



# Pets you can't keep in Queensland



Queensland  
Government

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# Introduction

Many introduced animals such as the rabbit have become serious pests in Queensland. Invasive animals can destroy the environment and damage agricultural areas.

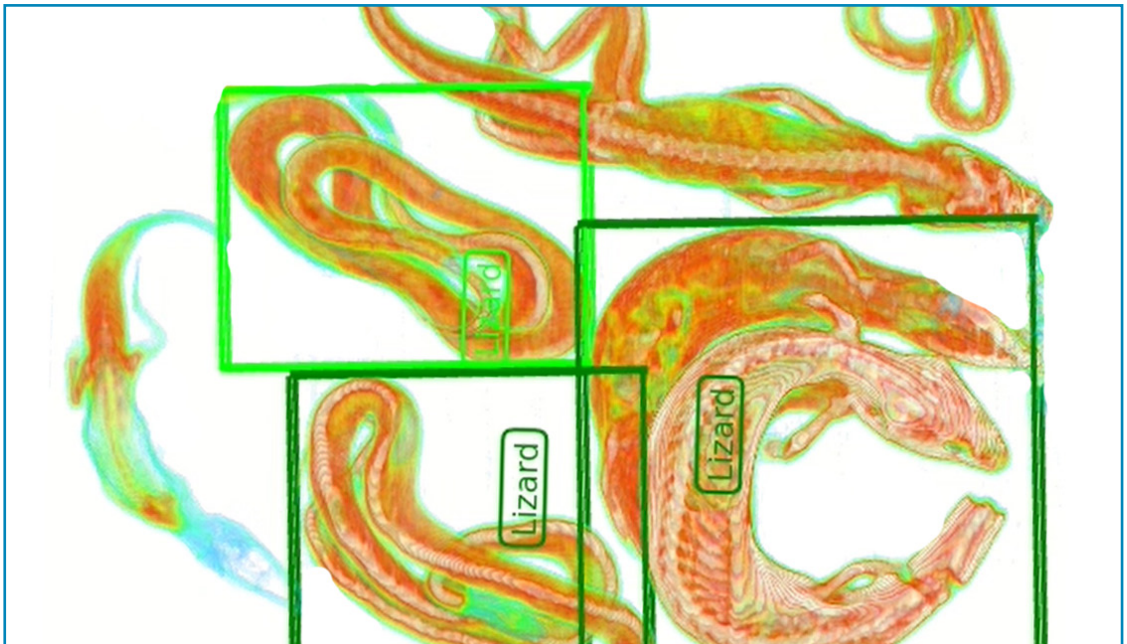
Invasive animals can also spread exotic diseases not known to occur in Australia. They can also be responsible for other diseases that are dangerous to humans. Illegally kept invasive animals introduce new pest populations to areas through escape or deliberate release. In some countries, numerous invasive animals that started in the pet trade have become serious pests. For this reason, importing certain animals and keeping them as pets is illegal under Queensland legislation.

If you have illegally kept pets in your possession, you can surrender it to Biosecurity Queensland (call 13 25 23). Do not release invasive animals into the environment including bushland, national parks, reserves, rainforests, creeks or dams and do not give them away to friends or family.

Report any illegal activities such as the importation, movement, sale and keeping of illegal pets. Actions you take will protect Queensland's environment and agriculture from the impacts of introduced invasive animals.

## Why can't I keep an exotic pet if I keep it in a secure enclosure?

There is evidence from around the world and Australia that shows some pet owners release their unwanted pets which form wild populations. In other countries, various lizards, snakes, frogs, salamanders, toads, turtles, chipmunks, hedgehogs and caimans which started as pets have become serious pests. In Australia, exotic fish are endangering our lakes and rivers because owners have dumped the contents of their aquariums into the environment.



X-Ray image of smuggled reptiles in luggage (Photo courtesy of Department of Agriculture, Water and the Environment)

# Legislation requirements

The *Biosecurity Act 2014* (the Act) lists certain species as prohibited as they are not present in Queensland. Other invasive animal species are listed as restricted because populations are now established in Queensland. Invasive animals listed as prohibited or restricted pose a serious threat to agriculture, human health, social amenity, the economy and the environment.

The legislation also places a general biosecurity obligation (GBO), on all persons to take reasonable and practical measures to prevent or minimise biosecurity risks associated with invasive animals.

Dealing with restricted or prohibited pets through trading, moving or keeping, even within an enclosure, is illegal. The trade in illegal pets can also involve poor animal welfare practices with animals transported or kept in inappropriate conditions resulting in death, ill health or injuries. Owners of illegal pets may be reluctant to seek qualified medical services for animals which can also lead to further suffering or death.

