



# Epistemic Moral Error of Wildlife Lovers in Relation to Human Health in the World

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## Love for Wild Animals

Wild animals are traditionally preferred by humans to remain in their natural habitats, which are typically located far from urban centers or residential areas. However, for practical reasons, city officials have decided to build zoos both in city centers and on the outskirts to allow urban residents to observe wildlife at close range. This indirectly compels animals to live outside their natural habitats. Regardless of how sophisticated man-made zoos may be, the full complexity of natural habitats remains impossible to reproduce. Moreover, circus performances have been introduced as another form of entertainment for urban residents, featuring trained wild animals, including elephants, tigers, lions, horses, and bears. These animals are often subjected to special and intensive training to act as humans, using a combination of gentle and coercive methods that can, at times, be painful. Barbara Pompili, France's environment minister, emphatically stated in a 2020 press conference that bears, tigers, lions, elephants, and other wild animals would not be allowed to participate in traveling circuses "in the coming years." Furthermore, dolphins and killer whales cannot be introduced or bred in three French marine parks.

A turning point unfolds, marking a new era in the relationship between humans and wildlife and emphasizing the prioritization of animal welfare [10]. Existing zoos are continually being driven towards modern zoology. This requires proactive programs to identify areas for ongoing improvement and reactive programs to address identified animal welfare issues. The programs include an animal welfare committee in zoos. Staff of the facility should be able to raise animal welfare concerns without fear of retaliation. Continuous monitoring of all individual animals includes the use of positive and negative welfare indicators. Furthermore, staff are required to receive training in current science and be able to understand key concepts of animal welfare. Zoo facilities should also utilize new scientific evidence to continually improve animal care practices. Modern zoological institutions, including zoos and

aquariums, have an ethical responsibility to provide a high level of welfare for animals under their professional care. This is specifically important given that animals should have the opportunity to thrive [6].

Schönbrunn Zoo in Vienna has met the requirements for Global Humane Certification and is recognized as the oldest zoo in the world [Global Humane Society, 2025] [5]. In addition to zoos and circuses, social media has intensified fascination with wild animals, encouraging some individuals to keep wild species as pets, even in private homes or bedrooms. During holiday seasons, gift-giving commonly includes companion animals such as puppies or kittens. More troubling practices include gifting wild animals, namely lion cubs, tiger cubs, monkeys, turtles, and snakes, as novelty pets. These practices reflect epistemic moral error, arising from the belief that an action is ethically justified despite objective inappropriateness. Cognitive bias, rationalization, or flawed moral reasoning can reinforce this misconception, causing harmful actions to be perceived as acceptable.

## Psychological and Social Motivation

Owning wild or exotic animals is often perceived as a symbol of wealth, prestige, and dominance over wildlife. Social media reinforces the perception that showcasing wild animals has become associated with lifestyle performance, self-expression, and social status. Psychological perspectives further explain this behavior through concepts including fragile narcissism, admiration for controllable representations of nature, or attraction to juvenile animal features known as pedomorphism. In some cases, practical and economic motives also play a role, with wild animals kept for social media content or commercial activities, namely breeding, without deeper psychological drivers. This pattern underscores a paradox in human attitudes toward exotic animals. Expressions of affection coexist with destructive practices, including widespread poaching that disregards national hunting regulations, illegal

logging, and unregulated wildlife trade for traditional medicine or meat consumption. Accelerating deforestation, forest degradation, and poaching have intensified extinction risks for many species. Preventive alternatives have unfolded, such as wildlife exhibitions in Germany that use 3D hologram technology to simulate animals in natural settings [1]. Although visually engaging, the performances often lose appeal over time. Wildlife documentaries on platforms such as National Geographic, BBC Earth, Animal Planet, Our Planet (Netflix), and BBTV Official, which focuses on birdlife, offer a more sustainable form of engagement. These programs allow audiences to experience wildlife from home, providing access for individuals limited by time, financial constraints, or physical capacity.

## Various Main Factors that Drive the Trend of Loving Wild Animals or Hating Them

The main factors driving this trend are outlined in four categories:

- a) Social status and self-expression, where exotic animals (tigers, lions, orangutans, etc.) are viewed as symbols of prestige, wealth, and power. This trend is reinforced by social media, where public figures flaunt rare animals as part of a luxurious lifestyle. Based on the evidence obtained, animals become status accessories. This behavior is portrayed as a manifestation of the ego and a desire to conquer the world's wildlife.
- b) Loose and inconsistent regulations: In many countries, including the United States (US), Europe, and Africa, wildlife ownership regulations vary from state to state, facilitating accessibility. Even in Indonesia, which has strict regulations, permits are still available for captive-bred animals of a certain generation. Access to ownership has become easier, leading to a situation where more tigers are kept privately in the US than are living in the wild globally.
- c) Lack of awareness and information: Many prospective owners are unaware of the complexities of care, the high costs, and the dangers entailed. They are lured by the allure of cute baby animals without considering adulthood. Exotic animals are often neglected as adults, which seriously endangers both animal welfare and human safety.
- d) Economic motives and monetization: Wild animals are used for social media content that generates financial gain. Economic value is also driven by the massive captive breeding industry and legal/illegal trade. In the US, tiger cubs can cost less than purebred dogs, but the long-term costs of care are enormous [3,8,9].

