication?"
  17. Ibid.
  18. Ibid.
  19. White-Singleton and Skibins, "Exotic Pet Ownership: Drivers and the Role of the Zoo Experience".
  20. American Natural History Museum, "What is domestication?"
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Global Initiative against Transnational Organized Crime, Catch me if you can: Legal challenges to illicit wildlife trafficking over the internet (2018), <https://globalinitiative.net/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/Wingard-and-Pascual-Digital-Dangers-Catch-me-if-you-can-July-2018.pdf>

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Stepping up the global fight against wildlife crime through a united response. INTERPOL. (n.d.). <https://www.interpol.int/en/News-and-Events/News/2022/Stepping-up-the-global-fight-against-wildlife-crime-through-a-united-response>

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World Population Review Newsletter. (2024, December 27). Global Pet Culture: From Dogs to Sacred Cows.

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