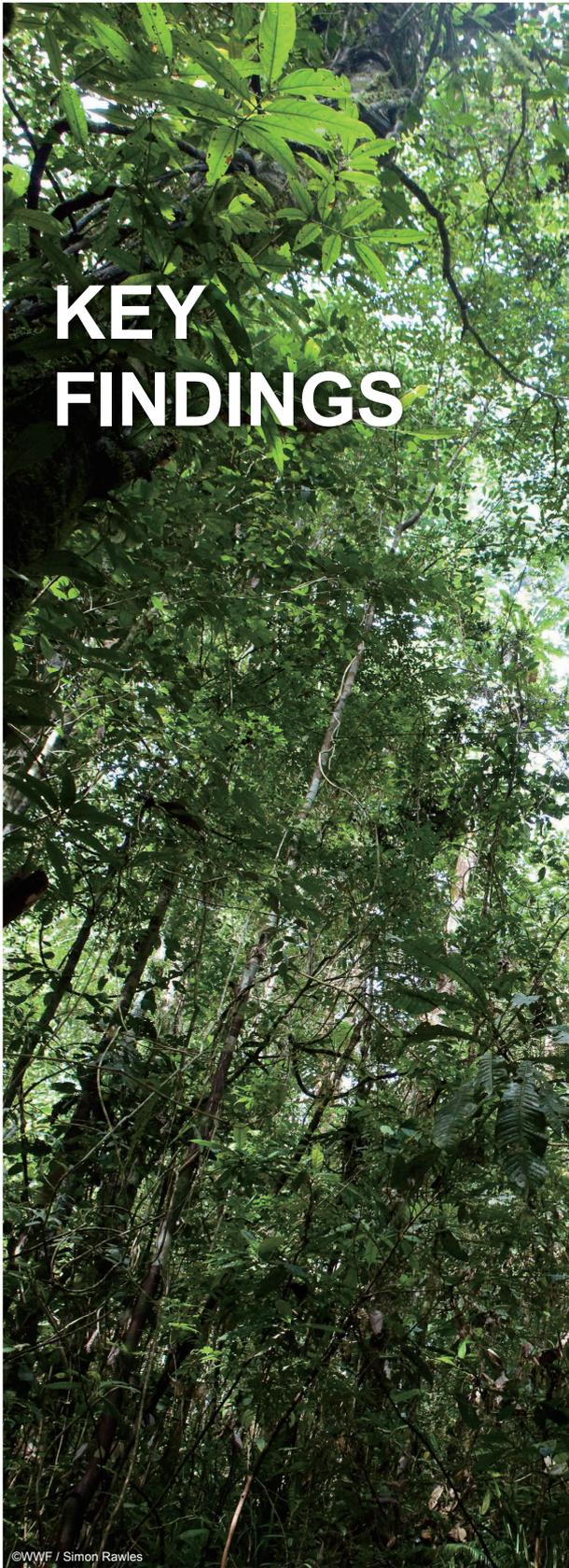




JAPAN



**OPINION SURVEY ON  
EXOTIC PET USE IN JAPAN  
2021**



# KEY FINDINGS

With the backdrop of the growing popularity of exotic pets, WWF Japan conducted an opinion survey of Japanese citizens' attitude toward exotic pet use and its associated issues.

- One in every three (33%) indicated interest in petting exotic pets, while one in every six (17%) indicated interest in having them as pets. The interest was higher among younger age groups.
- Around 68% had little or no knowledge of the five issues associated with exotic pets, namely, the issues of **infectious diseases, animal welfare, endangered species, illegal trade, and invasive species**.
- After being informed, 95% responded that they felt the issues were problems. About 60% expressed that the issue of infectious diseases was most important, followed by 18% indicating that endangered species were the most important.
- About 95% responded that stronger regulations were 'needed' or 'somewhat needed'. However, the proportion expressing they were 'needed' declined with age.
- After being informed about the issues, respondents interested in petting declined to 25%, while 14% still expressed interest in having exotic pets. The margin of decline in the latter was markedly small.
- The survey revealed that although the awareness on the issues of exotic pets is low amongst Japanese citizens, once they are informed, many would perceive these issues as problems. Conversely, potential consumers found particularly in younger age groups had a tendency to not change their interest in having exotic pets by simply being informed.
- These results suggest that a set of actions, including policy efforts to realize swift regulatory improvements, raising public awareness to foster the social norms, changing the behavior of potential consumers, as well as improving of businesses is necessary to address the issues associated with keeping exotic pet. WWF will work together with a wide range of stakeholders to achieve these changes.

