

Original Article

Exotic Animal Trade in India: Legal Framework, Challenges, and Implications

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Received: 08 August 2025

Revised: 17 September 2025

Accepted: 06 October 2025

Published: 29 October 2025

Abstract - India is one of the most biodiverse countries in the world, yet the trade in exotic animals is worsening. The Wildlife Protection Act (WPA) of 1972 safeguarded native species, but it initially did not include non-native animals. This oversight allowed traffickers to exploit a loophole for decades. As India's pet industry grows and borders with Nepal, Myanmar, and Bangladesh remain easy to cross, both the demand and supply for exotic species have surged. Recent efforts to control this trade include the Voluntary Disclosure Scheme (2020) and the addition of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) to the WPA (2022). However, trafficking is still easy due to weak enforcement, poor monitoring, and misuse of regulatory frameworks. This paper examines the real-life situation of the exotic animal trade in India by reviewing the laws, enforcement challenges, and the impact on trafficked animals. The findings reveal that poor care practices, unregulated breeding, and online sales worsen animal suffering and pose ecological risks. These risks include the introduction of invasive species and the spread of zoonotic diseases. The analysis points out the disparity between strong legal frameworks and weak enforcement, showing that the system is not yet capable of addressing the scale of the problem. The study concludes by emphasizing the need for a national registry for exotic pets, improved enforcement strategies, and campaigns to reduce consumer interest in purchasing these animals. To protect biodiversity, animal welfare, and public health in India, it is vital to address these gaps.

Keywords - Animal welfare, Biodiversity conservation, CITES, Exotic animal trade, Illegal wildlife trafficking, Wildlife Protection Act.

1. Introduction

India is home to over 44,500 species of plants and 92,000 species of animals, making it one of the most biodiverse nations in the world (Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India, 2020). To protect these species, the Indian Government introduced the Wildlife Protection Act (WPA) in 1972, which ensured stricter laws for the well-being of endangered species such as snow leopards and cheetahs, among others (Prakash Alizad, 2024). The WPA has schedules for the protection of these species, listing all animals that are safeguarded under this act (Directorate General of Foreign Trade, 2018). While the Wildlife Protection Act played an important role in safeguarding India's native species, it did not originally extend to non-native species, creating a legal grey area that traffickers exploited for decades. Many animals could be owned and traded because of this loophole (Krishnan, 2022). Recent reports indicate that more than 70,000 native and exotic species have been trafficked through air routes, highlighting the scale of the crisis (Wildlife Trust of India, 2023). To address these concerns, the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC) in 2020 launched the

Voluntary Disclosure Scheme (28). The scheme was designed to regulate and verify the possession of exotic animals in India by encouraging voluntary declarations. However, the absence of mandatory documentation for declarations submitted before March 15, 2021, created opportunities for misuse (Shankar, 2021). Smugglers and private owners exploited this provision to legitimize illegally acquired animals. To combat this, in 2022, the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) was incorporated into the Wildlife Protection Act. This was done to ensure that international trade in wildlife is regulated and prevents trade that threatens the survival of endangered species and illegal trade. (*Notification of Rules Framed Under Section 49M of the Wildlife(Protection) Act, 1972 (as amended in 2022)*, n.d.) The present study evaluates the ground realities of animals in trade and the various loopholes that severely hamper the welfare of animals trapped in pet shops, breeding centres, and the entire animal trafficking industry.

In addition to legal frameworks, major human-caused stresses on India's biodiversity include habitat fragmentation,



urbanisation, poaching, and climate change (Saxena & Sharma, 2021). In terms of worldwide profits, wildlife trafficking, in particular, has become one of the most profitable transnational crimes, coming in second only to drug and arms trafficking (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2020). Because the illegal trafficking of exotic species increases the risk of zoonotic disease outbreaks, this trade is not only a conservation issue but also a public health one (Smith & Daszak, 2019). Global concerns about the unregulated wildlife trade were heightened by the COVID-19 pandemic, highlighting the urgent need for improved monitoring systems and stronger enforcement (World Health Organization, 2021).

Despite being significant milestones, there are still a number of issues with the integration of CITES and the WPA. According to studies, a large number of animals involved in trafficking are purposefully mislabelled or misclassified in order to avoid detection (TRAFFIC India, 2022). Due to a lack of resources and training, forest officials' and customs authorities' ability to enforce the law is frequently restricted (Gupta, 2021). Furthermore, it is challenging to trace the origins and welfare conditions of animals in India due to the pet trade's continued growth on unregulated markets and online platforms (Menon, 2022). In urban and semi-urban areas, exotic birds, primates, and reptiles are freely sold despite being illegal (Bose, 2021).

The socioeconomic aspects of human trafficking present another difficulty. Due to unemployment and poverty, many local communities join trafficking and poaching networks (Bawa, 2020). The lack of long-term incentives keeps people returning to the illegal trade, even though some interventions try to offer alternate sources of income (Tiwari & Rao, 2021). Therefore, addressing the underlying causes of supply and demand is just as important as strengthening laws in the fight against human trafficking.

