

Helping to prevent the spread of invasive non-native species

Pet Code of Practice

Advice and guidance on the responsible keeping
of non-native pets, for people owning or keeping
pets, including traders



Introduction

What and who does the Code apply to?

The Code applies to anyone owning or keeping a pet, including traders. A pet is any animal kept in the household other than for use as human food. It includes small mammals, birds, reptiles, amphibians, fish and invertebrates such as spiders and stick insects.

Why is a Code needed?

Pets that are released, or escape, into the wild can be a danger to our native wildlife. Invasive non-native species are one of the major threats to native wildlife. They cause a range of problems such as increased predation, disease or even extinction of native species. It is therefore best that pets do not get into the wild. No specimens of any pet should ever be released or allowed to escape.

The no release message applies also to any non native plants you might use for instance in an aquarium or pond (for more information see the Be Plant Wise website).

This Code provides practical guidance to help ensure compliance with the law. For further details see information provided by the Non Native Species Secretariat.

Must I follow the Code?

While the Code isn't a comprehensive guide to relevant law, failure to follow its provisions might leave you open to allegations that you have broken environmental, animal welfare and trading standards laws.



The Code

All owners or keepers

1. Never release pets, or allow them to escape, to the wild (it's cruel as well as dangerous)

Always assume it is against the law to release any pet from captivity or to allow it to escape. Irrespective of where pets escape or are released from, they will be unprepared for life outside of captivity. Most will die of the cold, starvation, disease or be caught by predators. So rather than being given their freedom, most released animals are likely to meet a cruel and untimely death. Being cruel to an animal or neglecting its welfare is a criminal offence.

In addition, you should be aware of the nature of the animals you choose to own and what is required in terms of cages, enclosures, aviaries, ponds or aquariums to ensure that they remain in captivity. If you are unsure, seek advice. You should ensure that any such containment is maintained in good order.

Other techniques such as feather clipping and pinioning may also be used to reduce the chances of an escape. Neutering or maintaining same sex populations may prevent any escaping animals reproducing. Specialist veterinary or expert advice should be sought if these methods are to be used.

2. Make sure nothing else escapes

You should know how to dispose of waste materials such as old bedding or substrate to ensure eggs or the animals you are keeping cannot escape from captivity.

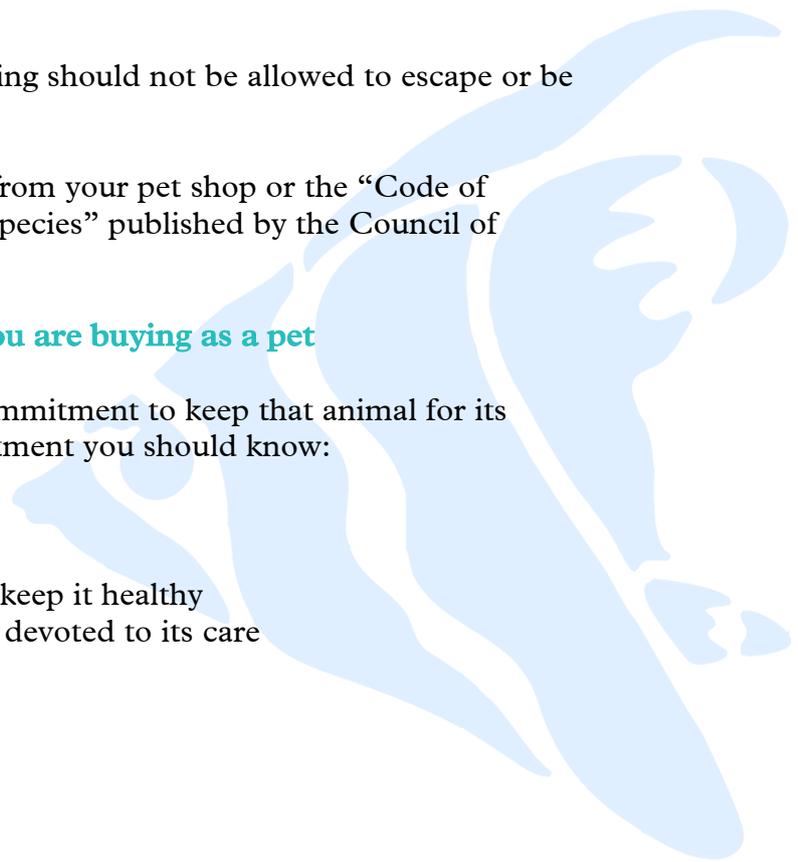
Any food (plant or animal) you are using should not be allowed to escape or be disposed of in the wild.

You can obtain more detailed advice from your pet shop or the “Code of Conduct on Pets and Invasive Alien Species” published by the Council of Europe.

3. Make sure that you know what you are buying as a pet

If you choose to own a pet this is a commitment to keep that animal for its lifetime. Before taking on that commitment you should know:

- ▶ how long it will live
- ▶ how large it will grow
- ▶ what room it will need
- ▶ what equipment it will need to keep it healthy
- ▶ how much time will need to be devoted to its care
- ▶ what it will cost to keep.



If you buy on the internet you must ensure the pet can be legally kept and imported into Britain and, if purchased from outside the country, that it meets all the import rules and is transported in a legal way.

If for any reason you cannot keep your pet for the whole of its life then you should make suitable arrangements to rehome it, making sure of course the new owner has full accurate details of the care it requires. Pet shops, pet societies or rehoming groups may be able to assist. You may need to consider humane euthanasia, for which veterinary advice should be sought.

If you supply pets to anyone else

Elements of this could apply to you if you informally hand animals to someone else or you exchange your pets over the internet.

4. Make sure your customers know what they are buying

Make sure that anyone buying pets from you is fully aware of the commitment required to care properly for that animal for the remainder of its life. Part of that information should include how to keep them in captivity. Ensure your customers are aware of restrictions that apply (if any, for example the Import of live Fish Act, Dangerous Wild Animals Act, Destructive Imported Animals Act or Wildlife Trade Regulations) to the ownership of these species.

When selling pets you must be both clear and honest on all labelling. If you are retailing, you are also required by the Animal Welfare Act to provide care information.

5. Beware hitchhikers

Ensure that any animals (or plants) you buy are as far as possible free of hitchhikers (species that you didn't intend to buy). These could be odd individuals of species mixed in with a batch of a species you did order (for example, parasites or pests of the pets or companion animals) or on their packaging or food.

References

- ▶ Be Plant Wise: <http://www.nonnativespecies.org/beplantwise/>
- ▶ The Non Native Species Secretariat
<http://www.nonnativespecies.org/home/index.cfm>
- ▶ The Council of Europe “Code Of Conduct On Pets And Invasive Alien Species”
<https://wcd.coe.int/com.instranet.InstraServlet?command=com.instranet.CmdBlobGet&InstranetImage=2136028&SecMode=1&DocId=1776136&Usage=2>