\* In this survey, exotic pets were defined as "animals that are not considered as common pets, primarily those having overseas and/or wild origins".

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Forest by the Mahakam River, Kutai Barat, Borneo. Southeast Asia is home to many species that are used as exotic pets, including slow lorises (*genus Nycticebus*) and the green tree python (*Morelia viridis*).

## WWF

WWF is one of the world's largest and most experienced independent conservation organizations, with over 5 million supporters and a global network active in more than 100 countries. WWF's mission is to stop the degradation of the planet's natural environment and to build a future in which humans live in harmony with nature, by conserving the world's biological diversity, ensuring that the use of renewable natural resources is sustainable, and promoting the reduction of pollution and wasteful consumption.

Published in March 2021 by WWF Japan

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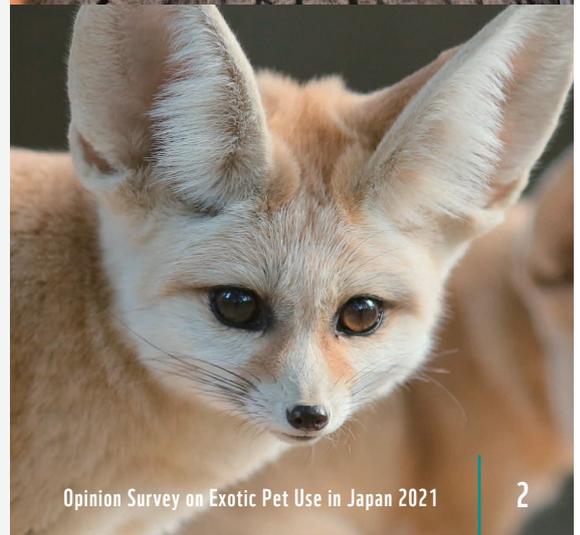
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# INTROUDUCTION & METHODOLOGY

Japan is one of the key exotic pet markets in the world. Animals like otters, galagos, hedgehogs, owls, and many other rare species of turtles and tortoises, lizards, chameleons, frogs, etc., are traded as private pets or for the purpose of display and petting at commercial facilities like animal cafés. In fact, Japan is known for having the highest number of exotic animal cafés in East and Southeast Asia. The popularity of exotic pets is being amplified through social media and the mass media. However, it is not well known that such popularity of exotic pet encompasses multifaceted issues, including the risks of infectious diseases, animal welfare, endangered species, illegal trade, and invasive species. WWF Japan, therefore, conducted its first opinion survey of Japanese citizens on the use of exotic pets and attitudes toward these issues.