Globally, examples from Latin America, Africa, and Southeast Asia demonstrate that concerted efforts combining technological surveillance, stringent border controls, and community involvement have produced fruitful outcomes (ASEAN Wildlife Enforcement Network, 2019). India could improve conservation results by adopting these practices through international partnerships, blockchain-based tracking of the legal wildlife trade, and digital wildlife crime monitoring systems (Jain, 2021).

The predicament of animals confined in breeding facilities, pet stores, and transit hubs is especially worrisome from a welfare standpoint. Only a small percentage of trafficked animals survive long enough to reach markets, according to research showing extremely high mortality rates during capture and transportation (Shepherd & Nijman, 2020). The very foundation of conservation ethics is undermined by

the fact that those that do survive frequently suffer from severe physical and psychological trauma (Phillips, 2020).

Despite these concerning facts, there is still a dearth of research on the exotic animal trade in India. Smaller mammals, reptiles, and birds are still poorly studied, while the majority of existing research has focused on the poaching of iconic species like tigers, elephants, and rhinos (Banerjee, 2022). By assessing how current laws are being applied in practice, pointing out gaps in the current legal framework, and emphasising the moral and welfare implications of the exotic pet trade in India, this study aims to close that gap.

Though large-scale research has been done on the poaching and trafficking of animals, this research has been focused on international trade and global trade routes. The ground realities of this illegal trade at the domestic level remain rather underexplored. There is a gap that exists when it comes to the research about the trade of these animals through Indian pet shops and the lack of enforcement of regulations. These exotic animals are subjected to poor conditions, no climate control facilities, and poor veterinary care. Despite the presence of legal frameworks like the Wildlife Protection Act (WPA), the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (Pet Shop) Rules, 2018, and the inclusion of CITES under the WPA in 2022, there is a lack of implementation of existing laws when it comes to the trade of exotic animals. This study looks at how pet shops handle, sell, and keep exotic animals. It points out problems with enforcement and concerns about animal welfare. The study highlights the gap between India's strong laws and how they are actually put into practice. It shows that there is an urgent need for better regulation, mandatory registration, public awareness, and stricter enforcement. These steps are crucial to reduce the growing domestic trade in exotic wildlife and to protect biodiversity and animal welfare.

2. Literature Review

The trade of animals across national borders, particularly involving the movement of non-native wildlife species, is referred to as exotic animal trade. Over the past 20 years, this trade has gradually expanded in India, where both regulated and unregulated markets have seen the entry of species ranging from exotic birds to reptiles and primates. India has emerged as a popular destination and transit hub in this international trade because of its large territory, expanding pet industry, and porous borders. Though this trade is regulated under CITES (Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora), porous borders allow for the illicit trade of these species.

India's vast consumer market plays a significant role in the global trade of exotic species (Lakshmi et al., 2024). The Indian pet industry is predicted to reach 7 billion dollars by 2028, which shows the growing demand and profitability of

this industry (India Brand Equity Foundation, 2025). India has also become a source and a transit point for trafficking wildlife products in other countries, including China, Southeast Asia, the US, and Europe. As mentioned, India is among the top 20 countries with the highest numbers for animal trafficking (GlobalPETS, 2025). From January 2022 to May 2025, seizure incidents grew annually, with an estimate of 3951 animals seized in 56 wildlife trafficking incidents in 2022 (Shankar, 2023).

With globalisation and improved connectivity, the movement of goods has become easier. At the same time, the exploitation of exotic animals has escalated. The weak law enforcement across the country has created an environment where traffickers can easily trade in native and non-native wildlife species. Porous borders with countries like Nepal, Myanmar, and Bangladesh continue to facilitate smuggling operations, making them key players in wildlife trafficking. This trade occurs through transit points like Guwahati and Dimapur. Illegal trade also occurs through airports in cities like Mumbai, Kolkata, and Chennai, where there is extensive smuggling of macaws and parakeets.

The Wildlife Protection Act safeguards animals native to India but does not regulate the exotic pet trade in India, and this has affected innumerable exotic species (Variyar, 2022). These species are smuggled in unhygienic and cramped conditions and sold in live animal markets across the nation (Variyar, 2023). According to reports from World Animal Protection and the Wildlife Trust of India (Wildlife Trust of India, 2022), mortality rates during transportation can reach 70–80%, which raises concerns about conservation and welfare.

The voluntary disclosure scheme aimed to curb the increasing trade of exotic animals by regulating it. This scheme allowed Indians to declare the possession of exotic wild species without any documentation before March 15, 2021 (Dutta, 2022). Nevertheless, studies (Shankar, 27; 28) demonstrate that traffickers took advantage of this clause, transforming illegally obtained animals into “legitimate” property. Such abuse reveals regulatory oversight flaws where enforcement is jeopardised by lax documentation.

