

Why Reptiles Shouldn't be Released Into the Wild

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Though it is illegal to release non-native wildlife into the wild, many reptile owners who no longer want to keep their pets often do it. Aside from the legality of the issue, there are many other problems with this practice.

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- Captive species may be carrying an organism that they have an immunity to but that wild species don't, and they can decimate wild populations.
- Captive species have little to no defense against natural predators.
- Captive species will die if the environment is not comparable to their native environment. This is especially true for tropical or desert species.
- Captive species are used to being fed, and they have difficulties finding or catching their own food, so they will eventually starve to death.
- Captive species will die of exposure when they cannot find adequate shelter.
- Captive species that do manage to survive will consume plants and animals that wild species would normally eat, which forces the wild animals to compete with them and negatively affects the function of the ecosystem.

As you can see, reptiles that are released into the wild either die or become an invasive species and have a disastrous effect on the local wildlife. Whatever the outcome, it's a bad situation and one that can be avoided with just a little effort.

Other Options

It's a sad fact that many reptile owners come to realize that they do not want to or cannot care for their reptiles, but if releasing them into the wild isn't feasible, what are your other options?

- Contact the store or breeder you acquired the reptile from about possible returns.
- Trade or sell your reptile to another reptile hobbyist.
- Contact a local [reptile shelter](#).
- Search the web for people looking to adopt a reptile.
- Contact your veterinarian for recommendations or assistance.

Though all of these will take more effort than simply letting your reptile loose in the nearest field or forest, the time you take to ensure that your reptile finds his way into a new home will help to protect your local ecosystem and the native species in it.

Prevention

There are many ways to avoid putting yourself and your reptile in a situation where you are faced with the task of rehoming him.

Never purchase a reptile (or any other pet) on a whim. Thoroughly research the species you are considering before purchase. How long will he live? What will his adult size be? Will you be able to meet his housing and food needs? Some reptiles can grow to be upwards of 4 feet long - do you have space for his housing? Making impulse purchases almost always ends up badly, as the new owner comes to realize that he had no idea what he was getting himself into and decides he no longer wants the reptile.

Consider the long term care involved; Some reptile species can live upwards of 25 years. Will you be able to care for the reptile for his entire life span? Where will you be five, ten, or twenty years from now? Are you sure that wherever you're living will allow you to keep a reptile? If you're not sure your long-term situation is stable enough, wait until it is feasible to purchase a reptile.

Never purchase a reptile for a child. Not only do reptiles require more care than a child can provide, but a child is most likely not going to be interested in the reptile for the entire length of his life. The child may go off to school and be unable to bring the reptile with him, or the child may lose interest long before that point. Whatever the reason, the end result is that the reptile will become the responsibility of the adult. Therefore, it's better to purchase him as a family pet with the realization that you will be caring for him. Parents that purchase a reptile expecting their child to care for him are often unpleasantly surprised when the burden falls on them, and the reptile is soon in need of a new home.

With that being said, we do understand that sometimes life can change drastically, and there are situations in which responsible reptile owners can physically, financially, or psychologically no longer manage to care for their pets. In these situations, we urge you to make use of the other options available rather than condemning your reptile or the native species to death by simply releasing him into the wild.