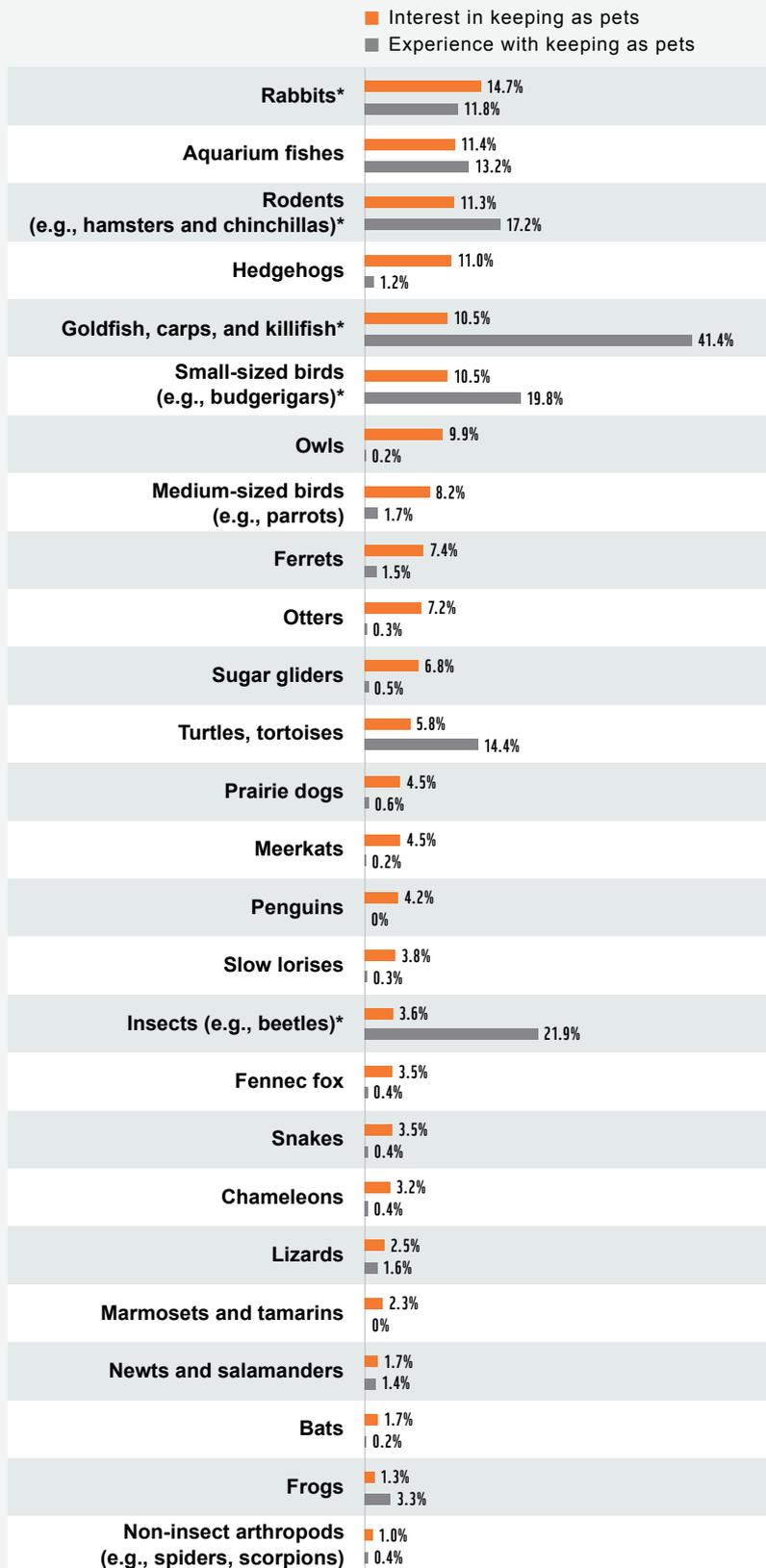
The survey was conducted between February 1st and 3rd via an online questionnaire. The sample consisted of 1,000 respondents of age 15–79, reflecting Japan’s age composition. In this survey, exotic pets were defined as “animals that are not considered as common pets, primarily those having overseas and/or wild origins.”



# INTEREST IN EXOTIC PETS

## Ranking of animals wanted as pets – excluding dogs and cats

Responses were provided against the following categories of animals.



(N=1000)

**50%** have experience of keeping animals other than dogs and cats

**29%** have experience of keeping animals other than conventional pets\*

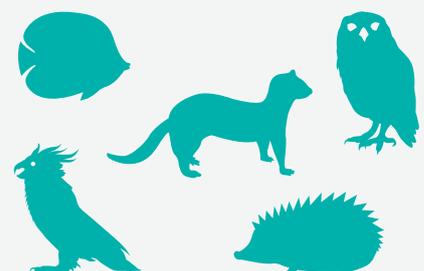
\* excluding relatively common pets such as rabbits, hamsters, goldfish, budgerigars, beetles, etc.

For this survey, exotic pets were defined as “animals that are not considered as common pets, primarily those having overseas and/or wild origins.” However, it is often difficult to draw clear lines for many animal groups.

The animal groups on the left chart also include categories which could contain both common pets and exotic pets defined in this survey. Therefore, the proportion of respondents with experience in keeping exotic pets shown above is a crude estimate.