Under the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (Pet Shop) Rules, 2018, the sale of native and exotic animals is regulated with restrictions in place (Animal Welfare Board of India, 2018); however, the rules governing their purchase and sale are complex and are hardly enforced anywhere across the country. For imported exotic animals, a licence is required from the Director General of Foreign Trade. Declaration and

Registration is required to own an exotic animal, but with the growing trade of these animals, significant gaps are present in the implementation of these rules (Animal Welfare Board

of India, 2018). Comparably, the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (Aquarium and Fish Tank Animals Shop) Rules, 2017, addressed captive fish welfare issues for a brief period of time, but their removal left a regulatory void, highlighting the lack of enforcement (Animal Welfare Board of India, 2017).

The PCA Act of 1960 is still the main framework, but there is a persistent legal gap because its provisions are rarely modified for complicated situations like the trade in exotic animals. Even with these laws and plans in place, enforcement is still a big problem. Wildlife crime units all over India do not have enough money and often do not have the training they need to deal with cases involving exotic species. Also, the penalties in the Wildlife Protection Act and other related rules are not always harsh enough to stop traffickers. Research indicates that numerous convicted wildlife traffickers face negligible fines or brief incarceration periods, which do not serve as effective deterrents (Mishra & Khanna, 2023). Because of this weak enforcement structure, organised crime groups can keep doing what they do without much fear of getting caught.

Another worry is that online platforms are playing a bigger role in making it easier for people to trade illegal wildlife. Traffickers have found new ways to advertise, sell, and move exotic animals without being seen, thanks to the rise of e-commerce and social media (Natarajan & Jadhav, 2023). People have found that online groups and private chat apps are good places to set up deals for animals of all kinds, from exotic birds to reptiles. The internet’s anonymity and the lack of specialised cyber monitoring for wildlife crimes have helped this market grow.

The trade in exotic animals also has serious effects on the environment. The introduction of non-native species into India threatens local biodiversity by competing with native species, preying on them, and spreading diseases (Saha, 2025). For example, exotic turtles and fish that have been brought into Indian rivers have messed up local ecosystems and outcompeted native species. In the same way, the release or escape of exotic birds has caused hybridisation and the spread of disease, which has hurt native populations. The welfare of exotic animals is still very troubling from an ethical point of view. Many species are smuggled in inhumane ways, such as being kept in small cages, not getting enough food, and being moved long distances without veterinary care (Jain, 2021). Even when they get to markets or private homes, exotic animals often do not have good living conditions because most owners do not know how to take care of them or do not have the money to do so. This leads to a lot of pain and death for these animals.

Experts have said that to fix these problems, law enforcement agencies need to work together more, have better training, and have stronger enforcement mechanisms

(Shepherd & Nijman, 2020). Public awareness campaigns are also very important for lowering the demand for unusual pets. By teaching people about the ecological, ethical, and legal issues of owning exotic animals, stricter supply-side controls can be put in place, along with solutions based on demand.

As a result of poor enforcement, insufficient welfare protocols, and growing domestic demand, the exotic animal trade continues largely unchecked, despite India's notable progress through legal reforms and participation in international conventions like CITES, according to the literature currently in publication. The studies under review demonstrate that, in addition to legal reform, technology-based monitoring, international collaboration, and public advocacy are all necessary to address this issue. By explicitly connecting legal loopholes to the lived realities in Indian pet stores, this study expands on these insights and closes a major research gap.

3. Materials and Methods

Qualitative and quantitative research was conducted to identify patterns of how the trade of exotic species occurred with reference to current wildlife protection laws, such as the Wildlife Protection Act and CITES. A mixed-method survey was conducted where owners of twenty-five different pet shops across India were questioned about the animals they sell, where they belong, and where they are bred. These questions were among the many that were asked to collect data on the trade of exotic species in India. Some pet shops were visited in person, while others were contacted by telephone. A combination of twenty-two questions from a bank was asked to each pet shop owner, and the responses were recorded and tabulated for further analysis. An additional set of ten questions was used for the interviews conducted with experts from the field of wildlife and animal protection, who shared their insights on the situation and practices prevalent in the industry. The insights were pertinent to exotic animal ownership laws in the country and the lapses in their enforcement. This helped in the process of gathering their in-depth perspective on the topic. Responses from pet shop owners were tabulated and analysed to establish patterns of lapses in the implementation of existing regulations in the country. They were also studied in the context of expert interviews and secondary research.

Public literature reviewed to establish the framework for the data collection process included peer-reviewed journals, newspaper articles, and government websites. The online database was used to look for publications that talked about "exotic species" and "illegal wildlife trade" with regard to the Indian subcontinent. This data helped identify key trade routes through which trade with these species occurs. It also focused on the gaps that exist in various wildlife governing documents, such as the Wildlife Protection Act. Other significant documents that were included in the secondary research were

the PCA Act 1960, the Pet Shop Rules 2018, and the CITES Agreement.