A permit may be issued for the keeping of prohibited and restricted invasive animals for specific purposes. These purposes include education about the management of the invasive species, scientific and medical research. Zoos and exhibitors licenced under the *Exhibited Animals Act 2016* may also keep and exhibit prohibited and restricted invasive animals.

The keeping of prohibited and restricted invasive animals as a pet is not a purpose for issuing a permit. Some Australian native animals may be kept under a recreational wildlife permit provided by the Department of Environment and Science – for further information on recreation wildlife licenses visit [des.qld.gov.au](http://des.qld.gov.au) or call 13 74 68.



Biosecurity Officers follow-up reports of illegally kept pets, sometimes resulting in prosecution



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# Rabbit (*Oryctolagus cuniculus*)

## Restricted invasive animal – category 3, 4, 5 and 6

Rabbits are one of Australia's most destructive animal species both agriculturally and environmentally, causing severe land degradation and soil erosion, threatening the survival of many rare and endangered species. Pet rabbits and wild rabbits are the same species and readily interbreed. Escaped or released pet rabbits have the potential to form new wild populations.

### Legal requirements

You cannot keep a rabbit as a pet in Queensland. Penalties including an on-the-spot fine may apply. Although desexed rabbits and rabbits confined to an enclosure pose minimal risk to the environment and agriculture, there are practical obstacles to mandatory desexing including difficulties to enforce and are costly to implement. Trials involving the registering and desexing of animals in Australia, have not demonstrated an effectiveness in reducing unwanted populations.

The rabbit is a category 3, 4, 5 and 6 restricted invasive animal under the Act which means you cannot move, keep, feed, give away, sell, or release into the environment. The Act requires everyone to take all reasonable and practical measures to minimise the biosecurity risks associated with invasive animals under their control. This is called a general biosecurity obligation.

### Description

Rabbits are small mammals around 34–45 cm in length usually grey, brown with pale belly fur, other colours include piebald, black and ginger. They have long ears 10 cm long and big eyes. They have long hind legs with hind feet measuring 9–11 cm and short front legs. The tail is fluffy brown with white underneath, 4–8 cm. Adult rabbits usually weigh around 1–2.1 kg.

### What should I do?

If you have a pet rabbit, you can surrender it to Biosecurity Queensland or your local government. Contact your local government or Biosecurity Queensland for more information.





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# Ferret (*Mustela furo*, *Mustela putorius*)

## Prohibited invasive animal

The ferret is an aggressive predator that could threaten biodiversity in Australia, with a wide range of Australian native birds, mammals and marsupials, reptiles and frogs potentially at risk. Ground-nesting birds are more vulnerable and could be threatened from direct predation on their eggs and chicks, while small marsupials could be ideal prey. The ferret could also affect commercial and backyard poultry production by taking chickens and eggs potentially spreading livestock and human diseases. Ferrets remain a major concern for the transmission of bovine tuberculosis (*Mycobacterium bovis*) which can affect trade in beef. They can also inflict painful bites.

Wild ferrets can prey on small to mid-sized native animals, such as possums, bandicoots, birds and their eggs, lizards, frogs, fish, and invertebrates. Ferrets have naturalised in New Zealand and continue to pose a significant threat to native ground dwelling birds and small mammals.

### Legal requirements

You cannot keep a ferret as a pet in Queensland. Penalties may apply. The ferret is a prohibited invasive animal under the Act. It is illegal to import, keep, breed or sell ferrets in Queensland. Ferrets must be reported immediately to Biosecurity Queensland on 13 25 23.

### Description

The ferret has a long, narrow body of 20–46 cm in length, with short legs and a tail of 7–14 cm. The fur coat can range from whites and light tans through to darker browns and purplish/black colours. The tail is black and bushy. The face is greyish-white with dark areas, giving a masked appearance, but these marks can be absent in some domesticated animals.

### What should I do?

If you think you have seen a ferret or have one in your possession, report it immediately to Biosecurity Queensland on 13 25 23. Until an authorised officer contacts you, please take reasonable and practical measures to prevent the ferret from escaping.





Boa constrictor (*Boa constrictor*)

## Exotic snakes

In Queensland, it is illegal to purchase or import exotic snakes. Exotic snakes must be reported immediately to Biosecurity Queensland on 13 25 23.

Penalties may apply for failing to report sightings of exotic snakes.

These laws help reduce the risk of non-native invasive animals escaping and forming wild populations. This protects our valuable agricultural industries, natural environment and human safety. In countries without these restrictions, non-native reptiles have become major problems.

Exotic snakes can be secretive in nature and difficult to impossible to detect. They have the potential to become abundant in suitable habitats due to lack of a natural pests and diseases.

The introduction or establishment of exotic snakes could have significant, irreversible impacts to native wildlife and some species including large constrictors and venomous snakes can harm people. Antivenom for exotic snakes is not widely available in Australia.



