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Protecting Biodiversity: How an EU Positive List Can Make a Difference

The exotic pet trade threatens biodiversity and animal welfare. Volt's proposal for an EU-wide positive list aims to regulate which species can be traded, ensuring safer and more sustainable practices. Discover how this policy can protect our ecosystems and enhance public health.



Europe's exotic pet trade, including species like turtles, is vast and largely unregulated, posing risks to wildlife and ecosystems. – [unsplash.com](#) © [neom](#)

What you'll learn in this article

This article explores the benefits of implementing a positive list and how this policy can effectively create a better future:

- The exotic pet trade is a concern due to its harmful **impact on species conservation, public health**, and the ethical treatment of animals.
- A positive list can **improve the exotic pet trade** by clearly defining which species are safe and sustainable to trade, thus preventing the exploitation of at-risk animals.
- Implementing a positive list will help **protect endangered species, reduce public health risks**, and ensure higher standards of animal welfare.
- Ensuring the positive list works requires **effective enforcement, public awareness, and international cooperation** to regulate and monitor the exotic pet trade.
- **Volt envisions a future** where the exotic pet trade is ethically managed, biodiversity is protected, and public health and animal welfare are prioritized across Europe.

Why is the exotic pet trade a concern?

The concerns surrounding the exotic pet trade are longstanding. Within the European Union, the [European Parliament addressed these concerns](#) back in November 2022. However, the push for implementing an EU-wide positive list to regulate the trade continues into 2024 – and is to persist. Key concerns include:

Animal Welfare since many species suffer greatly in captivity due to ...

- inadequate care (results chronic stress; poor physical health).
- improper housing (leads to insufficient space and unsuitable environments).
- a lack of understanding of their complex needs (causes difficulties in providing appropriate nutrition, social interaction, and environmental enrichment).

Another significant concern is the **public health risk** associated to the exotic pet trade. For example, zoonotic diseases can spread more easily when humans are in close contact with wild and exotic animals. The [European Parliament investigated](#) on that matter back in 2020. The investigation was prompted by evidence that the COVID-19 pandemic has connections to wildlife markets:

“Human activities, such as trade in wildlife, increase opportunities for animal–human interactions and facilitate zoonotic disease transmission. Several significant diseases, including Ebola and the severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) outbreak, have been traced, in part, to substantial animal-human contact along the trade chain.

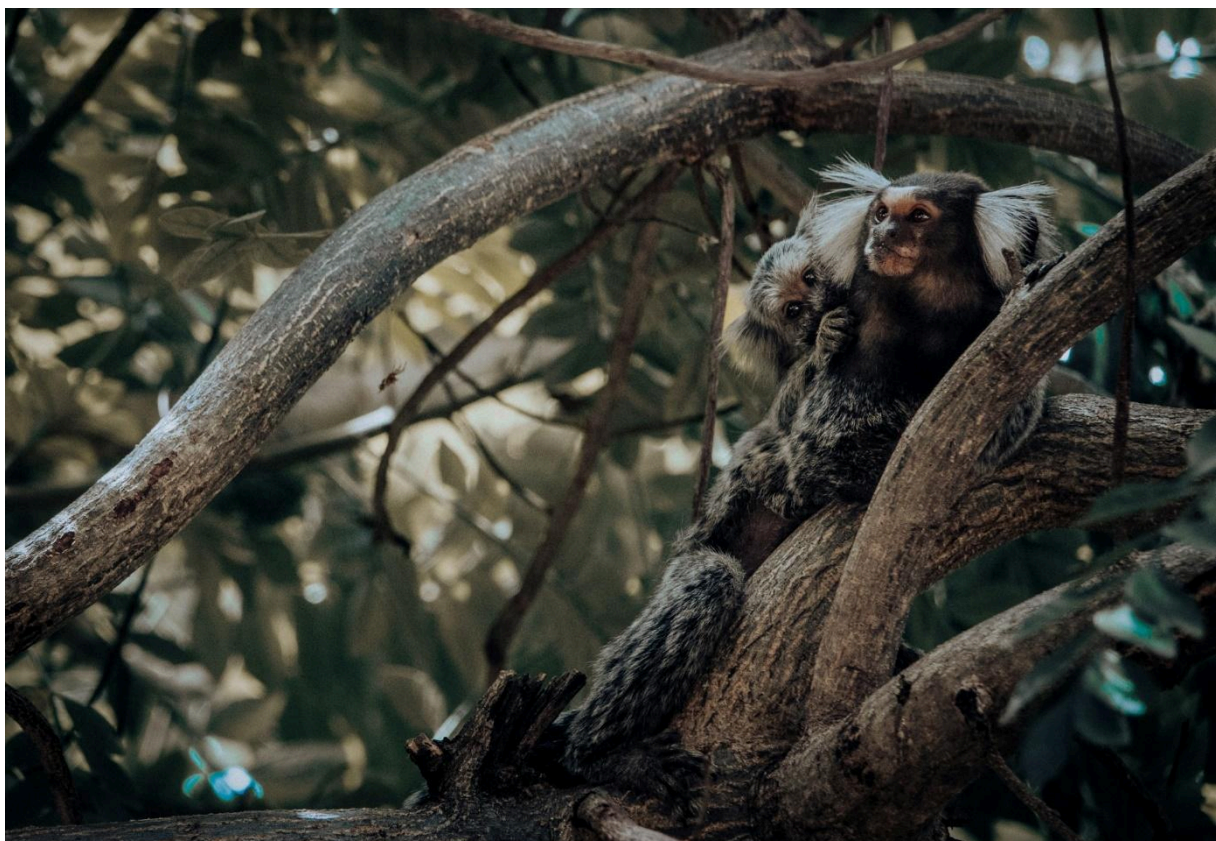
Current information suggests that the Covid-19 pandemic may have started from a local Chinese wildlife market."