3.1. Ethical Considerations

In this research on the exotic animal trade in India, certain ethical concerns were adhered to. The pet shop owners surveyed were assured of complete anonymity to facilitate confidentiality and privacy. They were clearly informed that the information they provided would be utilised solely for academic and research interests. Participants were assured that no personal-identifying information would be disclosed in any study reports or publications emanating from this study. This is in line with fundamental research foundations with the aim of protecting people's rights and fostering trust. In addition, the well-being of animals was taken into consideration by documenting existing conditions instead of intervening in their maintenance. The research was designed to balance the need for useful scientific knowledge with regard to the dignity and privacy of human participants and the welfare of animals, which satisfied the ethical principle of maximising benefits while minimising harm.

4. Results and Discussion

Data was acquired from 15 pet shops across various Indian states, including Punjab, Maharashtra, Uttarakhand, Tamil Nadu, West Bengal, Uttar Pradesh, Karnataka, and New Delhi. The survey addressed exotic species sold, animals' country of origin, breeding locations, living conditions, genetic modifications, and regulatory compliance. Furthermore, three wildlife experts were interviewed to gain insights into legal loopholes, enforcement gaps, and potential solutions regarding exotic animal trade in the country.

4.1. Quantitative Analysis

The frequency distribution of reported animal groups is presented in Figure 1. Birds were the most frequently reported group of animals, with a frequency of 10, indicating they were the predominant category in the sample. Cats were followed with a frequency of 6, and hamsters and gliders were both reported by 4 pet shop owners. Moderate frequencies of 3 were noted for several exotic animals like iguanas, guinea pigs, and rabbits, while dogs had a frequency of 2. Several animal groups, including turtles, fish, snakes, rodents, mammals, reptiles, and exotic dogs, were the least reported, with a frequency of 1 each. This distribution shows a clear concentration of demand among a few common animal species, with birds being the most prominent. Additionally, there is a high demand for certain exotic species, especially birds like sun conures, Mitchell cockatoos, African grey parrots, blue-and-gold macaws, and albino cockatiels. Particularly in cities like Chennai, Kanpur, and Gurugram, small mammals like guinea pigs, Syrian hamsters, and sugar gliders were also well-liked. Remarkably, no genetic alterations were reported in any of the establishments that were surveyed, and pet store owners consistently reported that neither inbreeding nor DNA alterations were used.

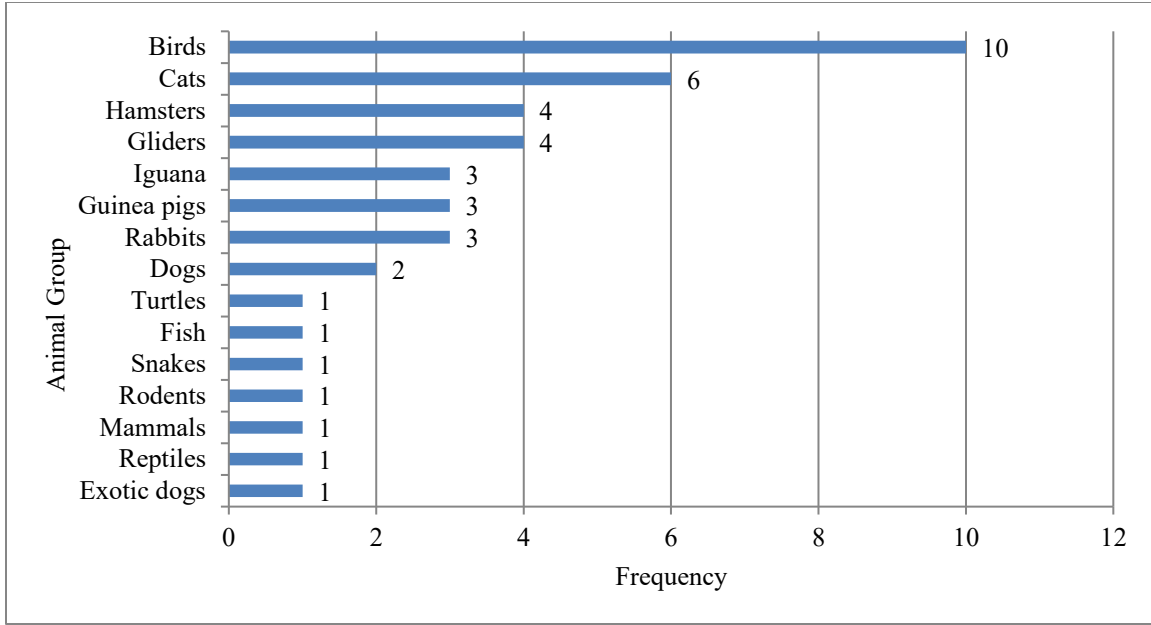


Fig. 1 Frequency distribution of reported animal groups

The analysis of animal origins (Figure 2) showed that exotic animals came from various geographic locations. Australia was the most commonly mentioned country (4 responses), followed by South America (2 responses) and Syria (2 responses).