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# American corn snake (*Pamtherphis guttatus*)

## Prohibited invasive animal

American corn snakes are detected frequently being traded illegally on the illegal reptile market. They can prey and outcompete native species for resources, spread diseases, bacteria and parasites. They are non-venomous and may strike if threatened or disturbed.

### Legal requirements

You cannot keep an American corn snake as a pet in Queensland. Penalties may apply. The American corn snake is a prohibited invasive animal under the Act. It is illegal to import, keep, breed or sell American corn snakes in Queensland. American corn snakes must be reported immediately to Biosecurity Queensland on 13 25 23.

### Description

American corn snakes are slender, growing between 100–120 cm long, sometimes up to 180 cm. They range in colours and patterns, most common being a combination of orange and reddish brown dark edged blotches along its back. Other colours can include yellows, greys and whites. The underside has alternating rows of black and white colourations.

### What should I do?

If you think you have seen an American corn snake or have one in your possession, report it immediately to Biosecurity Queensland on 13 25 23. Until an authorised officer contacts you, please take reasonable and practical measures to prevent the American corn snake from escaping.





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# Boa constrictor (*Boa constrictor*)

## Prohibited invasive animal

Boa constrictors threaten native animals, pets, poultry and small livestock. Due to their strength, large specimens pose a crush risk which may cause severe injury if able to coil around a person. They are non-venomous and may strike if threatened or disturbed. They can also spread diseases to native snakes.

### Legal requirements

You cannot keep a boa constrictor as a pet in Queensland. Penalties may apply. The boa constrictor is a prohibited invasive animal under the Act. It is illegal to import, keep, breed or sell boa constrictors in Queensland. Boa constrictors must be reported immediately to Biosecurity Queensland on 13 25 23.

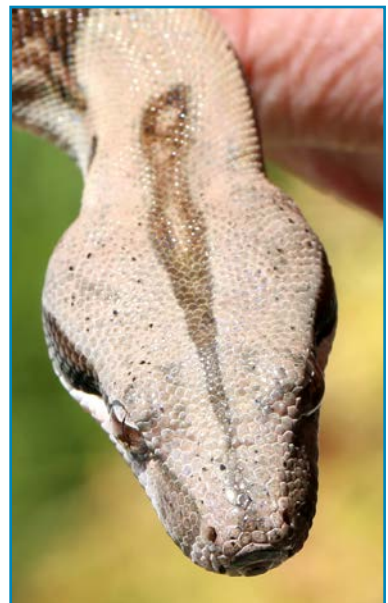
### Description

The boa constrictor is a large, heavy snake commonly weighing from 10–15 kg with captive specimens weighing over 30 kg. Captive specimens can reach up to 4 m long, males are typically 1.8–2.4 m and females 2–3 m.

They have a brown, grey or light-coloured base with darker brown to reddish brown patterns forming 'saddles' on the back which are more pronounced toward the tail. Their head is arrow-shaped that has distinctive coloured stripes with one running from the snout to the rear of the head. Stripes also appear from the snout to the eyes with further stripes running from the eyes to the jaw.

### What should I do?

If you think you have seen a boa constrictor or have one in your possession, report it immediately to Biosecurity Queensland on 13 25 23. Until an authorised officer contacts you and where safe to do so, please take reasonable and practical measures to prevent the boa constrictor from escaping.



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# Burmese python (*Python bivittatus*)

## Prohibited invasive animal

Burmese pythons can threaten native species, including birds, pets, poultry and small livestock. They can also spread diseases, bacteria and parasites. They are non-venomous and may strike if threatened or disturbed. Due to the strength of the snake, larger specimens pose a crush risk which may cause severe injury if able to coil around a person. Burmese pythons have become established in other parts of the world and eradication is nearly impossible.

### Legislative requirements

You cannot keep a Burmese python as a pet in Queensland. Penalties may apply. The Burmese python is a prohibited invasive animal under the Act. It is illegal to import, keep, breed or sell Burmese pythons in Queensland. Burmese pythons must be reported immediately to Biosecurity Queensland on 13 25 23.

### Description

The Burmese python is a heavy snake with brown blotches bordered by black along the body and tail. Both males and females can grow up to 5 m long, sometimes up to 7 m long. Females generally present as bulkier in shape than males. They are light tan in colour with brown blotches upon their body which are bordered in black. There are also different colour morphs in captive bred populations including albinos. Markings forming a 'V' shape are found on top of the large pythons heads. With blotch shapes on their body appearing to 'fit' together like a puzzle, like markings on a giraffe.

### What should I do?

If you think you have seen a Burmese python or have one in your possession, report it immediately to Biosecurity Queensland on 13 25 23. Until an authorised officer contacts you and where safe to do so, please take reasonable and practical measures to prevent the Burmese python from escaping.