## Exotic pets - “never had” but “interested in having”

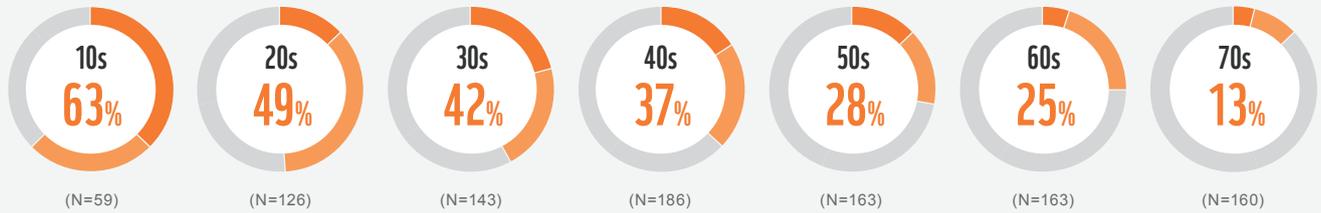
Exotic animals, such as aquarium fishes, hedgehogs, owls, medium-sized birds (e.g., parrots), ferrets, otters, and sugar gliders, were among the top-ranked animals desired as pets. Some also expressed interest in keeping reptiles, amphibians, and insects.



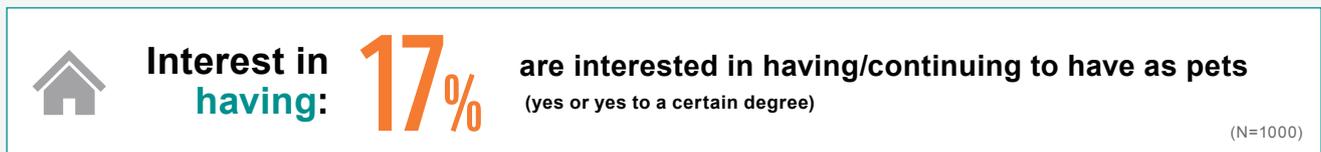
**Q Would you like to pet exotic animals?**



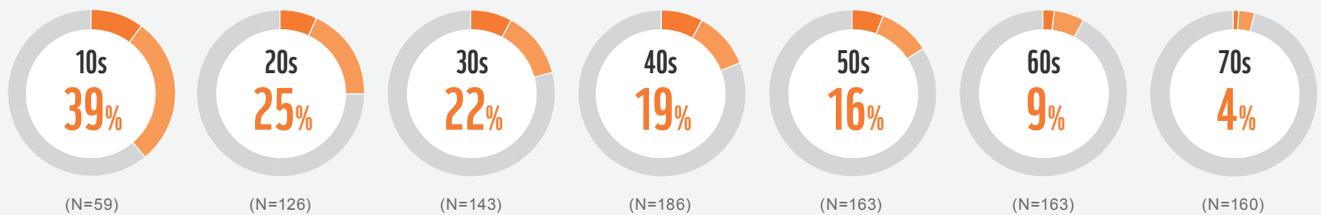
**By age groups** ■ Yes ■ Yes to a certain degree



**Q Would you like to have (or continue to have) exotic pets?**



**By age groups** ■ Yes ■ Yes to a certain degree



**Reasons I want to keep exotic pets**

1	animals are <i>kawaii</i> (cute)	53%
2	animals give me <i>iyashi</i> (healing)	43%
3	they are animals that I like	39%
4	I want to pet animals	29%
5	I enjoy viewing animals	17%
6	they are animals that my family likes	16%
6	I am interested in rare animals	16%
8	animals are beautiful	14%
9	I feel lonely without animals	7%
10	I want to attract attention by keeping rare animals	2%
11	Other	1%

(Among those gave reasons for wanting N=354)

**Stronger interest in younger age groups**

The proportion of respondents indicating interest in petting and keeping exotic pets doubled in the teenage group. Furthermore, over 50% of teenage males/females, males in their 20s, and females in their 30s expressed interest in petting exotic animals.

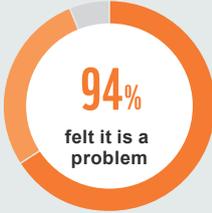
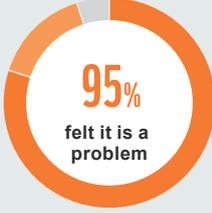
People in their 10s and 20s accessed information about exotic pets through a wide range of sources including the internet (portal sites as well as websites for zoos and aquariums), TV (shows, commercials), and the social media such as Twitter.

