

From the Editor's Desk

Editor's note from the 2010 Reptiles USA annual.

By Russ Case

The past year since the last Reptiles USA has been a trying one for the reptile industry in some regards. I'm happy to say, however, that the reptilekeeping hobby is still going strong thanks to the unceasing devotion of millions of reptile fans.

When I say "trying" I'm referring primarily to the continuing attempts by anti-reptilekeeping organizations to put an end to the keeping of exotic pets. Reptiles, in case you didn't know, are considered exotic pets. Technically, many common pets fit into this category, including hamsters, birds and other animals kept by a smaller percentage of pet owners. I'm talking about sugar gliders, pygmy hedgehogs, pot-bellied pigs and the like. Calling a pet "exotic" is in contrast to pets that are considered domesticated, such as dogs and cats.

There are groups that frown on the keeping of exotic pets, and they are always on the lookout for circumstances they can exploit to further their agendas. As far as reptiles are concerned, they got handed something on a silver platter: the existence of Burmese pythons in the Florida Everglades. Ever since this fact came to light, a variety of legislative bills have been introduced that would, in essence, put an end to the reptile (and overall pet) industry as we know it.

The most infamous was H.R. 669, a U.S. House of Representatives bill seeking to add unapproved nonnative species to an injurious-wildlife list. Many herps, including boas and pythons, could end up on that list. If this bill were to pass, it would make it illegal for people to sell these animals unless they were added to a list of approved species (no easy task). Officials were considering this bill in early 2009, and reptile hobbyists and industry professionals united to show their outrage by inundating them with e-mails, letters, petitions and phone calls. Organizations such as the Pet Industry Joint Advisory Council (pijac.org) and the U.S. Association of Reptile Keepers (usark.org) were integral in keeping everyone informed and advising people on how to best make their voices heard. It worked. In April 2009 the bill was tabled.

But PIJAC and USARK warn the fight is far from over. As I write, rumors of a revised H.R. 669 are circulating, and more federal legislation, including a Senate bill titled S. 373, which would basically ban interstate commerce of pythons among other things, is waiting in the wings.

Attacks on herpkeeping aside, enthusiasm and excitement emanated from the large crowds at 2009 reptile expos. The Reptile Super Show in San Diego, Calif., was one of shows I attended this year. Among the people filling the aisles, it was hard to remember that the economy, both in the U.S. and in California, is experiencing turbulent times.

I hope this 15th anniversary edition of Reptiles USA finds you happy in your hobby whether you're just starting out or a longtime enthusiast.