The majority of animals were reported to originate from multiple or ambiguous foreign locations (5 responses). The high frequency of vague responses was either due to intentional concealment of supply chains or a lack of awareness among pet store owners regarding particular origins.

Variation was also seen in the context of domestic breeding patterns. The respondents most frequently cited multiple or vague locations, with Punjab being the most commonly cited specific breeding region. Single mentions were also recorded for several regions, including Delhi, Uttar Pradesh, Hyderabad, Mumbai, Kanpur, and Rajasthan. Some pet shop owners from Hyderabad, Mumbai, and Kanpur reported local breeding operations, while others sourced animals from breeders in Punjab, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh, and New Delhi. This geographic distribution suggests an extensive domestic breeding network spanning various states.

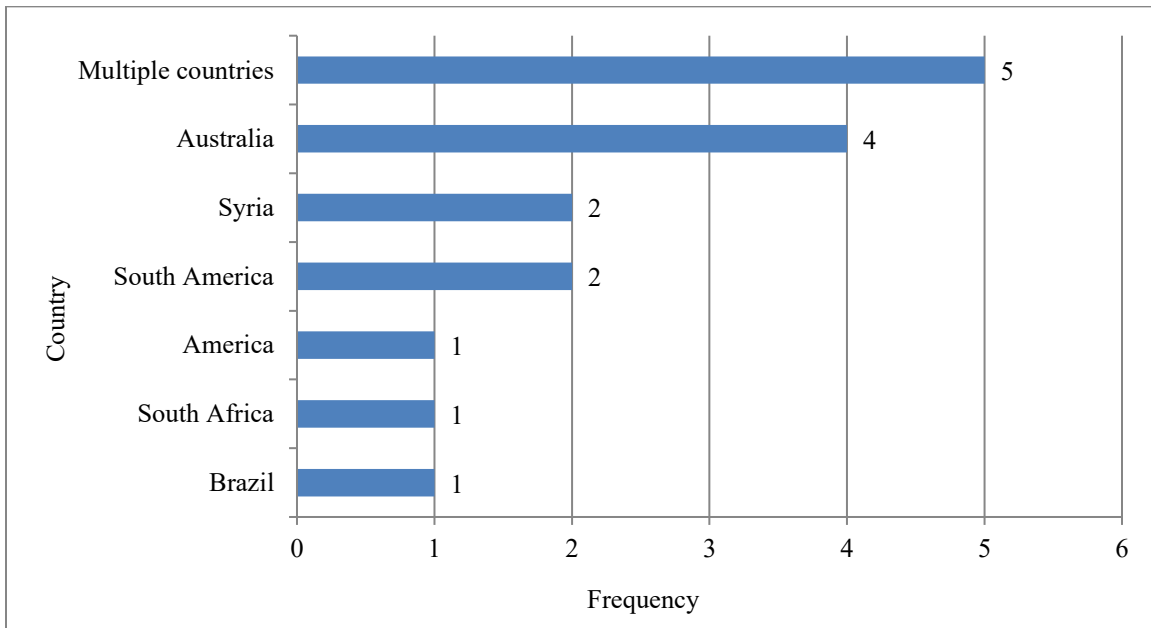


Fig. 2 Frequency distribution of reported countries of origin of exotic animals

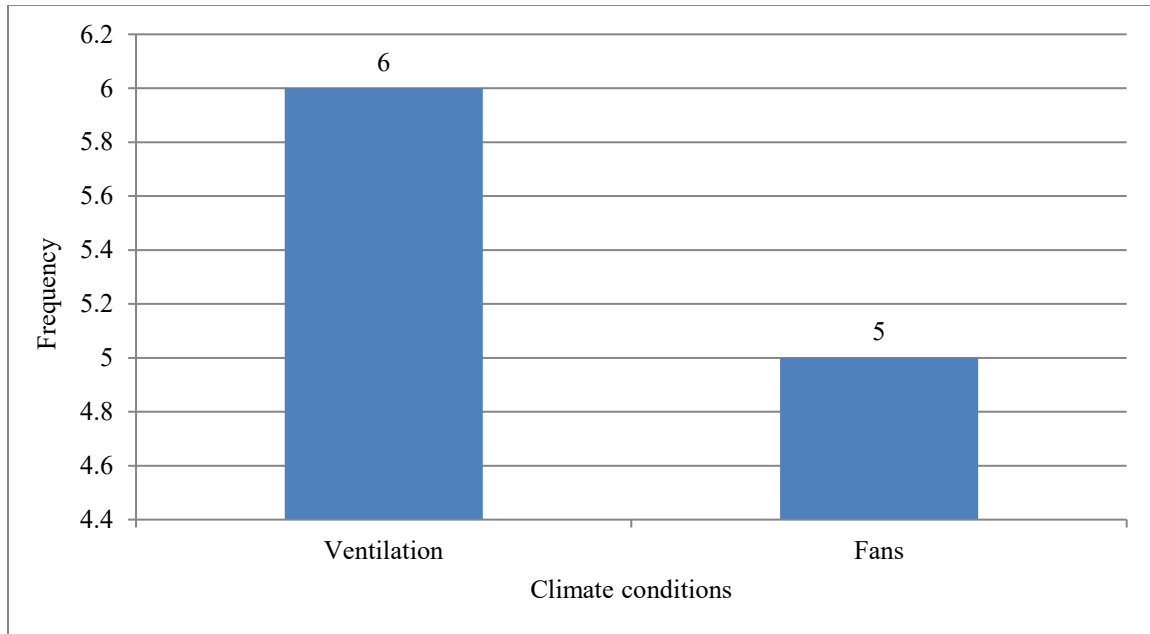


Fig. 3 Frequency distribution of climate control facilities provided for animal care

The climate control systems (Figure 3) in all of the establishments that were surveyed were crude. The facility most frequently mentioned was ventilation (6 reports), closely followed by fans (5 reports). Animals were adapted to the Indian climate, according to some owners (2 reports).

Nevertheless, none of the establishments surveyed reported having specialised climate-controlled environments. Given that many exotic species come from climatic regions that differ greatly from India's, this finding is especially worrisome.

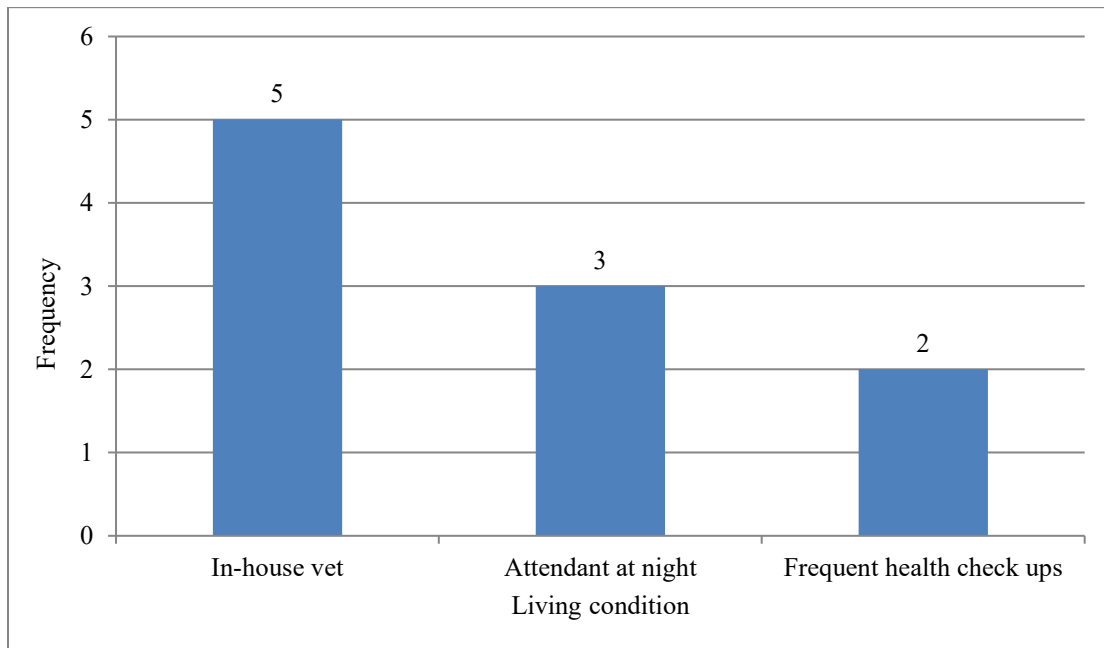


