

Local / State

Exotic pets gain popularity nationally and locally

By GRETCHEN RATLIFF
Battalion Reporter

Along with the wide variety of people in the cities of Bryan and College Station, an even wider variety of pets can be found, and not just the typical dogs or cats.

A 14-inch Texas Plated lizard that will eat out of its owner's hand or an albino ferret are some of the pets found locally.

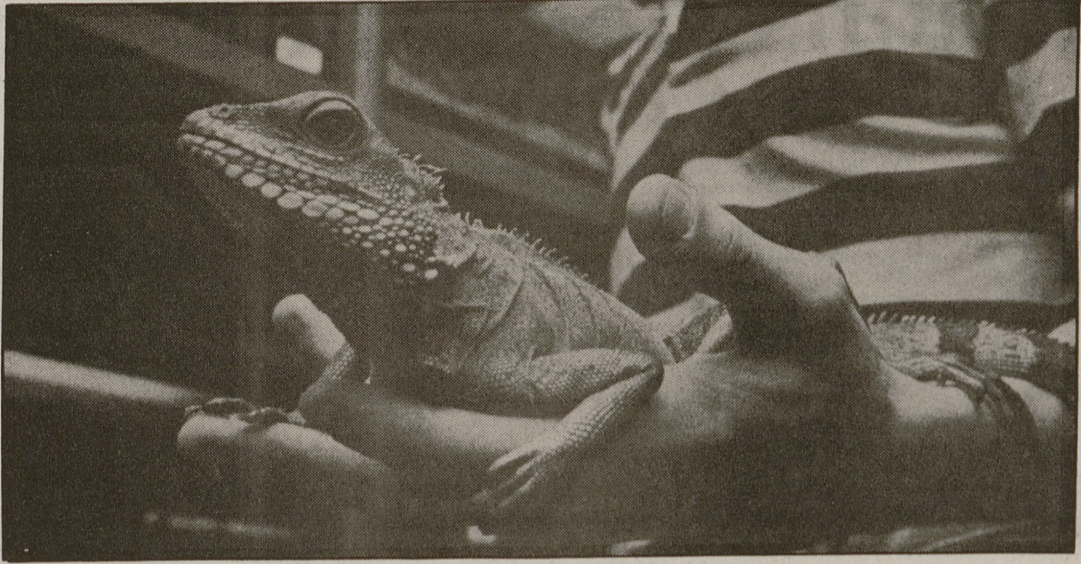
Ownership of exotic pets has been on a national upswing, and Bryan and College Station have their fair share of these animals. "Usually something like a reptile, tarantulas, or scorpions are considered exotics," Harold Mogford, assistant manager of Animal World Inc., said. The list also includes monkeys, armadillos, skunks, ferrets, lions, and some birds.

However, Charles Honeycutt, an animal control officer of Bryan, said that large exotic animals, such as bears, tigers, or lions, are prohibited from being kept within the city limits.

Honeycutt said he has been called to pick up animals ranging from boa constrictors to a 325-pound lion. "He was just like a big old housecat," he said.

College Station, however, has no city ordinances regarding the ownership of exotics. But T.R. Preston, a warrant officer in College Station, said a person should contact the Humane Society, the police, and even city directors before bringing in a large animal.

Victor L. Camp, curator of mammals at the Houston Zoo, said that when exotic pet owners can no longer handle their animals, many of them call the zoo for help. "We can't take them," Camp said. For this reason, he said, the



The exotic Chinese Water Dragon is imported from the Far East and has a lifespan of more than 20 years. The reptile sells for approximately \$40 at a local pet shop.

zoo won't sell exotic animals to private individuals. He said that people who obtain exotics have a responsibility to the animal, and that they are obligated to see that they get proper care, including trips to the veter-

inarian for wing clipping, for declawing, and for vaccinations. Because many exotics may have severe reactions to common drugs, most local veterinarians refer them to the small animal clinic at Texas A&M University.

Besides the costs of food and medical attention, there is the cost of the animals themselves to consider. Often the greatest cost is the initial purchase price.

Tracy Rickard and John Pegues co-own a double yellow-headed Amazon parrot named Zip. They said they consider his purchase price a real bargain — \$500.

On the other hand, some exotics may come free for the catching. Frank Lubrano has a worm snake and two water snakes, all of which he caught himself. His four-foot bull snake, Ert, was a birthday present.