**Motivation behind wanting exotic pets**

The most common reasons for wanting exotic pets pertained to notions of “*kawaii* (cute)” and “*iyashi* (healing).” These motivations appear to be shared with motivations toward more common pets like dogs and cats. Contrarily, 16% expressed rarity was an important factor.

# ATTITUDE TOWARDS ISSUES WITH EXOTIC PETS

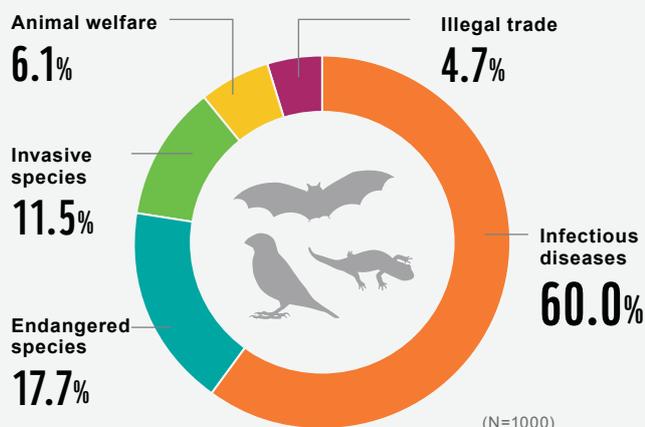
Level of awareness on the issues were low. However, after being informed, 95% perceived them as problems.

Issues with exotic pets	Level of awareness	Level of concern after being informed
<p><b>01 Infectious diseases</b></p> <p>There are risks of contracting infectious diseases from exotic pets, as certain pathogens (called “zoonotic diseases”) transmit from animals to humans. COVID-19 is a zoonotic disease.</p>	 <p>68% unaware</p>	 <p>96% felt it is a problem</p>
<p><b>02 Animal welfare</b></p> <p>Some are animals not suited to be kept as pets in private homes or facilities like cafés. Such animals may suffer from serious mental and physical stress.</p>	 <p>79% unaware</p>	 <p>94% felt it is a problem</p>
<p><b>03 Endangered species</b></p> <p>Many animals kept as exotic pets are endangered species. For some, pet trade is threatening their survival in the wild.</p>	 <p>66% unaware</p>	 <p>95% felt it is a problem</p>
<p><b>04 Illegal trade</b></p> <p>Exotic pet smuggling cases are busted every year in Japan. It is known that smuggled animals enter the domestic pet market.</p>	 <p>64% unaware</p>	 <p>95% felt it is a problem</p>
<p><b>05 Invasive species</b></p> <p>There are many incidents, where animals traded as exotic pets are introduced into a nonnative environment with negative consequences for the ecosystems.</p>	 <p>61% unaware</p>	 <p>96% felt it is a problem</p>
<p><b>Attitude toward the five issues (average)</b></p>	<p>68% unaware (have no knowledge or little knowledge)</p>	<p>95% felt it is a problem (it is a problem or somewhat problem)</p>

(N=1000)



The most important issues with exotic pets: **60%** chose infectious diseases



Infectious diseases considered most important, followed by endangered species.

The tendency to emphasize the issue of infectious disease likely stems from the awareness brought about by COVID-19, as well as the fact that it is the only issue that presents a direct health risks to humans. Following infectious diseases, 18% responded that the issue of endangered species was most important. The issue of animal welfare was the least known of all the issues, with 79% being unaware.

