

Pets or Food?

Did you know that most rats and mice in pet shops are sold for snake food? Have you ever seen a sign in a pet shop that lists rats by size with different prices? They usually say “small, medium, large, jumbo.” This is for snake owners.

We want to change the way rats and mice are sold in pet shops for three reasons. First, most of the rats sold in pet shops are not meant to be pets, and yet, many of them are sold as pets. This means people are buying poor quality pets, and may be sadly disappointed or heartbroken.

Second, because most rats and mice are sold for snake food, the people who work in pet shops often don't care if they are treated properly. If the rats and mice get sick, the cost to treat them is more than their monetary value, so they rarely get proper care but are left to suffer and die.

Finally, it is inhumane to feed a live animal to another animal. What would you say if live rodents were sold to feed cats? That is unacceptable, and it shouldn't be acceptable to sell live rodents to feed reptiles either.

We want live rats and mice to be sold only as pets, and frozen rodents sold for snake food. Frozen rodents are also better for the snake, since a live rodent can cause severe injuries to a snake. Rodents sold frozen are killed humanely with carbon dioxide at the breeding facility and then frozen. This eliminates any suffering during transportation and feeding reptiles.

If live rats and mice are sold for pets only, they will be more valued, and will hopefully receive the care they deserve. We think this is the only way they will be treated humanely.

Poor Pets

Most rats and mice sold in pet shops are raised in crowded, mass-production facilities like puppy mills. They often don't receive any human handling until they are weaned and so are afraid of people.

Scientific studies have shown that rats raised in small cages without toys aren't as smart as rats raised in larger cages with toys. Rats raised in small cages also tend to have poor bathroom habits, while those raised in large cages can be litter-box trained.

Animals raised in crowded conditions are stressed, which can affect their health later in life. These rodents are often shipped long distances to pet stores, which stresses them even more. If they are purchased as a pet, the trip home is yet another stress. It is very common for pet shop rats to get sick and die soon after going to their new home.



There is no concern for the genetics, health or temperament of these mass-produced rats, and the males are often abnormally aggressive. Frequently, males and females are housed together, ensuring that most of the females will be sold pregnant.

The Importance of Socialization

Animals are socialized by being handled by humans and exposed to human activities. In order to bond to humans and become a quality pet, a baby animal must be held, petted, cuddled, talked to, carried around and exposed to normal human activities and sounds. People naturally do this with puppies and kittens born in a home. It must be done with caged pets too, but often isn't.

Socialization before weaning—ideally from birth—is much more effective than socialization after weaning. (It is a myth that a mother rat or mouse will kill her babies if they are handled.) The more an animal is socialized before weaning, the more trusting, personable, affectionate and cuddly it will be.

Poorly socialized animals are often timid, nervous, and afraid of humans. They

don't want to be petted or held, and can bite and scratch. A feral kitten is one example of a poorly socialized animal. These animals can be "tamed," but they will never be as trusting or cuddly as well-socialized animals.

Rats and mice sold as pets should be bred and raised to be pets, not snake food. They should be genetically selected for good temperament and health, raised in large cages with toys, and receive lots of early human handling.

Is This Practical?

Eighty percent of pet shops already sell frozen rodents for reptile food. But 92% of pet shops still sell live rodents for food, and more than three times as many live rodents are sold for food than frozen rodents. Why? Because that's the way it's always been done. Many snake owners still believe their snakes must eat live rodents, and most pet shops are willing to sell them. We don't think that is a good enough reason.

Most captive snakes are raised on thawed frozen rodents, and it is fairly easy to convert those that weren't. All the snakes commonly sold in pet shops can be trained to eat thawed frozen rodents.

Zoos and professional herpetologists, caring for many different species, feed their snakes thawed frozen rodents. There is no need for pet shops to sell live rodents to feed snakes. It is time to stop this cruel, outdated practice. Snake owners must be educated, and pet shops should be helping with this education.

Is it Really Cruel ?

Constrictor snakes kill rodents by strangling them to death. Zookeeper Louis Daddono, who was constricted by a 22-foot python in 1997, said on the BBC/Animal Planet show *The Big Squeeze* that it felt like suffocating, and "The pain was incredible." Some snake owners will try to stun a rodent before putting it in with the snake, but not always humanely, and this doesn't stop the suffering that can occur before they buy the rodent either.

Pet shops often separate infant mice and rats from their mother to sell for snake food. This is particularly cruel because the babies suffer from cold, hunger, and the pain of a full bladder and bowels, because they can't go to the bathroom by themselves. These cruelties must be stopped.

We Need Your Help

Please help us to improve the quality of pet rats and mice sold in pet shops, and stop the cruel practice of selling live rodents for snake food. You'll find this brochure on our website, or we can send you some to give out to pet shops and people you know. We have other handouts for snake owners. Urge pet shops to stop selling live rodents for snake food, and boycott the ones that refuse.

RATS is a registered non-profit organization and donations (money or items) are tax-deductible as per the law. Federal ID number 37-1460662.

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Are Your Pet Rats All They Could Be?



Are they...

- Personable, forming strong bonds with their humans?
- Gentle, affectionate and cuddly?
- Calm and trusting enough to lay on their backs in your hands?
- Do they beg to come out of their cage to be with you?

If not, find out why inside...