

**AN INVESTIGATION INTO PET SHOP CONDITIONS FOR BIRDS IN SINGAPORE
2016**



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By Animal Concerns Research and Education Society (ACRES)

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ACRES is a pioneering Singapore-based charity and Institution of Public Character, founded by Singaporeans in 2001 with the aim of advocating an end to animal cruelty in Asia.

We have six focus areas: Tackling Wildlife Crime, Wildlife Rescue and Rehabilitation, Addressing Zoo Animal Welfare, Humane Education, Community Outreach and Promoting Cruelty-Free Living.

Tackling Wildlife Crime

The illegal wildlife trade subjects billions of animals to pain and suffering, and threatens to wipe out countless species. At ACRES, we combat this wildlife trade through our 24-hour Wildlife Crime Hotline, undercover investigations, public awareness campaigns and collaborations with other NGOs and the government. Our investigations have led to the capture of many wildlife criminals. Our campaigns and engagements with the government have led to vast improvements to national wildlife protection laws.

Wildlife Rescue & Rehabilitation

In 2009, we opened the ACRES Wildlife Rescue Centre (AWRC) in Singapore. We now rescue, treat and rehabilitate hundreds of wild animals every year, some from the illegal exotic pet trade and others native to the forests in Singapore that are found injured, lost or disorientated. We run our wildlife rescue services 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. The facility operates on a 'no kill' policy.

Addressing Zoo Animal Welfare

We also conduct scientific investigations into the welfare of animals in zoos and marine parks throughout Asia. We use our findings to raise the standards of captive environments across the region, to ensure that at least the basic needs of the animals are met and to end cruel and exploitative circus-style animal shows. Our work with the zoo community, governments and local NGOs has led to improved welfare standards at zoos in Singapore, Malaysia and Japan.

Humane Education

We never forget that the key to ending animal abuse is education. Our talks, roadshows and Humane Education programmes touch a wide cross section of society, from children in kindergarten to the elderly in the heartland, reaching over 100,000 individuals each year. We travel to schools as well as malls, both downtown and in the heartland. And almost every other day, we get a busload of school children visiting our Education Centre and Outdoor Conservation Classroom at the AWRC. Our aim is to encourage sympathy, compassion and respect for animals

as well as other human beings, and to inspire and empower children to change their world for the better.

Community Outreach

We currently have over 20,000 volunteers and supporters in our database. Our volunteer opportunities promote volunteerism in Singapore and create a more caring and compassionate society. We also distribute grants for local animal protection projects, organise conferences and forums and encourage people to become involved in global animal protection campaigns.

Promoting Cruelty-Free Living

Through our Cruelty-Free Living educational materials, we raise awareness about a wide range of household products, food items and fashion accessories that are either tested on animals or cause needless suffering and death in animal labs and factory farms. Our aim is to get consumers to make more humane, considerate and compassionate choices in their daily life.

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TERMS OF REFERENCE

Term	Explanation	Annexed at
AVA	means the Agri-food and Veterinary Authority	
Pet shops	A pet shop is defined in the <i>Animals and Birds Act</i> (Cap. 7), <i>Animals and Birds (Pet Shop and Exhibition) Rules</i> as, ‘any premises where animals or birds intended for use as pets are kept or displayed for sale by retail or wholesale or for export’.	
Pet Shop Licence Conditions	means the Pet Shop Licence Conditions (4) Display and Sale of Birds revised as at 1 March 2011.	Appendix 1
Noted Conditions	means those of the Pet Shop Licence Conditions that the investigators visually examined.	
AVA’s Pet Shop Grading Scheme	According to AVA, <i>‘AVA licenses the keeping and display for sale of pets to safeguard the welfare of animals. AVA introduced the Pet Shop Grading Scheme in 2007 to raise standards of animal welfare and professionalism in the pet retail industry.</i> <i>These pet shops are graded from Grade A to D according to their compliance with licence conditions and their adoption of best practices.’</i>	
AVA’s Grade List	means AVA’s Pet Shop Grades list updated as on December 2015. (http://www.ava.gov.sg/docs/default-source/tools-and-resources/resources-for-businesses/ava-pet-shop-grade-list_updated-june-2016.pdf?sfvrsn=2)	
CITES	the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora. It is an international agreement to ensure that trade ceases to threaten wildlife with extinction. Singapore became a signatory to CITES in 1986 and regulates trade in endangered species through a system of permits.	
CITES Appendices	lists of species afforded different levels or types of protection from over-exploitation. Appendix I lists species that are the most endangered among CITES-listed animals and plants. Appendix II lists species that are not necessarily now threatened with extinction but that may become so unless trade is closely controlled. Appendix III is a list of	

