

In a Down Economy, Turn to Reptiles

By Russ Case

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Every day news reports bring dark clouds of gloom regarding the flailing economy (and I live in California, which is facing its own potential economical disasters). It's depressing, and as I'm sure many of you are, I'm witnessing the effects of the economy firsthand. Friends have lost their jobs and are scrambling to find employment with the threat of foreclosure and bankruptcy hanging over their heads. Others are stressing out over the uncertainty of whether they will remain employed or not. These uncertain times are the scariest I've personally experienced in this regard, and I look forward to the day that the giant wheel in the sky turns us toward better times. Until then I'm hanging on with both hands.

Pets have proven to be great stress relievers. The sad side effect to the economy, however, is that a lot of people have been abandoning their pets. There have been reports about animal shelters that are getting inundated with dogs and other pets that their owners can no longer afford to keep. Recently I received an e-mail from a friend, which contained a message from a woman whose family was losing its home and moving to an apartment. They had two 3-year-old Labrador Retrievers they were looking to place in a new home because they couldn't take them with them. I've long thought about getting a dog and I sent the woman an e-mail to investigate the possibility of maybe adopting both dogs. I never heard back from her and later learned that the e-mail my friend had sent me had apparently been making the rounds on the Internet for several years and was no longer valid.

But what that woman went through, others are going through now. Dogs eat a lot and need a lot of attention, and this is proving too much for some people to keep up. It's a sad time for a lot of pet lovers.

So here is my pitch for potential pet owners in this down economy: If you're considering a pet but are worried about the expense, remember that reptiles are very low maintenance pets. They don't even need to eat every day; snakes can get by with a once-a-week feeding. The animals themselves can be had for reasonable prices (though some, depending on what you choose to buy, can be very expensive), and buying the materials you need to house them, such as an enclosure, substrate, lighting, etc., won't empty your bank account.

As for the stress-relieving properties of pets, petting a dog or cat can indeed be a great stress reducer. But caring for pet reptiles has a quality all its own that can make one feel right with the world, and that's a feeling I think we all need right now.

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