

[◀ Back to Article](#)

DEP creates list for banning wild, exotic animals by public

Brian Lockhart, Staff Writer

Published: 05:36 p.m., Saturday, January 22, 2011

Nearly two years after a chimpanzee mauled its owner's friend in Stamford, the state Department of Environmental Protection has released a proposal to ban possession of dozens of wild and exotic animals by the general public.

The list contains the obvious -- elephants, lions, bears, hippos, rhinos, large primates, harbor seals and alligators. It also includes perhaps the less obvious -- deer, black-tailed prairie dogs, striped skunks, raccoons, rattlesnakes and bats.

There are some specific members of species that also would be banned as pets: mangrove snakes, cat-eyed snakes, Muscovy ducks, swamp, rock and nail-tailed wallabies, tree kangaroos and monk parakeets.

A hearing has been scheduled at the agency's headquarters in Hartford for Feb. 15, the eve of the second anniversary of Travis the chimp's rampage.

"We're just trying to put these regulations in place," DEP spokesman Dennis Schain said. "That was the first best date to have that public hearing."

Travis, who lived with owner Sandra Herold for years and was a common sight in Stamford, got loose on Feb. 16, 2009, attacking and severely injuring friend Charla Nash before being shot dead by police.

The incident brought to light the fact the state has a patchwork quilt of animal possession laws and the DEP had no permitting process in place, even though legislation passed in 2004 instructed the agency to do so.

"The theory is, 'Yes we were'," said Rick Jacobson, the DEP staffer who put together the new regulations, admitting there are no permits on file from prior years.

After considering a highly debated, wide-ranging ban, the General Assembly following Travis' attack instead outlawed large primates and charged the DEP with developing a thorough list.

The agency focused on cataloguing those animals that pose potential dangers to humans, crops and Connecticut's flora and fauna. The agency also tried to define the entities -- aquariums, zoos, circuses, nature centers, schools and laboratories -- exempted from the ban on importation and possession.

But, Jacobson noted, DEP is not going to require permits.

"It reduces our workload and the workload of the vast groups out there being able to possess various animals," Jacobson said, adding the state would be unable to charge enough to make up for administrative costs.

The list of banned animals was initially developed in-house, then updated in response to hearings last March in Derby, Old Lyme and Rockfall. Feedback also came from academics and the state departments of health and agriculture.

"We did change substantially from our initial draft," Jacobson said.

For example, he said, the DEP had never thought to make sure veterinarians were on the exemption list.

The original list was also far more inclusive. So initially all pythons made the list of banned animals before the decision was made to exclude Burmese pythons because they are not considered an immediate threat to humans.

The DEP did not attempt to deal with invertebrates like spiders.

"You could have more species added but we were fearful if they began to appear to some as nonsensical we might not get the regulatory structure passed," he said. "There are poisonous tarantulas that aren't deadly (but) they make you sick. Does that meet the prohibiting threshold? We didn't want these kinds of nuanced questions to compromise" the project.

Interested parties who cannot attend the Feb. 15 public hearing on the regulations have until close of business on March 1 to submit their



views to the DEP.

Enforcement will be mainly complaint-driven, Jacobson said, with penalties ranging from fines between \$500 and \$2,000 and three months to a year in prison.

Jacobson said once the new ban is in place, the DEP is considering again asking Connecticut's Beardsley Zoo in Bridgeport to host an amnesty day for residents to turn in illegal pets without penalty.

The first effort, held in August 2009, netted 135 different creatures, many of them reptiles.

Staff Writer Brian Lockhart can be reached at brian.lockhart@scni.com

Pre-Owned Ford Explorer

The low-mileage pre-owned Ford Explorer you want.
FordCPO.com

3.70% Fixed Refinance

\$160,000 Mortgage for \$547/mo. Free. No Obligation.
Lendgo.com

Ads by Yahoo!