

International Biodiversity Day - 22 May 2007

The National Council of SPCAs (NSPCA) believes that International Biodiversity Day is the appropriate platform to draw attention to the considerable and growing problem of exotic or alien animals in our country.

Biodiversity includes the protection of our indigenous and natural resources in their entirety.

Non-indigenous species are coming in to our country legally and illegally: - last week's discovery at OR Tambo airport of exotic snakes in video containers is an example of the latter. Animals escape into the veld or are released into the wild when the novelty to the owners wears off or the cost/effort in keeping them becomes prohibitive.

The trend of keeping exotic animals as pets is fuelled by unscrupulous traders, smugglers and breeders. These animals are seen as renewable commodities with prices on their heads. Many are caught in the wild in their countries of origin. Capture, handling and transportation are issues of concern. By law, no alien/exotic/non-native specie may be released into the wild in South Africa. So these animals are condemned to lifelong captivity, frequently sold to anyone who feels that having an exotic animal lends street-cred or makes a fashion statement.

There is no doubt that such species are released and we need only mention mynah birds to illustrate the point that if the invasive specie does survive, it competes with the indigenous species for housing, food and territory – often to the detriment of the native species. Invasive or exotic species have no natural predators in South Africa.

Conservation authorities appealing to the public to kill invasive species does not solve the problem. This is reaction after the fact.

The NSPCA calls upon national and provincial governments and their relevant departments to actively do something about this problem which they acknowledge exists. Pro-active measures are urgently required. Currently in some provinces not even so much as a permit is required to hold and keep an exotic animal in captivity, including in a domestic home.

A recommended starting point is the introduction of legislation to ban future imports and that strict and enforced standards are applicable to the breeding and keeping of exotic animals.

This would be in the interest of protecting all biodiversity within the Republic of South Africa.