	species included at the request of a Party that already regulates trade in the species and that needs the cooperation of other countries to prevent unsustainable or illegal exploitation	
Psittaciformes spp	Refers to all parrots.	

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

We conducted an undercover investigation in August-September 2016 into the conditions of licensed pet shops in Singapore displaying and selling birds. We examined those conditions which could be evaluated solely on visual examination. They were:

No.	Condition no.	Explanation
(i)	1(a)	All birds housing must be of adequate dimensions and supplied with suitable perches for the birds.
(ii)	1(b)	Birds must be able to move freely and comfortably and their tails and outspread wings should not touch the sides of the cage.
(iii)	3	Birds kept together must be compatible. There must be no overcrowding.
(iv)	4	Housing must be in good condition and kept clean and dry. It must be safe and comfortable for the birds.
(v)	5	Sick, diseased or injured birds must be removed from display.
(vi)	7	Clean drinking water must be provided at all times. Drinking containers must be clean.
(vii)	10	Common rock pigeons must not be displayed or sold.
(viii)	11	No poultry, including chickens, quails and pheasants, are to be displayed or sold.
(ix)	17	Shops with a grade must display their latest Grade Decal prominently

In addition, the shops were also surveyed for sale of bird traps.

We investigated a total of 45 shops displaying and selling birds. As the investigators did not have access to any bird breeding facilities, retail spaces displaying birds for sale were examined.

Pet shops are graded under AVA's Pet Shop Grading Scheme. According to the AVA, it grades pet shops based on their compliance with licence conditions and adoption of best practices. Grading is done, apparently, to raise the standards of animal welfare and professionalism of pet shops.

For the purposes of this report, the Pet Shop Licence Conditions (4) Display And Sale of Birds Conditions are used as a benchmark against which to evaluate the bird shops' practices in respect of their display and sale of birds.

We also collated all online advertisements on sale of birds on Gumtree Singapore (22 June 2016 to 21 August 2016), Locanto Free Classifieds Singapore (1 July 2016 to 21 August 2016), Chutku.sg Classifieds (1st 8 pages; checked on 5 August 2016) and Facebook (August 2016).

The undercover investigation revealed the following:

Bird Shops Total: 45	All of the pet shops in AVA's Grade List displaying and selling birds, totalling 34. 2 pet shops that are not in AVA's Grade List. 2 pet shops had ceased operating at the given location at the time of the investigation, but this is not reflected in AVA's Grade List.	Out of the 36 shops that displayed birds for sale, 27 pet shops (75%) breached one or more of the Pet Shop Licence Conditions:- 13 out of 27 pet shops (48%) which sums up to half of the said pet shops displayed for sale sick, diseased and/or injured birds (see condition no. 5). 11 out of 27 pet shops (40.7%) failed to provide clean drinking water (see condition no.7). 13 out of 27 pet shops (48%) breached by reason of failure to provide basic housing required under the Pet Shop Licence Conditions (see condition no. 4). 15 out of 27 pet shops (55.5%) failed to display the grade decal prominently (see para 17).
	7 pet shops do not sell birds anymore.	

From the results of the investigation, there appears to be flouting of the Pet Shop Licence Conditions, in 75% (27 out of 36 shops displaying and selling birds).

The breaches were obvious upon a purely visual examination. As such, members of the public are equally capable of monitoring pet shops in Singapore. The public is encouraged to be the check and balance of the pet industry - to complement AVA's efforts - as consumer demand wields much influence over industry practices. In order to improve industry standards, we recommend that AVA actively educates the public on the animal welfare conditions applicable to pet shops and advise consumers to make responsible choices.

