

Little Shops of Sorrows

STORIES OF ANIMAL SUFFERING
IN U.S. PET SHOPS



A critically ill parakeet, one eye caked in blood, hidden away in a feces-encrusted cage under a sink, unlikely to receive the veterinary care he desperately needs...



Puppies confined to a wet outdoor pen, ribs and backbones protruding, eyes running...



Guinea pigs covered in scabs and abrasions, missing large amounts of fur from their bodies, languishing in barren cages...

A lizard scratching and pacing in her glass-walled prison for months on end...



Rats, mice, and snakes literally warehoused in plastic storage boxes...

The depictions of animal suffering on the previous page are from the eyewitness reports of an investigator with the Animal Protection Institute (API) who went undercover into more than 60 pet shops in California during the spring of 2005.



The purpose of this groundbreaking investigation, part of API's new *Little Shops of Sorrows* campaign, was to shine a light on the true — and truly appalling — practices of pet shops that sell animals. In documenting the conditions in which animals are kept in pet shops, API aims to change the way such stores do business and to protect animals caught up in the cruel pet trade.

Sadly, scenes involving sick and neglected animals, animals in psychological distress, unsuitable and unsanitary conditions, and ill-informed store employees are not isolated incidents.

Across California and around the nation, animals sold in pet shops suffer from inadequate care and housing, poor handling by employees, and the cruelty inherent in treating sentient beings as mere merchandise.

The retail sale of live animals is a profitable industry that affects countless animals. According to the American Pet Products Manufacturers Association, sales of "pets" totaled \$1.6 billion in 2004.

The cost of this trade in terms of animal welfare is staggeringly high. To be successful, pet stores, like other businesses, try to keep to a minimum costs associated with merchandise maintenance, storage, and loss. But when the merchandise consists of living, feeling beings, concerns about humane treatment naturally arise.

API'S LITTLE SHOPS OF SORROWS CAMPAIGN:

- Includes publication of a groundbreaking report and documentary film on how animals fare in pet shops
- Reveals the results of our undercover investigation into more than 60 California pet shops
- Provides an overview of how the law protects — and fails to protect — animals sold in pet shops
- Features a "Pet Shop Action Pack," complete with information on state pet shop laws, pet shop checklist, and other ways advocates can help animals
- Begins development of a national database of conscientious pet supply retailers that do not sell live animals
- Charts a course for the future with specific recommendations for lawmakers, regulators, the pet industry, and consumers

RETAIL: AN UGLY REALITY

As an organization dedicated to protecting animals from abuse and exploitation, API routinely receives calls from concerned citizens around the country regarding conditions in their local pet shops. Now, armed with footage, documentation, and eyewitness reports from our undercover investigation, we're poised to make a real difference in the way animals sold in pet shops are treated.

In 2005, API went undercover to document conditions in 64 randomly-selected pet stores in California that sold live animals. The stores were located in four major metropolitan areas: Sacramento, San Francisco, Los Angeles, and San Diego.

The investigation revealed widespread violations of California law designed to protect animals sold in pet shops. It also highlighted how many of the state's laws fail to actually protect animals by, for example, not addressing key welfare issues or by exempting many of the species sold in pet shops.

In a retail environment, animals must be treated like commodities in order for the store to realize a profit. The cost of veterinary care for sick and injured animals can easily exceed the animals' commercial value, and providing enrichment or adequate cage space cuts into profits, if only marginally.

As a result, pet shop owners or managers have the often conflicting responsibilities of making a store profitable and caring for animals. Similarly, the future well-being of the animals that pet shops sell seems to be of little or no concern, so long as the asking price is paid. This means that thousands of reptiles, exotic birds, and other animals are sold to people who will be unable to provide lifetime care and meet the unique needs of these animals.

The fact is, when retailers are faced with a choice between endangering profits and endangering animals, the bottom line usually wins. So when animals are exploited for commercial gain, suffering is often involved.

API INVESTIGATION REVEALS WIDESPREAD ANIMAL WELFARE PROBLEMS IN PET SHOPS

During the course of our investigation into 64 California pet shops, API found abundant evidence of animal suffering. Here are some "lowlights" of our operation:

- 66% of stores failed to provide at least one form of environmental enrichment (exercise wheels, hide boxes, etc.) to one or more of the animals in their care.
- 64% of stores failed to provide API's investigator with written information on the care and housing requirements for the animals they sell. California law requires that such information sheets be provided to consumers.
- 44% of stores had at least one animal who was sick, injured, or showed signs of neglect.
- 44% of stores had at least one animal who showed signs of psychological distress.
- 39% percent of stores failed to provide sufficient water and/or nutritionally adequate food for animals.
- 37% of stores had one or more animals maintained in an enclosure that was too small or too crowded for the animals to move about comfortably or to avoid social aggression from cage mates.
- 32% of stores investigated maintained animals in cages with unsanitary conditions, including feces accumulation at the bottom of cages and feces-encrusted perches in bird enclosures.
- 25% of stores did not provide animals with sanitary food or water. Water and food bowls were often contaminated with feces or mold.
- 12% of stores had unweaned parrots on the premises.



API'S RECOMMENDATIONS

API was shocked by what we found in the course of this investigation: illness, injury, and neglect, and animals in overcrowded and unsanitary conditions, denied veterinary care, languishing in barren cages.

What is more shocking is that this mistreatment occurred in public view. API found these conditions in random pet stores in average cities across California. If this is what the industry finds acceptable to show the public, we can only imagine the horror behind the scenes.

The retail sale of "pets" is a billion-dollar-a-year industry. Our investigation shows that it is the animals that really pay the price.

The lessons learned from API's investigation are clear: *the law is not working to protect animals in pet shops.*

Three things must follow from this investigation:

- **The law must be improved.**
- **Existing laws must be enforced.**
- **Consumers must use their power to end the suffering.**



THE LAW NEEDS TO CHANGE

We call on legislators to improve the law. Pet shop laws must be detailed enough to provide pet shop owners with proper guidelines for treatment of animals in their care and for law enforcement officials to be able to correct problems or confiscate sick and injured animals from stores.

Stronger laws are not enough, however. We also call on humane law enforcement authorities to strongly enforce existing laws. For any law to be effective, it must be actively enforced. By investigating complaints promptly, citing pet shops that fail to comply with the law, and confiscating sick and injured animals, humane law enforcement can play a key role in reducing animal suffering in the pet trade.



CONSUMERS CAN TAKE A STAND

API will do what we can to improve the laws and ensure that they are enforced.

The fact is, however, that everyone has the power to effect change for animals like those we found neglected and injured in the course of this investigation.

The messages for consumers are simple:

- **End pet shop cruelty by reporting poor conditions and mistreatment to humane law enforcement.**
- **Support only those stores that do not sell live animals. Ensure that your dollars do not support abuse and neglect.**
- **Adopt your next companion animal from a shelter or rescue group.**

Consumer power can make a difference. Don't buy animals from pet stores that sell animals, and send a message to the pet trade that animals should not pay for industry profit with their lives.

For more information about API's Little Shops of Sorrows campaign, visit www.api4animals.org.

ANIMAL PROTECTION INSTITUTE

Mailing Address: P.O. Box 22505, Sacramento, CA 95822

Street Address: 1122 S Street, Sacramento, CA 95814

Ph. 916.447.3085 • Fx. 916.447.3070 • www.api4animals.org • info@api4animals.org