Other diseases like salmonella and monkeypox have also been linked to the exotic pet trade, making it a public health concern.

Following the route of concern, a further issue is that the pet trade contributes to the **decline of species populations and disrupts ecosystems**. This depletion of wildlife can [lead to imbalances in ecosystems](#), with far-reaching consequences for biodiversity. Additionally, when exotic pets escape or are released into the wild, they can become invasive species, threatening native wildlife and habitats.

Lastly, we will need to look at the dark sides of trading living creatures: **the illegal wildlife market**. Over history, there have been many cases where this trade has led to significant sufferings. The extent of these negative impacts includes mass extinctions of countless species, the destruction of the largest ecosystem on our planet – the oceans – and the spread of numerous diseases, as well as the endangerment of human lives.

Moreover, the illegal wildlife trade often overlaps with illegal activities. The demand for rare and exotic animals fuels a black market that exploits wildlife and undermines conservation efforts. Given these concerns, the push for an EU-wide positive list aims to create a more standardized and precautionary approach to the exotic pet trade. Such a list would clearly define which species are suitable to be kept as pets, helping to protect animals, humans, and the environment.



Marmoset monkeys, still allowed as pets in some EU countries, are among millions of wild animals captured annually for the exotic pet trade. – unsplash.com © [rodolfoallen](#)

What are the origins of the trade?

Before we examine the positive list and its potential to improve the world for all, it is crucial to understand the importance of regulating the pet trade market. We need to grasp the [extent of global and EU-wide trading activities](#). The belief that exotic animals for adoption in the EU come exclusively from captive breeding is wrong! Exotic animals in the EU primarily originate from nature all around the world – commonly Southeast Asia, Africa, and South America, with illegal trade involving millions of creatures annually.

For example, between 1998 and 2007, 30 million CITES-listed animals were illegally caught in Southeast Asia and exported globally. The EU is a major player, being the third-largest global consumer and transit point for wildlife trade. Despite CITES regulations, in 2018, EU member states reported over 6,000 seizures, highlighting the scale of this trade, which remains difficult to fully quantify due to weak border controls and enforcement.

The awareness of the economic, health and social impact of animal trading is important to stop this threatening conditions. Moreover, it is important to make it clear to pet owners and those interested in exotic pets that keeping these species is problematic in many cases. If there is no way around keeping exotic animals, interests should check the following information when adopting an animal:

- **legal status:** Ensure the species is legal to own and not protected under CITES or local regulations.
- **origin:** Verify that the animal was sourced ethically and not taken from the wild illegally.
- **care requirements:** Research the specific habitat, diet, and enrichment needs of the species.
- **long-term commitment:** Understand the lifespan and potential growth of the animal and ensure you can commit to its care.
- **health risks:** Be aware of any zoonotic diseases the species may carry and the risks to human health.
- **impact on biodiversity:** Consider the environmental impact of keeping the species, including the risk of invasive species if released or escaped."

What Is a positive list?

A positive list is a **regulatory measure** that clearly outlines **which animal species are legally allowed to be traded or kept as pets**. Unlike a negative list that bans specific species, a positive list includes only those species that are **considered safe and suitable for domestic care**, ensuring better protection for both animals and ecosystems.

What are the key benefits of implementing a positive list?