We also surveyed the online advertisements on sale of birds from June 2016 to August 2016 respectively. Four platforms were chosen to conduct the survey. The online advertisements on sale of birds revealed a total of 655 advertisements online, with 273 of the 655 (41.7 %) of the ads for CITES listed bird species. The Animals and Birds Act also requires that any person keeping animals and birds in captivity for sale, export or exhibition in any place should be licensed by the AVA. The presence of online advertisements without licensed premises and the resulting enforcement challenges on ad-by-ad basis raise serious concerns on uncontrolled online trading in live animals.

CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

1. This report is based on the results of undercover investigations conducted by ACRES' investigators in August-September 2016 into the conditions in shops in Singapore displaying and selling birds.
2. We chose a sample of 45 target shops comprising:
 - i. all 34 of the pet shops licenced by AVA for the display and sale of birds found in AVA's Grade List (updated as at December 2015);
 - ii. 2 pet shops not included in AVA's Grade List;
 - iii. 2 pet shops had ceased operating at the given location at the time of the investigation, but this is not reflected in AVA's Grade List;
 - iv. 7 pet shops do not sell birds anymore.
 - v. A total of 36 shops displayed birds for sale were surveyed.
3. The objectives of the undercover investigation were:
 - i. to determine the extent to which bird shops in Singapore complied with the Pet Shop Licence Conditions (4) Display And Sale of Birds Conditions, upon visual examination only (see Noted Conditions below);
 - ii. to determine whether bird shops live up to their grades, as conferred under the Pet Shop Grading Scheme;
 - iii. to determine the animal welfare conditions in which birds are displayed and sold in the retail spaces. In this respect, we used the Pet Shop Licence Conditions (4) Display And Sale of Birds Conditions governing the welfare of the animals as a benchmark, based on AVA's statement that pet shops have to adopt the guidelines set out by AVA and comply with the Conditions of Licensing to enhance animal welfare and the professional standards of pet shops;
 - iv. to determine if native birds sold in bird shops are poached from the wild locally;

- v. to determine the prevalence of live birds sale on online platforms and social media platforms like Facebook.

CHAPTER 2. INVESTIGATION METHODOLOGY

2.1. MEANS BY WHICH BASIC INFORMATION WAS ACQUIRED

4. We chose Pet Shop Licence Conditions (4) Display And Sale of Birds Conditions that could be evaluated solely by way of visual examination. They are as follows (the ‘**Noted Conditions**’):

No.	Condition no.	Explanation
(i)	1(a)	All birds housing must be of adequate dimensions and supplied with suitable perches for the birds.
(ii)	1(b)	Birds must be able to move freely and comfortably and their tails and outspread wings should not touch the sides of the cage.
(iii)	3	Birds kept together must be compatible. There must be no overcrowding.
(iv)	4	Housing must be in good condition and kept clean and dry. It must be safe and comfortable for the birds.
(v)	5	Sick, diseased or injured birds must be removed from display.
(vi)	7	Clean drinking water must be provided at all times. Drinking containers must be clean.
(vii)	10	Common rock pigeons must not be displayed or sold.
(viii)	11	No poultry, including chickens, quails and pheasants, are to be displayed or sold.
(ix)	17	Shops with a grade must display their latest Grade Decal prominently

2.2. RECORDING OF THE EVIDENCE

5. The investigators took contemporaneous videos of their visits to the target shops.

CHAPTER 3. TARGET SHOPS THAT BREACHED THE PET SHOP LICENCE CONDITIONS OR FAILED TO COMPLY WITH ANIMAL WELFARE CONDITIONS

6. **A total of 27 shops i.e. 75%** (out of 36 shops that displayed birds for sale) breached one or more noted conditions.
7. **19 out of the above 27** pet shops (i.e. 70.4%) failed substantively, in that they breached one or more of the following Noted Conditions governing the welfare of the animals displayed for sale i.e. **the most basic welfare conditions were not met:**

(x)	4	Housing must be in good condition and kept clean and dry. It must be safe and comfortable for the birds.
(xi)	5	Sick, diseased or injured birds must be removed from display.
(xii)	7	Clean drinking water must be provided at all times. Drinking containers must be clean.

