



October 21, 2025

City of Thunder Bay  
Mayor and Members of Council

*Via email*

Dear Mayor and Members of Council,

**Reference: Deny exemption request to Animal Keeping By-law re: ball pythons**

I am writing to support and encourage you to deny the October 14<sup>th</sup> [request to exempt ball pythons](#) from Thunder Bay's Animal Keeping By-law.

I support the comments made by both [Mayor Boschhoff](#) and [Keri Greaves](#) Commissioner of Corporate Services, that such an exemption would pose challenges the city is not prepared to handle, and compromise the existing protections Thunder Bay has in place to safeguard animal welfare and conservation.

**Municipal impacts**

As [noted by Commissioner Keri Greaves](#), Thunder Bay's current infrastructure is not equipped to manage an exemption for ball pythons. The city currently lacks the capacity to identify, seize, or house exotic reptiles, and enforcement would be entirely complaint-driven. Municipal kennel facilities are already near capacity and primarily designed for dogs and cats. Introducing ball pythons would require new protocols, staff training, and facilities – tax-payer funded resources that are not currently allocated.

**Conservation concerns**

[Ball pythons are listed as "Near Threatened"](#) by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), and [Appendix II](#) on the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) as species that may become threatened unless trade is closely controlled.

Their populations are declining in the wild due to poaching and exploitation for the exotic pet trade. There is no way for a prospective owner to verify whether a seller is directly or indirectly exploiting wild populations.

There is also a risk that granting this exemption would contribute to normalizing exotic pet ownership and risk further exacerbating wildlife trade issues. As [Mayor Boschhoff said](#), "it creates an attitudinal situation where people think that this is okay to [have them]. (...) Do you not think that it creates a callousness to what is happening in the world on this kind of pet trade?"

## Animal welfare concerns

Exotic animals are not domesticated like cats, dogs, or domesticated rabbits. They retain the same instincts and complex needs as their wild counterparts – needs that are extremely difficult to meet in captivity. Despite marketing efforts to the contrary, most species of snake are rated as “difficult” or “extreme” to care for using the [EMODE pet score](#), a science-based, free online tool developed by biologists and veterinarians.

Our understanding of how complex these species are is rapidly growing. Substantial evidence has invalidated the previously conceived notion that reptiles and amphibians are predominantly unsocial, sedentary creatures, and do not need complex habitats. Even zoos with expert staff often struggle to meet the needs of these animals. Pet owners are even less likely to have the space, equipment and knowledge to provide proper care.

Animals are frequently surrendered or abandoned when owners can't meet their animals' needs. There are few exotic animal rescues and sanctuaries in Canada. These few specialized facilities – and even larger animal shelters – are already overwhelmed and lack capacity for new intakes. Without anywhere else to turn to, overwhelmed owners may resort to abandoning their pet in the wild. Situations just like this have resulted in the spread of invasive species like red-eared sliders and American bullfrogs in Canada. If they're not able to survive, the abandoned animals will suffer until they eventually succumb to starvation, disease or exposure.

## Public health and safety

Ball pythons are non-venomous, but they can still bite and constrict when stressed. Bites can result in infections and other complications, and constrictions can be dangerous for children left unsupervised. Due to the risk of zoonotic disease, [Health Canada recommends](#) that children under 5, pregnant women, adults over 65, and immunocompromised people don't interact with reptiles and amphibians.

Reptiles and the rodents used to feed them can carry *Salmonella* bacteria, even if they appear healthy and show no signs of illness. Between 2019 and 2021, an [outbreak of Salmonella linked to pet snakes](#) infected 106 people across 7 provinces resulting in 7 hospitalizations. World Animal Protection has detailed just a few recent [cases of Salmonella illness linked to exotic pets](#) between 2012 and 2024.

## Municipal resolution

Ontario is the only province that does not licence or control the keeping of non-native (“exotic”) wild animals, downloading the responsibility to municipalities to create their own bylaws. World Animal Protection, with support of AMO, AMCTO and MLEOA, is asking [municipalities to support and adopt a resolution to regulate the keeping of exotic wild animals in Ontario](#).

In addition to denying this request for an exemption to your municipal bylaw, I also **encourage the City of Thunder Bay to consider adopting our municipal resolution**, calling on the province to take leadership on this issue.

World Animal Protection Canada resources:

- [Risky business: The unregulated exotic pet trade in Canada](#)
- [Trading animals and diseases: Canada's role in the global commercial wildlife trade](#)
- [Care guide and animal welfare analysis of commonly kept reptile and amphibian species](#)
- [World Animal Protection municipal resolution](#)

If you have any questions about this letter, the resources we have provided, or the municipal resolution, please don't hesitate to contact me. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

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**[name of municipality] RESOLUTION**  
**Provincial regulations needed to restrict keeping of non-native (“exotic”) wild animals**

**WHEREAS** Ontario has more private non-native (“exotic”) wild animal keepers, roadside zoos, mobile zoos, wildlife exhibits and other captive wildlife operations than any other province; and,

**WHEREAS** the Province of Ontario has of yet not developed regulations to prohibit or restrict animal possession, breeding, or use of non-native (“exotic”) wild animals in captivity; and,

**WHEREAS** non-native (“exotic”) wild animals can pose very serious human health and safety risks, and attacks causing human injury and death have occurred in the province; and,

**WHEREAS** the keeping of non-native (“exotic”) wild animals can cause poor animal welfare and suffering, and poses risks to local environments and wildlife; and,

**WHEREAS** owners of non-native (“exotic”) wild animals can move from one community to another even after their operations have been shut down due to animal welfare or public health and safety concerns; and,

**WHEREAS** municipalities have struggled, often for months or years, to deal with non-native (“exotic”) wild animal issues and have experienced substantive regulatory, administrative, enforcement and financial challenges; and,

**AND WHEREAS** the Association of Municipalities of Ontario (AMO), the Association of Municipal Managers, Clerks and Treasurers of Ontario (AMCTO) and the Municipal Law Enforcement Officers' Association (MLEOA) have indicated their support for World Animal Protection’s campaign for provincial regulations of non-native (“exotic”) wild animals and roadside zoos in letters to the Ontario Solicitor General and Ontario Minister for Natural Resources and Forestry;

**THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED THAT** [given the recent [enter incidents if any]], the [name municipality] hereby petitions the provincial government to implement provincial regulations to restrict the possession, breeding, and use of non-native (“exotic”) wild animals and license zoos in order to guarantee the fair and consistent application of policy throughout Ontario for the safety of Ontario’s citizens and the non-native (“exotic”) wild animal population;

**AND BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED** that this resolution will be forwarded to all municipalities in Ontario for support and that each endorsement be then forwarded to the Premier of Ontario ([premier@ontario.ca](mailto:premier@ontario.ca)), Ontario Solicitor General ([michael.kerzner@ontario.ca](mailto:michael.kerzner@ontario.ca)), Ontario Minister for Natural Resources and Forestry ([graydon.smith@ontario.ca](mailto:graydon.smith@ontario.ca)) and MPP [name and email address provincial representative], AMO ([amo@amo.on.ca](mailto:amo@amo.on.ca)), AMCTO ([advocacy@amcto.com](mailto:advocacy@amcto.com)), and MLEAO ([mleo@mleo.ca](mailto:mleo@mleo.ca)).