## ATTITUDE TOWARD REGULATIONS ON EXOTIC PETS

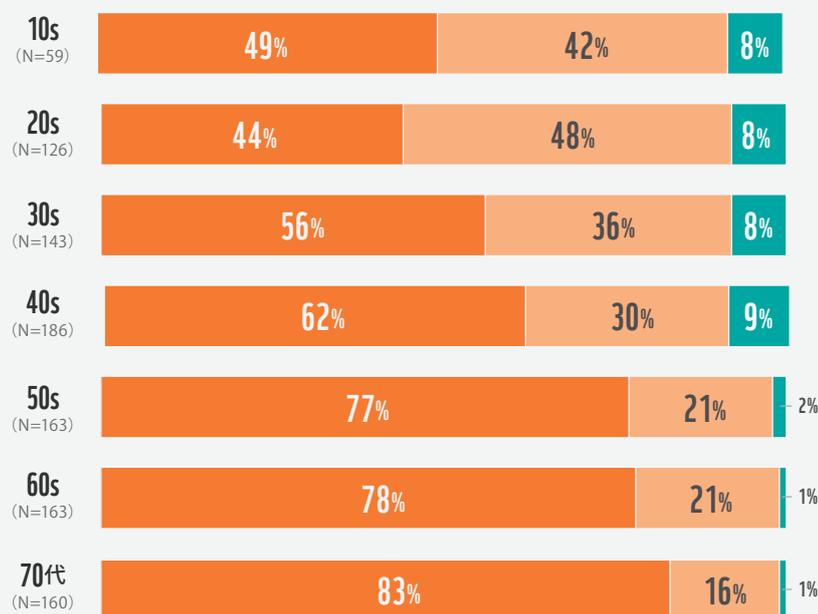
Q Do you feel stronger regulations are needed?  
after being informed about the five issues and the current regulations (P7)



**95%** felt stronger regulations are needed  
(needed or somewhat needed)

(N=1000)

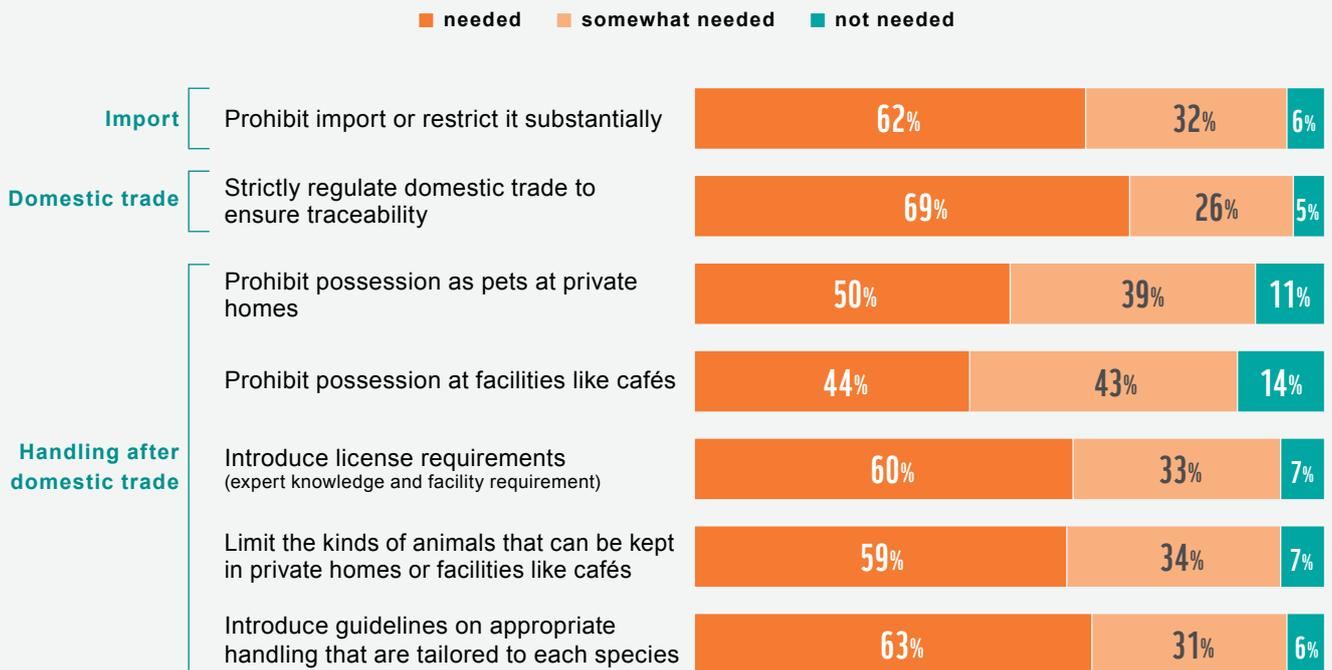
By age groups ■ needed ■ somewhat needed ■ not needed



### Slight difference across age groups

Across all samples, 95% expressed that stronger regulations were 'needed' or 'somewhat needed', with 67% indicating that it was 'needed'. For each age group, over 90% expressed it was 'needed' or 'somewhat needed'. However, around 80% in the age group 50s-70s indicated that it was 'needed', the proportion went down to only 45-50% in the 10s-20s. Furthermore, while only 1-2% in their 50s-70s expressed that stronger regulations were not needed, the proportion went up to 8-9% in the 10s-40s.