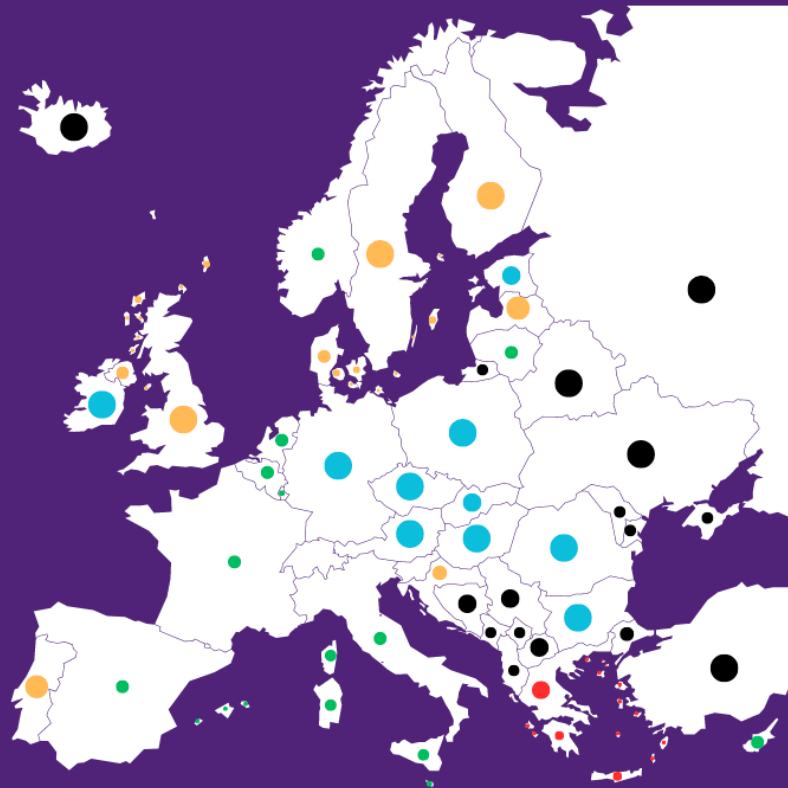
1. A positive list ensures only species that can thrive in captivity are kept as pets. Studies show that many exotic species suffer high mortality rates in captivity due to inadequate care (Eurogroup for Animals, 2020).
2. Limits exposure to zoonotic diseases by restricting the trade of high-risk species. Approximately 70% of emerging infectious diseases in humans originate from animals, highlighting the importance of minimizing contact with wild animals. (WOAH example "[Overview of Wildlife \(Zoonotic\) Diseases in Pakistan](#)", 2013).
3. Reduces pressure on wild populations by preventing the capture and trade of endangered species. The exotic pet trade is a significant driver of species depletion, with over 100 million wild animals kept as pets in Europe alone ([Council of the EU, 2022](#)).
4. A positive list offers clear guidelines for which species are allowed, making it easier to enforce laws and prevent illegal trade. Countries with positive lists have reported more effective regulation and enforcement compared to those using negative lists (World Animal Protection, 2020).
5. Prevents the introduction of non-native species that could become invasive and harm local ecosystems. Invasive species cost the EU an estimated EUR 12 billion annually in management and control ([European Commission, 2023](#)).

Mapping positive lists: EU's exotic pet policies

- positive list
- in conversation
- negativ lists
- no regulations
- no informations

❗ Countries with a positive list have either adopted or are in process of implementing it. The scope of there lists varies by country and includes different species.

Volt



Volt's Vision: How can we ensure the positive list works?

Volt envisions a future where the exotic pet trade is strongly regulated. For this, it is essential that the European Parliament implements a comprehensive EU-wide positive list, creating a safer and more ethical framework for pet ownership. By championing this policy, Volt aims to protect biodiversity, prevent the exploitation of endangered species, and enhance public health. To ensure the positive list works effectively, robust enforcement and clear guidelines are crucial.

Governments need to implement strict monitoring and penalties for non-compliance to deter illegal trading. Additionally, educating people about the importance of choosing pets from the positive list, through public awareness campaigns, will emphasise the benefits for animal welfare and biodiversity. Regular updates to the list, based on scientific research and conservation needs, will help adapt to changing circumstances and ensure it remains relevant and effective.

“Regulate exotic pet trade through an EU-wide positive list to protect biodiversity, human health, and that of other animals. The list would detail which animal species are allowed to be traded as companion animals.”

Discover More: Electoral Moonshot Programme 2024/29

To learn more about Volt's vision for the future and our plans to address critical issues like the exotic pet trade, explore our [Electoral Moonshot Programme 2024/29](#). Together, we can build a better tomorrow.