Fig. 4 Frequency distribution of living conditions and care services provided by the Pet shop

Significant gaps in animal welfare provisions were found in living conditions and care services (Figure 4). Only five shops reported regular or in-house veterinary presence, indicating a generally low level of veterinary care. Only two of the shops surveyed offered regular health examinations, and

only three of them had staff on duty to watch over and tend to the animals at night. There was little documentation of animal health, breeding history, or care procedures, and most establishments lacked thorough record-keeping.

Patterns of regulatory compliance varied among the establishments surveyed. Some stores publicly acknowledged operating without the required registration, while others claimed to be registered with animal welfare boards. Reports of no disease outbreaks were consistent, but this might be attributable more to poor monitoring than to accurate disease prevention.

Several respondents claimed that vaccinations were not necessary for birds or small animals, demonstrating a basic ignorance of the requirements for preventive healthcare. Vaccination practices were visibly lacking.

4.2. Qualitative Analysis

Interviews with experts confirmed the outcome of the survey, demonstrating that despite a comprehensive legal framework like DGFT policies and global agreements like CITES, enforcement is still seriously lacking. Experts on wildlife describe that rampant infractions consist of unlawful importation, unchecked breeding practices, poaching, and both blatant and secretive trade activities. There is a significant lack of development of uniform housing and husbandry norms for exotic wildlife, and there are no established protocols available that monitor the acquisition and upkeep of the animals involved in unlawful trade.