## Keeping Wild Animals or Exotic Animals as Pets is a Right Action in a Wrong Situation Because It Threatens Lives

Keeping wild animals at home may appear acceptable, given the popularity of exotic species on social media, but the practice is fundamentally inappropriate. Exotic animal rescue activists, including Brink (2025) [4] from San Diego, assert that this

practice is wrong due to the associated life-threatening risk. The report showed that an estimated 5,000 to 7,000 tigers live in private captivity across the US, a figure exceeding the global wild population of approximately 5,574 individuals. This imbalance reflects the rapid expansion of the exotic pet trade, which has made apex predators increasingly accessible to the public. Financial accessibility further contributes to the trend, as the purchase price of a tiger can range from \$900 to \$2,500, often lower than the cost of many purebred dogs. However, the purchase price represents only a small portion of the long-term financial and ethical costs associated with keeping wild animals.

Feeding large quantities of meat, specialized exotic animal care, building and maintaining safe and spacious habitats, permits, and insurance can quickly increase the cost of ownership to tens, or even hundreds, of thousands of dollars. Based on evidence, this situation certainly increases the cost of care, placing a burden on the owner. Keeping wild animals outside natural habitats demands specialized care, and these species are notoriously difficult to tame. Private owners often lack the resources to meet the extensive mental, physical, and nutritional requirements of wild animals, with only the very wealthy able to provide adequate support. Insufficient care frequently leads to chronic stress, boredom, abnormal behaviors such as pacing or self-mutilation, and severe neglect.

The death of a tiger cub due to owner negligence sparked debate over whether keeping tigers or other exotic animals serves conservation purposes or financial gain. The IUCN Red List classifies all tiger species as endangered, with population declines of 50% to 70% over the past decade. Indonesia previously hosted three endemic tiger types, but extinction has eliminated two, leaving only the Sumatran tiger (*Panthera Tigris Sumatrae*). Wildlife, including tigers, is legally protected, and the Indonesian Natural Resources Conservation Agency (BKSDA) allows public ownership of tigers for conservation, provided animals originate from captivity and are third-generation. This policy remains controversial, as verifying origins and care in private ownership is difficult. Social media content featuring tigers has encouraged more Indonesians to keep exotic animals as pets. Wealthy individuals often retain tigers for prestige or financial gain through digital entertainment. Regulations prohibit monetizing content that depicts animal cruelty on platforms such as YouTube, Facebook, and TikTok, but comments frequently express a desire to own wild animals. Severe consequences include the death of exotic animals due to unsuitable environments and negligent care. Animal abuse extends beyond direct acts such as neglect, staged rescues, or encouragement of harm, as monetization of exotic animals further worsens the problem. Additionally, high mortality rates under private ownership show the failure of these practices as conservation measures [13].

## The Relationship between Human and Animal Health

The relationship between human and animal health is expected to apply the "One Health" concept, officially recognized by WHO, FAO, and OIE (now WOA) as a holistic approach. This requires an understanding that human health, animal health (both wild

and domestic), and the ecosystem are closely and inseparably interconnected. The three elements form a very strong and multidimensional relationship, and the following issues need to be taken seriously:

- a) Zoonoses & Emerging Infectious Diseases (EIDs): Animals serve as reservoirs, with approximately 60–75% of newly identified human infections linked to zoonotic transmission. Observable examples include COVID-19 (suspected bats), H5N1 Avian Influenza (wild/domestic birds), Ebola (fruit bats), Lyme (deer/rat ticks), and Rabies (dogs, bats, raccoons). Domestic animals can function as transmission bridges between wildlife and humans, including cats exposed to infected birds or dogs contacting rabid bats. Reports showed that environmental change and wildlife trade further intensify these risks. Forest encroachment, illegal wildlife trade, and climate-driven habitat disruption increase human–wildlife contact, thereby facilitating pathogen spillover into human populations.
- b) Antimicrobial Resistance (AMR): The irrational overuse of antibiotics in livestock (for growth promotion or mass disease prevention) supports the development of resistant bacteria. The environment acts as a medium for the spread of resistant bacteria and resistance genes from livestock waste contaminating soil, water, and the food chain, threatening the effectiveness of treatment of infections in humans and animals.
- c) Food Safety and Nutrition: Domestic Animals as a Food Source. The health of livestock (cattle, chickens, pigs, fish) directly affects the safety of animal-derived food products (meat, milk, eggs). Diseases such as salmonellosis, anthrax, and brucellosis can be transmitted to humans through consumption. Wild animals play a role in contaminating water sources or crops with pathogens from wild animal waste that are harmful to humans.
- d) Ecosystem Health & Environmental Services: The health of wildlife populations is often an early indicator of ecosystem health. Population declines or disease outbreaks in wildlife can signal environmental damage or potential zoonotic threats to humans. Similarly, wildlife acts as a natural control, as it helps control pests and disease vectors such as mosquitoes and rats that can harm humans as well as livestock.
- e) Mental Health and Well-Being: Companion animals provide significant psychological benefits to humans, such as reducing stress, anxiety, and loneliness, as well as increasing physical activity and social interaction (Human-Animal Bond). Based on evidence, positive experiences with nature and wildlife contribute to human mental well-being [2,7,12].

## Conclusion

In conclusion, people often express affection for exotic animals by keeping wild species at home. However, destructive behaviour persisted through poaching, illegal logging, expanding deforestation, forest degradation, and wildlife trade in extreme markets. Social media further intensified this problem by supporting monetization, which frequently undermined conservation goals. These contradictions reflected repeated cases in which actions perceived as acceptable were, in reality, ethically and ecologically harmful.

Ideally, wild animals should be appreciated in their natural habitats. Although documentaries, 3D hologram exhibitions, zoos, and circus show offer alternative experiences, no artificial setting can fully replicate the authenticity of nature. Natural habitats are part of God's creation, and no human-made environment can replicate ecological balance. Therefore, greater public awareness is essential, particularly recognition of wrongdoing and moral responsibility for practices that harm wildlife.

## Conflict of Interest

No conflict of interest.

## Acknowledgement

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