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Lee Richardson Zoo
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Today I would like to discuss a very important “R” word. Now normally when I am talking about “R” words it is the big three in conservation: reduce, reuse, and recycle. This time though, I’m going to be discussing “research”. Pet research. Many people have a love for animals that drives us to become the slaves of many furry friends, myself included. This drive to surround ourselves with the creatures we adore can go beyond simple cats and dogs. Very few days go by where I don’t hear the phrase: “I’d love to have one as a pet.” Personally, I don’t discourage people from getting most pets, but I do ask people to do their research.

Caring for a pet can be very rewarding; however, it is also a large responsibility. When a person takes in a pet they are literally putting that animal’s life in their hands. Everything goes back to your own knowledge about the animal. You can’t even begin to consider things like correct diet or space requirements until you know what that animal needs.

Research doesn’t stop with care. It extends to the purchase of the animal as well. Be sure to research where and from whom you are purchasing your pet. A bit of research can reveal the reputable breeders from those that are not so reputable. Research also will help ensure you know exactly what you are purchasing. While many pet shop owners know what they are selling, there are many that don’t. Or they do, but to earn your money they will tell you what you want to hear, not what you need know. Some will even tell you incorrect information: “Oh yea! This is a small snake shouldn’t get more than three feet long.” When in fact it turns out to be a reticulated python that may reach 25 feet long!

Not only will researching where you get your pet save you a lot of potential headache and/or heartache, but you may also be helping with conservation by avoiding purchasing animals taken from the wild. The best places to receive exotic pets are directly from reputable breeders and from exotic animal rescues. This way you know you will be receiving an animal that is not taken from the wild and you can feel confident about what you are getting into.

For example a few years ago a video made the slow loris a popular animal for the illegal pet trade. The video seemed so cute that it quickly acquired over 10 million views. Looking at the comments to the video you can see that everyone wanted a loris of their own. Some claim to have bought the animals from breeders. A bit of research will show that slow lorises do not breed well in captivity. While the Lee Richardson Zoo has been successful breeding this species for the Association of Zoos &

Aquariums' Species Survival Plan, the total number bred throughout the world is only around one or two dozen each year. This means that every image or video depicting a slow loris as a pet is an endangered animal pulled from the wild. Since this video went viral slow loris populations have declined drastically. By simply researching you can avoid aiding in the decline of this species or others in similar plight. You could even aid them by reporting to the authorities if you do discover someone illegally selling endangered species.

Research can also help you with medical issues that may arise with an exotic pet. Veterinarians are very good at caring for the more common pets such as cats and dogs, but it is harder to find veterinarians that specialize in exotic animals. To get the proper care for an exotic animal you will need to find a specializing veterinarian, if a specialist cannot be found you will need to assist your veterinarian in identifying and researching possible medical concerns that would come up with the animal. Researching possible ailments will help you identify health issues early on or even prevent the problems all together by knowing what the causes are.

Unfortunately, zoos around the nation are bombarded almost every day with requests to take in pets that people did not fully research before they took them into their homes. While zoos do have the expertise to care for these animals, they are often limited by space, funds, and manpower. Zoos also take into consideration the health and wellbeing of the animals that are already in their care. So, if you decide that having an exotic pet is more than you bargained for, but you still want to enjoy these animals, remember the diverse array of animals found here at the Lee Richardson Zoo.