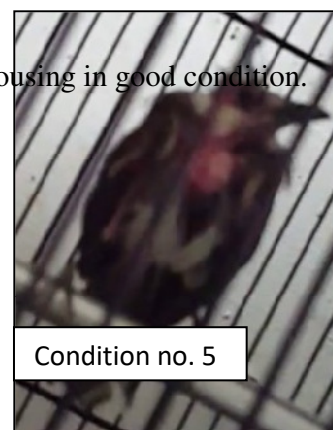
8. **12 out of the aforesaid 27 pet shops received an A grade under AVA's Pet Shop Grading Scheme** (as of the list updated on Dec 2015).

9. **7 out of the aforesaid 27** pet shops (i.e. **25.9%**) failed solely because they did not display their grades.

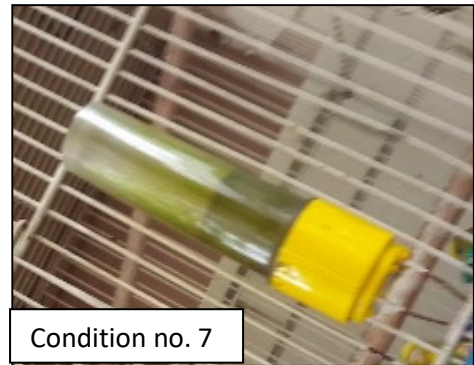
10. **9 out of 36** pet shops (i.e. **25%**) were observed at the time of the investigation to have complied with all the Noted Conditions.

11. Furthermore, **12 of the 27 (44.4%)** pet shops that failed to provide basic animal welfare such as provision of clean drinking water **3 of the 27 (11.1%)** and clean cages 4 of the 27 (14.8%) were graded A under the Pet Shop Grading Scheme. This intimates that the grading system, or the implementation thereof, may need to be reviewed.

12. Condition no.4: **13 of the 36 (38.2%)** shops failed to provide housing in good condition. Our investigators noted rusty cages and dried faeces covering perches and substrate substantially that the flooring gaps were filled with faeces.



13. Condition no. 5: **13 of the 36 (36%)** shops displayed birds with feather loss on body and tail and visible lesions.
14. Condition no. 7: **11 of the 36 (32.4%)** shops failed to provide clean drinking water to the birds. Investigations revealed dirty water, dirty containers or were empty.
15. **17 of the 36 shops (50%)** sold bird traps. They were sold for \$70 approximately.
16. Condition no. 11: **One** shop displayed fowl species for sale.



Condition no. 7



Bird traps on sale

CHAPTER 4. TRADE IN LIVE BIRDS ONLINE WITHOUT A PET SHOP LICENCE

17. Under the Animals and Birds Act Chapter 7, 48-(1) “No person shall keep in captivity for sale, export or exhibition any animal or bird in any place which has not been licensed in that behalf under this Act.” However sale of live animals online raises serious concerns on difficulties in monitoring the origin of these animals, housing conditions and transfer of licenses.
18. These online platforms without appropriate policing measures or guidelines in place, allow anyone to sell or buy live animals online without any licensed premises, making all the regulatory requirements under the Animals and Birds Act redundant.

For Gumtree Singapore (22 June 2016 to 21 August 2016)

- i. Total number of advertisements on sale of birds = 250. The most common bird sold is the Lovebird (54 advertisements; 21.6%), followed by Conure (36 advertisements; 14.4%) and Budgerigar (22 advertisements; 8.8%);
- ii. There were 5 advertisements (2%) on CITES Appendix I birds and 95 advertisements (38%) on CITES Appendix II birds (excluding Lovebirds, of which with the exception of the Peach-faced love bird *Agapornis roseicollis*, are listed under CITES Appendix II);
- iii. There were 11 advertisements on poultry (4.4%) which includes Chickens, Button Quails and common quails.

For Locanto Free Classifieds Singapore (1 July 2016 to 22 August 2016)

- i. Total number of advertisements on sale of birds = 335. The most common bird sold is the Lovebird (67 advertisements; 20%), followed by Conure (59 advertisements; 17.6%) and Cockatiel (41 advertisements; 12.2%);
- ii. There were 11 advertisements (3.3%) on CITES Appendix I birds and 134 advertisements (40%) on CITES Appendix II birds (excluding Lovebirds, of which

with the exception of the Peach-faced love bird *Agapornis roseicollis*, are listed under CITES Appendix II);

- iii. There were 6 advertisements on poultry (1.8%) which includes Chickens, Button quails and Common quails.