## Attitude toward regulations on exotic pets



(N=1000)

Over 90% responded that regulations over trade and management of animal handling were ‘needed’ or ‘somewhat needed’, with 59-69% indicating that they were ‘needed’. Even 86–89% indicated prohibiting the possession of exotic pets at home or facilities like cafés were ‘needed’ or ‘somewhat needed’, with 44–50% indicating they were ‘needed’.

### [ Supplementary information on current regulations ]

#### Infectious diseases

Certain animals (e.g., monkeys and bats) with high risk of infectious diseases are banned from import. However, there are few regulation to domestically trade and handle these animals, including keeping them as pets. This is giving rise to a situation where, in addition to domestically bred animals, illegally imported animals are traded as pets. Furthermore, the current regulation does not comprehensively cover import of exotic pets from the standpoint of precautionary principle toward disease risks.

#### Animal welfare

Existing regulations on handling of animals do not provide for the welfare of exotic pets or animals having wild origins. This gives rise to a situation where many species of wild origin are kept privately at homes and facilities, such as cafés, in conditions that undermine their welfare.

#### Endangered species

Existing regulations do not sufficiently cover the domestic trade of non-native endangered species. Many species are outside the scope of regulations and are being traded without traceability, which raises concerns over the increasing decline of wild populations in their native ranges.

#### Illegal trade

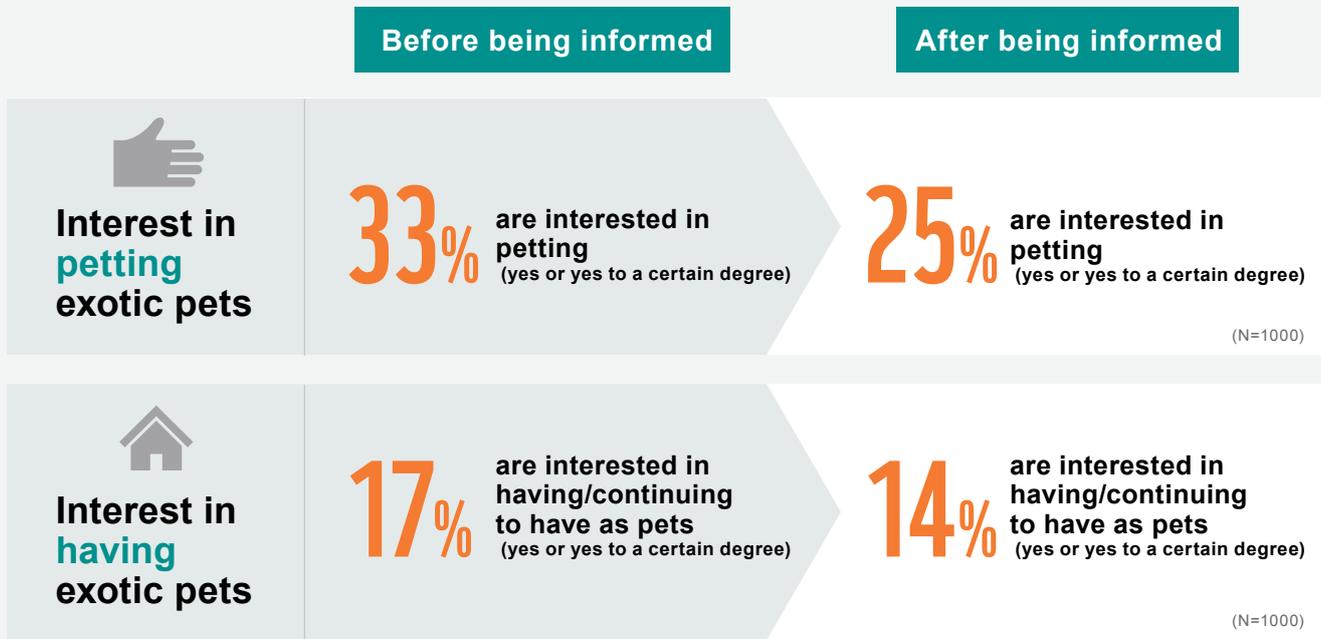
Current regulations do not require sellers to present any proof of legal origin for most animal species in trade. As a result, consumers are unable to distinguish if animals that have been illegally imported (smuggled).

