

The Animal Rights Industry

It's not what you think.

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Some animal rights groups that are against the keeping of reptiles play off public sympathy and lead potential donors to believe that their money will help care for animals in need.

The biggest threat to the Reptile Nation is not ambitious politicians or scientists bent on garnering grant money through "Made for TV Science." These people are dangerous to our reptile-keeping community, but by far the most dangerous entity we face is the animal rights industry. It creates the environment and molds public opinion that politicians and self-serving scientists thrive within. Without the aggressive public relations campaigns waged by the AR industry over the past 10 years there would not be near the support for their anti-reptile agenda.

The AR industry is a multibillion-dollar-a-year industry that targets well-meaning animal lovers and draws them into a web of corruption, influence peddling and fundraising at monumental levels. Animal rights groups operate under the guise of taking care of abused cats and dogs. This is an industry that targets and preys on students, soccer moms and the elderly in order to raise funds. Plucking on the heartstrings of an animal-loving public, AR groups run TV ads and cyber campaigns in which they post pictures of abused animals and insinuate that they are involved in rescuing and caring for these poor animals.

The truth is the largest and most powerful AR organizations do not care for any animals whatsoever -- but sometimes their members will kill them. In 2005 two PETA (People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals) members were arrested and charged with animal cruelty because they were caught dumping the bodies of animals they had killed by lethal injection into a dumpster. A jury acquitted them of these charges, even though they did kill the animals and throw them in a dumpster. What did they end up getting convicted for? Littering.

The "caring front" AR groups promote is a sham specifically designed to raise money and lobby for anti-animal legislation. I believe the unstated premise behind the AR industry is to end all animal/human interaction. No hunting, fishing, livestock farming, biomedical research, dog or cat breeding, equestrian, exotic pets and reptile keeping. Some are even working to close public lands to end human entry. Collectively, the unofficial slogan heard at AR industry conferences is "One Generation Away," meaning they're one generation from ending all human/animal interaction. Publicly, they paint most human/animal interaction as cruel and abusive. Some equate it to slavery, and thus justify euthanasia of animals as preferable to slavery. It is an extreme ideology hidden behind the façade of protecting animals from people.

Make no mistake, the AR industry is a huge money-making industry. Contrary to popular belief, little to no money generated goes toward actual care for animals. Primarily, money goes to six-figure executive salaries, lobbying congress to promote anti-animal legislation, slick public relations campaigns painting others as abusers and exploiters, and more fund raising. Most AR groups are not taking care of animals using the money that flows in every day from good-hearted donors who think they are helping to care for animals.

More recently, after the Michael Vicks dog-fighting story broke, the Humane Society of the United States posted photos in numerous media outlets of fighting dogs, to imply that it was somehow involved in taking care of these poor, abused animals. But the AR group was not involved in any way other than exploiting the photos to manipulate the public. And the donations flowed in.

People must be made aware of the misrepresentations the AR industry uses to fleece well-meaning donors. The Reptile Nation and USARK must do our part to educate the public to the true nature of the animal rights industry. We must better coordinate with the pet industry, researchers and farmers to get this message across to the American public. The AR industry is in Washington DC, and not coincidentally, the media often casts what the Reptile Nation does in a negative light. When we are able to get the public to see the disingenuous nature of the AR industry, most of our problems with anti-reptile legislation should disappear.

Andrew Wyatt is the President of the United States Association of Reptile Keepers (USARK) and has been an avid herp enthusiast for more than 35 years. He has traveled the world and has had his animals featured in a number of television productions. For more information about USARK, [click here](#) .

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