

August 2009 Editor's Note

Is it true most popular herps could become illegal?

By Russ Case

Yes, it is true. Take a look at your personable bearded dragon, begging you for food and scampering around the front of its terrarium, or your placid leopard tortoise, contentedly grazing. It's hard to believe many cherished herps could become illegal to own.

Believe it. As I write this, the pet-loving public is waiting to see what happens to H.R. 669, a federal bill for which a hearing was held on April 23. If this bill, as currently written, is ever made into a law, any nonnative animal — reptiles, tropical fish, hamsters, you name it — will become illegal to own in the United States. Although it's true a nonnative species could be made legal if it's placed on a list of approved species, adding an animal to that approved-species list would likely be a long and arduous process with fees attached. I suspect the odds against approval would be very high indeed.

Leading up to the H.R. 669 hearing, members of the Subcommittee on Insular Affairs, Oceans and Wildlife were hammered with thousands of e-mails, letters and phone calls. These came from concerned keepers, breeders and companies tied to exotic pets. Perhaps you were among them. With guidance from groups such as the Pet Industry Joint Advisory Council and the United States Association of Reptile Keepers, a monumental grass-roots effort was launched. I believe the reaction impressed a number of subcommittee members. Some said it was the largest response to a bill they had ever witnessed.

Hopefully it helped. At press time the bill is still in committee. Maybe it will never make it out; many bills languish and never make it out of committee. Or maybe it will move closer to becoming law or resurface in some other form. Personally, I'm crossing my fingers for the "languishing death" scenario.