For Chutku.sg Classifieds (checked on 5 August 2016; first 8 pages)

- i. Total number of advertisements on sale of birds = 28. The most common bird sold is the Red-whiskered Bulbul (10 advertisements; 35.7%), followed by the Oriental white-eye (9 advertisements, 32.1%) and White-rumped Shama (4 advertisements; 14.3%).
- ii. There were no advertisements on CITES- listed birds or poultry.
- iii. 3 of the birds were advertised to be 'wild caught'.

For Facebook (August 2016)

- i. Total number of advertisements on sale of birds = 42. The most common bird sold is the Conure (11 advertisements; 26.2%), followed by Budgerigar (4 advertisements; 9.5%) and lovebird (3 advertisements; 7.1 %).
- ii. There were 2 advertisements (4.8%) on CITES Appendix I birds and 26 advertisements (61.9%) on CITES Appendix II birds (excluding Lovebirds, of which with the exception of the Peach-faced love bird *Agapornis roseicollis*, are listed under CITES Appendix II).

CHAPTER 5. RECOMMENDATIONS

19. Below are our recommendations following the undercover investigation:

- i. The current Noted Condition no. 1(a) on space requirements are not specific compared to the guidelines given for dogs and cats. “Adequate dimensions” is subjective considering the diversity of bird species sold, with diverse needs in captivity.
- ii. The current Noted Condition no. 1 (b) on being able to “move freely” for birds- who can fly- compared to dogs and cats who move about, is also subjective. We urge for specific guidelines in terms of dimensions for different species offered for sale.
- iii. We urge for stricter enforcement of the Pet Shop Licence Conditions and more frequent spot checks by AVA in order to ensure currency of the grades conferred and heavier penalties for bird shops which have recurrent breaches.
- iv. The public can be encouraged to be the check-and-balance of the pet industry- to complement AVA’s efforts- as consumer demand wields much influence over industry practices. In addition, we recommend that AVA actively educates the public on the animal welfare conditions applicable to pet shops and farms, and advise consumers to make responsible choices.
- v. The sale of bird traps in pet shops is banned to reduce the incidence of poaching. Our recommendation is for AVA to loan out traps to monitor activity (for example, recapture of lost animals and potential trapping of wild birds).
- vi. Online live animal trade raises serious concerns on unmonitored backyard breeding, unregistered ownership of CITES listed animals, sale of wild caught animals, import/export of animals without legal documentation, and unfair competition for the licensed pet shops who are encouraged to ensure best practices in the pet industry.
- vii. Considering the above concerns and challenges faced by the AVA and ACRES in policing online platforms, where any individual can sell or buy goods, ACRES would like to urge for a ban on live animal trade online. We also urge AVA to continue working closely with online classifieds sites, including social media platforms like Facebook, to ban the online sale of birds and animals.
- viii. ACRES strongly recommends a ban on online trade in live animals, also considering the resources spent extensively by the agencies and ACRES is responding and

investigating online trade-related feedback on a regular basis. If users are blocked, they are likely to create a new User ID to continue trading. A ban would address the root cause of the problem.

- ix. ACRES also proposes establishing a centralised online system for re-homing pet animals with a standardised adoption fee for different groups of animals to provide an avenue for genuine re-homers.

CHAPTER 6. CONCLUSION

20. From the results of the investigation, there appears to be flouting of the Pet Shop Licence Conditions, and poor standards in over 60% of the pet shops investigated.
21. It would also appear that the AVA Pet Shop Grading System, or the implementation thereof, may need reviewing, as 12 pet shops that had breached basic, animal welfare conditions received an A grade.
22. All the breaches highlighted above are evident from a visual examination. As such, members of the public are equally capable of monitoring pet shops and farms in Singapore. In order to improve industry standards and best practices in animal welfare, AVA should educate the public on animal welfare conditions for pet shops and farms.
23. Online trade in live animals: While the pet shop licensing conditions govern the animal welfare in AVA licensed premises, thousands of animals are offered for sale online, with no regulations governing the welfare and ownership of these animals. These advertisements would be considered obvious flouting of the legislation.
24. Unregulated online trade encourages anyone to buy and sell online, rather than complying with the regulations under the pet shop licensing conditions. Pet shops are subjected to licensing conditions, government and public scrutiny with overheads to pay, unlike the sellers who ply their trade online freely.