The main reasons for the persistence of these violations are a high market demand for exotic species and a lack of adequate law enforcement actions. The experts emphasized that the development of standardized operational rules for managing and monitoring exotic animals, the more stringent enforcement of existing regulations, and large-scale awareness programs among the public, designed to reduce consumer demand, are all essential for determining effective remedies. In the absence of such actions, the exotic animal trade within India will probably continue its growth, thus further aggravating exploitation and critically risking conservation and animal welfare goals.

4.3. Discussion

The findings of the present study identify a paradox within the Indian response toward exotic animal trade: although there is a vast legislative system that also encompasses international treaties like CITES, enforcement is ineffective and inconsistent. Exotic species, especially birds like macaws, cockatoos, and African greys, were seen to be extremely popular, based on a survey of pet traders within India. These findings align with the findings of previous studies revealing that the most popular exotic pets traded within the Indian pet trade are indeed birds (Wildlife Trust of India, 2022; Nijman, 2018). Ongoing interest in non-native and rare species, as well as the ineffective effect of efforts to raise general awareness of the environmental impact and welfare issues related to exotic pet dealing, make up the principal motivators for the ongoing purchase of such exotic pets.

The study further depicts the unsuitable living conditions of exotic creatures. The lack of climate-controlled surroundings, the lack of adequate veterinary attention, and the absence of nighttime personnel are serious concerns for the effectiveness of the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act, 1960, and other relevant laws. Previous studies have suggested exotic creatures, especially those sourced from the tropics or temperate climates, seldom prosper under circumstances that are incapable of mimicking their natural surroundings (38). The subpar husbandry standards seen within the pet outlets evaluated show that, though standards exist, their enforcement is more the exception than the rule.

An interesting theme that arises from this research is the role of breeding networks in India. Some shop owners reported sourcing their animals from urban centres like Delhi or Hyderabad, whilst some reported getting them from states like Rajasthan and Punjab. This implies that India is not only a market for exotic species but is also starting into the captive breeding of the species. Since there are no regulations for the field, genetic inbreeding, incorrect labelling of the animals, and washing of trafficked specimens as stock bred in captivity can happen. These patterns reflect what has been seen for Southeast Asia, where breeding facilities that are not regulated have been linked to vast trafficking rings (Nijman, 2018).

Consultations with the experts emphasised the reality that the core issue does not occur because there is no legislation, but because of the failure to enforce existing regulations. This argument is similar to the one raised by scientists globally regarding the regulation of wildlife trade. They pinpoint the weaknesses of law enforcement, corruption, and lack of resources as the factors that render the trafficking viable (Gibbs, 2020; Daszak et al., 2021). The permeable borders of India with Bangladesh, Myanmar, and Nepal make the issue even worse by facilitating the entry of the smugglers. These elements and a failure to conduct proper checks at airports make India both a destination and a transit point for exotic species.

These results are significant. In the first place, the burgeoning exotic pet trade is a threat to India's biodiversity and can lead to the introduction of invasive alien species with the potential for causing ecological disruption. Secondly, since such a large number of animals die en route or upon catching and transporting them, the trade is anti-animal welfare.

Lastly, since exotic species are known carriers of zoonotic infections, it is dangerous for the general population (Daszak et al., 2021). There is a need for a multi-pronged approach for tackling the foregoing, namely, tightening enforcement, enhancing cross-border coordination, laying down mechanisms for monitoring legitimate trade, and initiating large-scale campaigns for creating awareness and reducing demand.

This research yields better results in two important ways when compared to previously published studies. First, it provides more detailed information than previous studies, which mostly provided general trafficking routes or seizure data without distinguishing between species preferences or welfare conditions in Indian pet stores. In contrast, this study provides a deeper understanding of the practical realities of the trade by highlighting the overwhelming popularity of birds, the growth of unofficial breeding networks across states, and the dearth of veterinary or climate-controlled facilities. Second, it incorporates legal frameworks and welfare concerns, which were not well-represented in earlier research that mostly concentrated on zoonotic risks and ecological harm. The study adopts a more comprehensive approach to comprehending the reasons behind the inefficiency of current policies by specifically highlighting poor living conditions, inadequate disease monitoring, and a lack of interest in vaccination or medical records. Unlike previous analyses that mainly relied on seizure data or policy documents, this research's methodological design purposefully bridged the gap between legislative frameworks and real-world practices.

These results highlight the paramount importance of India establishing an overall national database or register for exotic animals. The Voluntary Disclosure Scheme sought to address the issue; however, traffickers took advantage of its weaknesses to turn their illicit stock into legitimate-looking businesses. Closing the implementation gap would be reinforced by the establishment of a public, mandatory registration and surveillance system coupled with severe penalties for noncompliance. Failing such changes, the Indian exotic animal trade will continue to thrive and accelerate the perpetuation of exploitation and the risk of compromising conservation and animal welfare objectives.

