



Kenny Robinson
General Manager
Cabarrus Arena and Events Center
4751 NC Highway 49 North
Concord, NC 28025

Via email

July 8, 2020

Reference: Hosting of Repticon at Cabarrus Arena and Events Center July 11 & 12

Dear Mr. Robinson,

We wrote to you last year regarding the hosting of Repticon during which live reptiles will be bought, sold and exhibited. We are dismayed to learn that Repticon will be hosted again this coming weekend, despite a national pandemic which can most likely be traced back to human interactions with wild animals.

The role of the commercial wildlife trade in public health epidemics should not be underestimated. The wildlife trade is a key transmission mechanism for infectious diseases and deadly zoonoses – diseases such as Covid-19, which are transmitted from animals to humans. Zoonoses are responsible for over 2 billion cases of human illness and over 2 million human deaths each year. As the world attempts to confront the effects of Covid-19, it is crucial now more than ever to do all we can to prevent a recurrence of this global public health catastrophe.

The commercial trading of reptiles for the pet market has been specifically identified as an important factor in the emergence of zoonoses. Wild species, such as snakes and turtles, carry diseases, such as salmonellosis, that frequently cause infections in people, and can even lead to death, especially in small children and the elderly. Reptiles shed the Salmonella bacteria from their intestinal tract and carry it on their skin or shells. Harmless to reptile, Salmonella bacteria infections in humans can cause stomach cramps, fever, and diarrhoea, or infections in the blood, urine, bones, and joints. Many people are treated without hospitalization, while others require it.

Earlier this year, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) announced a new salmonellosis outbreak linked to reptiles. The outbreak resulted in 35 infected people across 9 states with 11 people being hospitalized. This outbreak is different from one that the CDC announced on January 9, 2020, that caused 26 people to fall ill across 14 states, with 8 people being hospitalized. Similarly, in December 2019, the Public Health Agency of Canada announced a salmonellosis outbreak that affected 92 people between April 2017 and October 2019. Snakes and frozen rodents used to feed snakes were the sources of those infections.

Despite claims that the pet trade industry is well-regulated, most regulatory oversight of wildlife trade is currently aimed at conservation, rather than prevention of disease introduction. Far from being immune to the potential devastating effects of animal-borne pathogens, the exotic pet trade could well be the source of the next big human health scare.

worldanimalprotection.us

450 Seventh Avenue, 31st Floor

New York, NY 10123

T: +1-800-883-9772

E: info@worldanimalprotection.us

We were known as **WSPA**
(World Society for the
Protection of Animals)



In 2019, World Animal Protection investigators visited multiple exotic pet events to observe the conditions of the animals and documented animal welfare. The investigation raised a number of serious concerns at each expo we visited. They included

- **A lack of concern for the spread of reptile-borne bacteria:** although some vendors had anti-bacterial soap on their tables, use of it was not encouraged or only encouraged before handling an animal
- **Inadequate space during transportation:** animals are typically transported in small, clear plastic containers stacked one on top of the other
- **Inadequate space during events:** animals typically remained in the same plastic containers used for transportation for the duration of the event. Snakes were regularly observed bending themselves to fit within the four sides of the container in an effort to stretch as long as possible, while other animals were observed desperately trying to find a way out
- **Overcrowding of animals:** even when placed in larger tanks or aquariums, geckos, lizards and other reptiles were observed grossly overcrowded, with as many as 12 animals piled on each other increasing the risk of injury and illness
- **Unhealthy animals:** animals available for sale were observed to be malnourished, injured or sick

Aside from the threats to human health posed by reptiles, large numbers of reptiles will die within their first year of captivity due to the rigors of transport, the stress of confinement and handling, and poor animal husbandry. While animal mortality rates are subject to debate, estimates vary from 4% to 75% for the first year in someone's home.

With the above considerations in mind, and the letter we previously sent you concerning the animal welfare implications of continuing to host Repticon events, we hope you will pledge to discontinue hosting exotic pet events at the Cabarrus Arena and Events Center in the future.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I am available to discuss these matters further at your earliest convenience.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Ben Williamson".

Ben Williamson
US programs director