APPENDIX I

PET SHOP LICENCE CONDITIONS (4) **DISPLAY AND SALE OF BIRDS**

INTRODUCTION

- A. A pet shop licence from the Agri-Food & Veterinary Authority (AVA) is required to keep or display for sale pets under the Animals and Birds (Pet Shop and Exhibition) Rules 2004.
- B. The licence is issued subject to (1) submission of a valid application, (2) satisfactory applicant assessment (in the form of a course, interview or test), (3) satisfactory inspection of premises and (4) compliance with licence conditions.
- C. The licence is renewable annually.
- D. The licensee shall comply with all conditions of the licence at all times. Failure to comply with any condition of the licence shall constitute an offence under the law and the licensee shall be subject to regulatory action. The licensee may also be liable to be prosecuted in court under the applicable law, or have his / her licence suspended or revoked at the discretion of the Director-General.
- E. The licensee undertakes a duty of care to ensure that the animals in the confined environment of shop are (1) healthy and in good condition (2) housed in a clean, comfortable and safe environment and (3) managed properly according to their needs and development requirements.
- F. ~~The licensee shall not keep or display for sale any animal which AVA has not given written approval for and which is not listed on the licence.~~
- G. The display or sale of drugs, medications and preparations that require a prescription from a veterinary surgeon is not allowed.

LICENCE CONDITIONS

HOUSING & ENVIRONMENT

1. All bird housing must be of adequate dimensions and supplied with suitable perches for the birds. Birds must be able to move freely and comfortably and their tails and outspread wings should not touch the sides of the cage.
2. Birds displayed on perches must have adequate perch space. Perches are to be of a size and material suitable for the birds to grip comfortably.
3. Birds kept together must be compatible. There must be no overcrowding.
4. Housing must be in good condition and kept clean and dry. It must be safe and comfortable for the birds.

MANAGEMENT & HEALTHCARE

5. All birds displayed for sale must be healthy. Sick, diseased or injured birds must be removed from display and treated by a licensed practising veterinarian. The veterinarian must certify that the bird is recovered before it can again be displayed for sale.

6. New consignments of birds that have just arrived must not be displayed until the birds have been properly transferred to suitable display cages.
7. Clean drinking water must be provided at all times. Drinking containers must be kept clean.
8. The shop must display an emergency contact number on the shop front for the public to call in the event of an emergency and there must be evacuation arrangements in place.

REGULATORY REQUIREMENTS

9. Each bird in the shop must be accounted for. The source of a bird, its date of arrival in the shop (and Singapore), the medical history and date of purchase / release to the buyer should be available.
10. Common Rock Pigeons must not be displayed or sold.
11. No poultry, including chickens, quails and pheasants, are to be displayed or sold.
12. Only birds and animals for which AVA has given written approval to display and sell are to be kept on the premises.
13. All birds must be kept in their designated display areas approved by AVA. Any change of location of the bird display area must be approved by AVA.
14. Birds must not be displayed outside the shop premises unless the licensee has obtained written permission from the relevant building or area management.
15. Stock-tracking must be done for all birds (CITES or non-CITES). Birds listed under CITES (Appendices I, II and III) must have valid CITES permits and/or certificates. Any acquisitions or purchases of birds from other importers must have supporting documents such as letters of transfer or invoices. CITES birds sold must be accompanied by a letter of transfer containing details of the bird.
16. The licensee, manager and all staff who have worked longer than 6 months at the shop must attend structured formalized training for the pet retail industry at a teaching institution recognized by AVA, when required.
17. Shops with a grade must display their latest Grade Decal prominently.
18. There must be no non-compliance with the requirements of other regulatory agencies.

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