

ZOOLOGY

Strange Animals as Pets

Piranha fish, cheetahs, ocelots, boa constrictors and pythons from jungles around the world are now bought by many Americans as pets, Ann Clarke reports.

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➤ JUNGLE BEASTS have invaded many American homes—as pets.

Sloths, ocelots, monkeys, honey bears and, even, pythons are joining “man’s best friend,” the dog, and the stately cat around the house. Among the winners in the recent Brooklyn Children’s Museum Pet Show was an amiable boa constrictor which could affectionately give his owner a death hug.

Persons looking for adventure and the unusual choose the zoo-type animals. As one man said who kept a piranha fish and two alligators, the pets put a little danger into the modern soft life. However, parents who like behemoth-sized pets should “keep small children away from elephants,” advises author Ivan T. Sanderson who wrote a recent elephant history.

The horned lizard seen on this week’s front cover is a fierce-looking fellow who is all yours for about a dollar. He is guaranteed to hide his harmless personality behind the spines.

Boa Constrictor a Favorite

The boa constrictor is a favorite among those seeking the odd and unusual in pets. Snake lovers buy boas by the foot. A young one-footer costs \$4.00 and can grow longer than 11 feet. Boa constrictors have a reputation for being easy to tame and are allowed free run of most homes where they are kept.

Pet boas demand live food, mice and hamsters for the smaller ones, and rabbits for the adults. Owners range from young boy enthusiasts who may keep the snakes until fully grown to persons who want the handsome, pale brown patterned snakes for a few months as conversation pieces. One mother’s reaction to a boa pet kept by her 14-year-old son was a simple, “I don’t like it.”

A second snake favorite is the python. Most python pets are imported from India and a few, rock pythons, from Africa. These adult pythons are 16 feet long and cost \$2,000. A New York pet shop reports that small ones are often bought by school children who like to bring them home to their parents—providing the child has \$35. The python is a sluggish beast which at home in the Indian and African jungles enjoys nothing more than soaking in swamp pools.

Ocelots are night-roving cats which are popular as pets. They hunt in dark jungles and moonlight may even keep an ocelot from an expedition. Ocelots range from southwestern United States to Paraguay. Prospective owners are told that they are gentle in the kitten stage, but are warned to watch out for the grown cat. Ocelots

can be treated like house cats in their younger days. A kitten weighs three to five pounds, but the adult may be as heavy as 35 pounds. They are between three and four feet long. Ocelots cost about \$125.

Another cat pet is the cheetah, a hunting animal from India where it is “semi-domesticated.” Traditionally the cheetah was used for hunting antelopes in Persia and India. It was taken to the fields hooded and released when game was sighted. A cheetah is one of the fastest animals on land. They can reach a speed of 45 miles an hour in two seconds and have been clocked at speeds upward of 70 miles an hour.

The fierce, hunting cats are easily tamed, but size and cost exclude them from the average U.S. family circle. One cheetah costs approximately \$2,500 and may consume between 10 and 12 pounds of meat a day. A more practical big cat buy is the leopard which may be purchased for around \$1,000 in pet shops.

The small squirrel monkeys that inhabit South American forests from Costa Rica to Bolivia and Peru are the most common monkey pets. A foot in height they are among the tiniest true monkeys. The squirrel monkey costs about \$25. These animals are difficult to keep because they are susceptible to respiratory diseases, must be fed a well balanced diet, including vitamins, and need large cages. Other monkey pets include the chimpanzee, the most intelligent of the apes, which costs about \$1,000, and the gibbon ape.

One monkey expert who is fond of the animals discourages people from buying them as pets. A monkey can be temperamental and will bite if not allowed to do what he pleases.

Caimans Popular

A reptile pet widely purchased in the U.S. is the caiman, the smallest of the crocodilian species. Caiman grow to a length of four feet and are often mistakenly bought in Florida as alligators. Pet caimans are usually six inches to three feet in length. The small beasts have meaner, more pugnacious dispositions than alligators.

Two unusual bird pets are the toucans and the European bullfinches. The toucan is a large-billed South American creature whose appearance and noisy behavior have earned him the title of “preacher bird.” The largest toucan is crow-sized. It costs about \$50.

The European bullfinch, a soft-spoken fellow, is famous for being able to mimic sounds. They are found from northern Europe and eastern Siberia to the Azores.

Popular fish pets are piranhas which have killed more people than any other fish. The

silvery-blue piranhas have thick-lipped, bulldog-like jaws. They are kept in ordinary aquariums. The pet size is only two to five inches long but is capable of grabbing a mouthful of an owner’s hand, taking a piece of flesh the size of a marble with each bite. Piranha fish cost about \$35 each. They are found in South American rivers from Argentina to Venezuela.

Along the insect line, ant farms with 50 red ants can be bought for around \$4.00. These come in 12-by-8-inch colonies and are guaranteed not to extend their activities beyond official boundaries.

Large pet shops may sell representatives from the entire animal kingdom. Monkeys, honey bears, ocelots, alligators, iguanas and turtles are purchased from dealers in Florida. Canaries are bought directly from Japan, Belgium, Germany and Ireland. Most of the African and Asian animals are selected by pet shop owners from markets in New York.

Zoos Accept Exotic Pets

Owners of exotic pets who may find an ocelot overgrown, a sloth tiresome or a boa constrictor too much of a conversation piece need only to call the nearest zoo to find the animal a home.

The National Zoological Park, Washington, reports that, although it turns down offers of ducks, rabbits and squirrels, it has accepted an ocelot, alligators, caimans, boas, indigos and king snakes, unusual fish and many birds.

Presidents of the United States have also been recipients of unusual pets. Mrs. Kennedy was given a leopard. The Eisenhowers received two Dorcas gazelles from Tunisia, an elephant named “Zimbo” from the president of the Congo Republic and a pair of Korean bears from Syngman Rhee. President Truman received a Cretan ibex. These animal pets never have lived in the White House, but are all turned over to the National Zoological Park as exhibits.

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ENGINEERING

Red China Reports Big Irrigation Project

➤ A PROJECT on a 120-mile-long river has extended the irrigated area of western subtropical Kwangtung Province in Red China to two-thirds of the farm land, a report from Hong Kong states.

Built like a staircase on the Chian River and begun six years ago, construction included six large sluice gates and a flow diversion project in the lower reaches of the river. More than 10,000 reservoirs and ponds of all sizes are linked, including two large dams and 18 medium-sized ones.

Formerly only one-third of the farm land was provided water, mainly drawn from wells by hand.

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