

Captive Bred Reptiles Are Better

By Russ Case

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The bearded dragon is a huge captive breeding success story, resulting in it becoming the number one lizard pet. There was a time when the alligator was considered an endangered species. Now, thanks to captive-breeding on alligator farms, wild populations have made a huge comeback. Green iguanas are bred by the thousands on iguana farms in South America, so captive breeding by private reptile breeders is not widespread. I've always been an advocate for reptile conservation, even though in the past conservation groups and pet advocacy groups didn't always see eye to eye. Naturally, being the editor of REPTILES, which has a very strong pro-pet focus, I'm all for the keeping of reptiles as pets. But while conservation organizations and pro-pet groups may not always see eye to eye there is much more synchronicity between the two factions than there used to be. It's not uncommon now to find booths for conservation groups side by side with reptile breeders at expos nowadays.

The reason for past disharmony is not complicated. The pet industry has resulted in depleted numbers of reptiles in the wild, and this rankles conservationists. In the old days, before captive-breeding of reptiles became more common, many thousands, maybe millions, of reptiles were removed from the wild in order to supply the demand for reptile pets. It's easy to see why this perturbed people who disagreed with removing the animals from nature, but the days of rampant collection have been tempered somewhat in recent decades with the advent of captive breeding.

This is not to say that animals are no longer being removed from the wild. They still are. In REPTILES and on ReptileChannel, however, we always urge hobbyists to purchase captive-bred reptiles and amphibians whenever possible. The benefits of doing so, in my opinion, outweigh the increased price that typically accompanies captive-bred specimens. Wild-caught reptiles, even though they're usually cheaper, can be stressed out and unhealthy as a result of their capture and the importation process. They may also be more prone to health issues, such as internal or external parasites that they have picked up in the wild, than captive-bred reptiles.

If you buy captive-bred herps you stand a better chance of getting animals that are healthier and less stressed. They're less stressed because, having been raised in captivity, they're more acclimated to it. It's all they've known. So they don't usually experience, at least to as strong a degree, the freaked-out "get me out of here" phase wild-caught herps do when they first arrive home.

Conservation groups such as the International Reptile Conservation Foundation, Turtle Survival Alliance and others play an important role in the lives of many reptile species, and they deserve your support. Over the years REPTILES has featured many stories and articles about the efforts of such organizations, and will continue to do so. I'm thinking I may devote a series of blogs to conservation groups sometime in the future, too, to let you know what they're up to lately and how you can help them.

For now, just remember: Whenever you can, buy captive bred reptiles – you won't be sorry!

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