4.4. Future Directions for Research

Future research on the Indian exotic pet trade must focus on shutting existing loopholes in the law and enforcement systems to curb this complex issue. Although laws like the Wildlife Protection Act (WPA) and the addition of CITES attempt to regulate trade, these mechanisms contain loopholes exploited by traffickers and used for laundering illegally taken animals. Further research is needed to unleash the potential of current policy regulation and identify some weak points within enforcement agencies, customs, and border authorities. Research can study how training and utilisation of technology, i.e., blockchain for supply chain traceability or electronic tracking of wildlife crime, can be applied to prevent abuse of schemes, i.e., the Voluntary Disclosure Scheme, and better control the illegal market. The role of the web platform and social media in emboldening the trade demands thorough research to develop interventions against the illegal digital trade that evades law enforcers.

Key stakeholders in this project are state and national government offices such as the Ministry of Environment,

Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC), Customs and Border Protection, Forest Departments, and the Indian Wildlife Crime Control Bureau, NGOs, wildlife experts, and community groups. These partners are critical for holistic strategies that integrate enforcement with community-based conservation and economic benefits to poor people involved in trafficking. Policy reform must target compulsory national lists of exotic pets, effective and transparent licensing and breeding regulations, and strict fines for infringements. Public campaigns have to go hand-in-hand with rule reform in order to decrease consumer demand. Plugging these gaps in future research will provide actionable intelligence and policy recommendations necessary to disrupt supply chains, improve animal welfare standards, and maintain India's biodiversity. A multi-pronged strategy that spans legal reform, updated enforcement, international cooperation, and public awareness provides the best path to curbing India's growing exotic animal trade and safeguarding both home ecosystems and at-risk exotic species.

5. Conclusion

The results of this study highlight the harsh conditions of exotic pets, along with the facts regarding their trade within India. Even though the country has numerous regulation mechanisms like the Wildlife Protection Act of 1973, the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act of 2018, and the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora, deficiencies within their implementations are evident. These inadequacies within their implementations permit the illicit import and trade of these pets. Traders benefit from the confusing status emanating from the lack of adequate regulations regarding the trade of non-indigenous species.

The information elicited from pet shop outlets shows a pattern that undermines the health and well-being of such pets. Their health and well-being are affected by a lack of environmental surroundings and improper veterinary care. The experts further asserted that the problem is not the absence of regulations but the inability to properly enforce such regulations. Instead of advocating for more stringent regulations for the trade of exotic species, there ought to be a focus on the enforcement of existing laws as a means of suppressing the unauthorized trade of exotic pets. Another issue is the rising demand for these exotic animals. Animal welfare is not given much thought in this growing consumer market. These animals may suffer greatly as a result of this unbridled demand and inadequate implementation of a legal framework. In conclusion, even though India has policies in place to regulate the trade in exotic animals, it is crucial that these policies and procedures are correctly implemented. Action must be taken to protect both native and non-native species, and a national database to regulate the exotic animal trade is essential. The cycle of abuse that these exotic animals endure will persist in the absence of more stringent enforcement.

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Appendix - 1

A questionnaire used for data collection from pet show owners

- 1) Which all exotic species do you usually sell?
- 2) Which countries do these animals belong to?
- 3) Are they bred in India?
- 4) If yes, which cities do these animals come from?
- 5) Do these animals have any genetic modifications? Is there inbreeding?
- 6) If yes, which are those modifications?
- 7) What are the most demanded exotic animals?
- 8) What climate control facilities do you provide for the needs of the animals?
- 9) What happens to animals that fall ill? Is there an in-house vet? On demand?
- 10) How frequently are health check ups done?
- 11) What records are kept for the animals?
- 12) What checks are done before selling an animal to a customer?
- 13) Who cares for the animals at night? Is the cooling system left on?
- 14) Are the breeders that you buy the animals registered with the animal welfare board?
- 15) Is your pet shop registered with the animal welfare board? If not, why?
- 16) Do you have any Indian wild animals available? Can you procure them even if they are not available at present?
- 17) How often do animals die? What happens when they do? What are the most common causes of death?
- 18) Are animals exposed to dust, smoke, and noise from traffic?
- 19) Are any vaccinations given to animals? Any other injections?
- 20) Have any disease outbreaks affected your business?

Questionnaire used for data collection from Experts:

- 21) How many years have you been in this field?
- 22) What are the laws that govern the trade of exotic animals and wildlife in India?
- 23) Are you aware of violations? If yes, please elaborate?
- 24) Why do these violations occur? What are the most common ones?
- 25) What can be done to fix these violations?
- 26) Is there a problem in the regulations or in the enforcement of the regulations?
- 27) Is there reluctance from the government to implement it?
- 28) Do you know of instances where pet shops have been sealed or penalized?
- 29) What is the way forward? What can people do?