Lubrano said he thinks snakes are great. "I've been around them all my life," he said. He said it costs him around \$8 a month to feed mice to the bull snake, but that he catches insects for the others to eat.

He said the snakes he catches tame down easily, and that they are basically clean animals.

Howard Marquise agreed that snakes make good pets. He has had his four-foot boa constrictor, Louie, since last June.

"They're not like a dog or a cat ... they don't need the constant attention," Marquise said.

He also said that the price for a six-inch boa may start at \$45, in this area. The mice they eat cost approximately \$2 per month, he said.

Glenn Schroeter paid only \$15 for his Mexican Red-legged tarantula and pays nothing for the crickets he feeds them.

The tarantula, named Smithii, whose fangs are 1/4-inch long, has a bite that would be no more toxic than a bee sting, but would hurt a lot more, Schroeter said.

"The chances of getting bitten by this spider are about as good as getting bitten by your pet dog," he said.

Robert Jackson's pet is another

freebie, a Texas Plated lizard more commonly known as an alligator lizard.

He said that the only time he considers his lizard, Lick, a problem is in the winter when Jackson has to get out and dig up grub to feed him.

"He is pretty interesting to watch," Jackson said of his 14-inch long pet. He said he caught him three years ago, and that was the only time it has bitten him. "He'll eat out of my hand now," he said.

Becky Carson and Richard Roeth own an albino ferret named Ferret.

"She is impossible to potty train," she said, "and she also likes to use the couch as a scratching post."

Maxine, on the other hand, wouldn't cause problems with shredded couches because she has been declawed and defanged. Maxine is a six-month-old bobcat owned by Hector Gomez.

"She handles like an ordinary cat, the majority of the time," Gomez said. She can become quite aggressive when she plays, he said.

He said that a person has to be really patient and understanding with a bobcat, especially to let its trust.

Patient and understanding landlords are an asset as well when dealing with the question of keeping an exotic in an apartment.

Scott Jackson, an employee of Arbor Square Apartments, said that while dogs, cats, and other large animals are prohibited, he does have some birds and snakes. He said they just don't want pets that would create a mess for the next person.

Rene Soedje, a leasing agent at Briarwood Apartments, said "as long as the snakes are contained, and the birds don't tear anything up, we really don't mind more."

However, Penny VonRoeder, an employee at Taos Apartments, said they don't allow pets of any kind. Especially not snakes, she said, because "they tend to get into the maintenance people's attacks."

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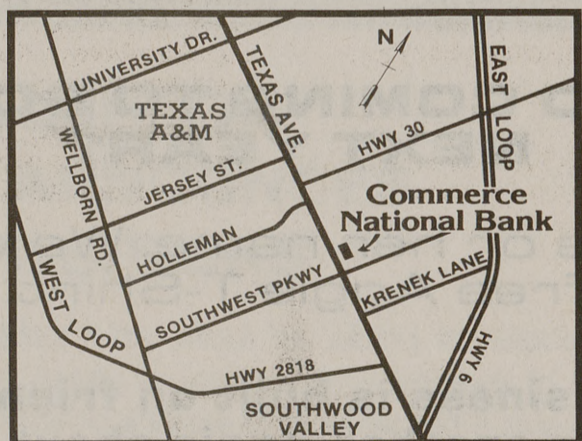
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House passes bill to let police give tickets for misdemeanors

United Press International
AUSTIN — A bill allowing policemen to issue citations for some misdemeanor violations rather than making arrests was given final approval in the House Tuesday, despite arguments it opened the way for discrimination and corruption.

The bill, sponsored by Rep. Bill Blanton, D-Pasadena, would allow a law officer to issue a citation in lieu of the person appearing before a magistrate judge. The measure, which passed 85-58 after a bitter debate, is designed to alleviate overcrowding in county and local jails.

The person issued a citation would have to give proof of Texas residency and sign a notice promising to appear in court. However, if a person refused to sign the notice or was wanted on an outstanding warrant, he would be arrested and taken before a judge to set bail.

Rep. Wilhelmina DeLoach, Austin, opposed the bill, saying it gave police officers the right to "pick and choose" who they were going to arrest.

The citation procedure would apply for misdemeanor violations ranging from homosexual conduct to prostitution to disorderly conduct. Most of the violations covered would be Class C misdemeanors with a few being Class B violations.

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