#### Invasive species

Current regulations prohibit import and handling (keeping as pets) of certain animal species which were confirmed to have negative impacts on local ecosystems. However, the regulation does not widely cover import or handling of non-native exotic pets from the standpoint of precautionary principles toward ecosystem invasion risks.

# CHANGE IN ATTITUDE TOWARDS EXOTIC PETS

Comparing people's perception before and after the survey, the proportions of respondents interested in petting and keeping exotic pets, respectively, changed from 33% to 25% and from 17% to 14%. The margin of decline for interest in keeping exotic pets was only 3%.



## CONCLUSIONS

The survey revealed that although awareness on the issues around exotic pets is low amongst Japanese citizens, once they are informed, as many as 95% would consider these issues as problems and demand stronger regulations. Conversely, potential consumers, particularly those belonging to younger age groups, had a tendency to not change their interest in having exotic pets by simply being informed. These results suggest that the following actions are needed to address the issues associated with exotic pet use in Japan:

- **Policy efforts for a swift introduction of adequate regulations;**
- **Raising public awareness to foster the social norms;**
- **Social behavior change communications targeting potential consumers;**
- **Improving businesses involved in trade and display of animals.**

WWF will work together with a wide range of stakeholders to achieve these changes.

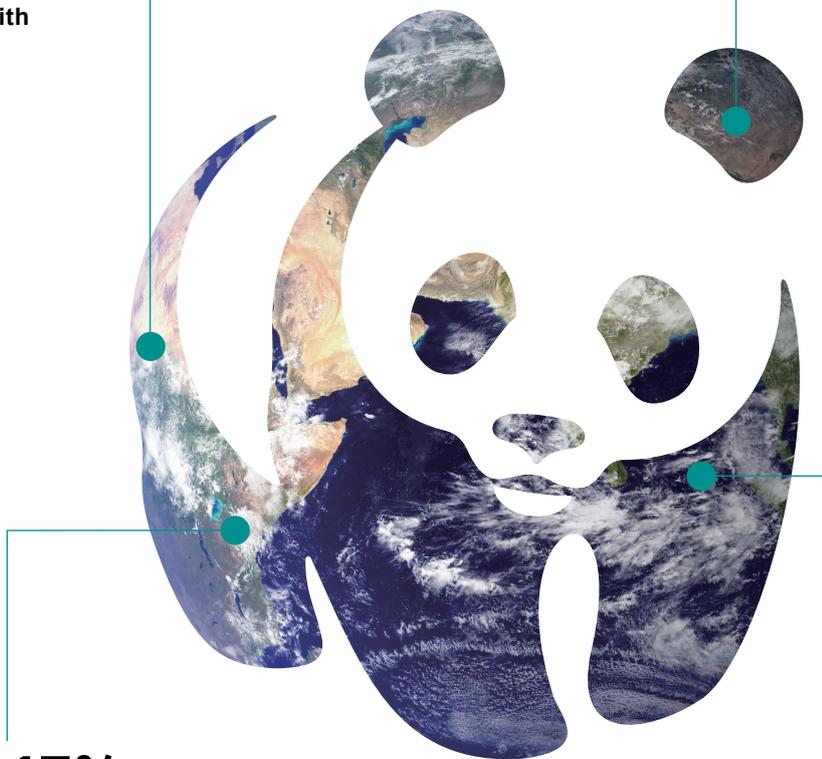
# Opinion Survey on Exotic Pet Use in Japan 2021

68%

unaware of issues associated with exotic pets

95%

expressed that stronger regulations are needed



17%

interested in having exotic pets

33%

interested in petting exotic pets

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