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Penalties apply

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# Pit viper (*Hypnale hypnale*)

## Prohibited invasive animal

The pit viper is venomous to highly venomous and extreme caution must be exercised as they may strike and envenomate if disturbed or stressed. Species from the Viperidae family can strike at a very fast speed. If required, antivenin for the treatment of a snake bite from non-native species may be difficult or unable to source in Australia.

### Legislative requirements

You cannot keep a pit viper as a pet in Queensland. Penalties may apply. The pit viper is a prohibited invasive animal under the Act. It is illegal to import, keep, breed or sell pit vipers in Queensland. Pit vipers must be reported immediately to Biosecurity Queensland on 13 25 23.

### Description

The pit viper is generally short and stout ranging in lengths from 90–150 cm. An exception is the bushmaster (*Lachesis muta*) which can grow in excess of 2 m. Colours range from vibrant greens and yellows with arboreal species through to darker colours with terrestrial species. Colour variations can occur within species and include markings which may be present in darker coloured blotches or bands.

### What should I do?

If you think you have seen a pit viper or have one in your possession, report it immediately to Biosecurity Queensland on 13 25 23. Until an authorised officer contacts you and where safe to do so, please take reasonable and practical measures to prevent the pit viper from escaping.



Photo courtesy Dr. Raju Kasambe, Wikimedia Commons (above)

Photo courtesy Department of Agriculture, Water and the Environment (left)



Radiated tortoise (*Astrochelys radiata*)

## Tortoises, turtles and other reptiles

In Queensland it is illegal to purchase or import exotic tortoises, turtles and other reptiles.

Any sightings of exotic tortoises, turtles and other reptiles must be reported immediately to Biosecurity Queensland on 13 25 23. Penalties may apply for failing to report.

A significant amount of illegally traded reptiles are sourced from wild populations posing a threat to native populations within the species home range.

Exotic reptiles are readily traded due to colourful patterns or for use with traditional medicines.

Exotic turtles and tortoises can be long lived and have negative impacts on native turtle populations and aquatic ecosystems.



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# Red-eared slider turtle (*Trachemys scripta elegans*)

## Restricted invasive animal – category 2, 3, 4, 5 and 6

Red-eared sliders are very aggressive and will out-compete native species for food and space in waterways. They are also a threat to nesting waterbirds, taking over nests for basking sites and damaging and preying on eggs and hatchlings. They will bite if threatened and their long claws can scratch skin.

### Legal requirements

You cannot keep a red-eared slider turtle as a pet in Queensland. Penalties including an on-the-spot fine may apply.

The red-eared slider turtle is a category 2, 3, 4, 5 and 6 restricted invasive animal under the Act which means you must not move, keep, feed, give away, sell, or release into the environment. You must report all sightings to Biosecurity Queensland within 24 hours. The Act requires everyone to take all reasonable and practical measures to minimise the biosecurity risks associated with invasive animals under their control. This is called a general biosecurity obligation.

### Description

Red-eared slider turtles are a freshwater turtle that can grow up to 30 cm long. It has a distinctive red stripe behind the ears, and fine yellow streaks and lines on the head, neck, legs and tail. The undersides of red-eared slider turtles are pale yellow with dark smudges or swirls. The head can retract directly back into shell, unlike native turtles which bend their heads to the side. Algae growing on their shell can affect visibility of colours and markings.

### What should I do?

If you think you have seen a red-eared slider turtle or have one in your possession, report it to Biosecurity Queensland on 13 25 23 within 24 hours. Until an authorised officer contacts you, please take reasonable and practical measures to prevent the red-eared slider turtle from escaping.





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Penalties apply

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# Leopard gecko (*Eublepharis macularius*)

## Prohibited invasive animal

Leopard geckos are climatically matched to areas of Queensland and highly likely to naturalise. An established population is highly likely to have a negative impact on native species through competition for the same food and resources. Animals that are illegally traded have a potential to carry exotic diseases or parasites, where the symptoms may not be obvious and can potentially spread to native species.

### Legal requirements

You cannot keep a leopard gecko as a pet in Queensland. Penalties may apply. The leopard gecko is a prohibited invasive animal under the Act. It is illegal to import, keep, breed or sell leopard geckos in Queensland. Leopard geckos must be reported immediately to Biosecurity Queensland on 13 25 23.

### Description

Leopard geckos are typically 7–10 cm long. They are yellow and white with black spots along the body with distinctive spotted patterns. Leopard geckos have moveable eyelids and do not have toe pads which does not allow it to adhere or climb walls like native species.

### What should I do?

If you think you have seen a leopard gecko or have one in your possession, report it immediately to Biosecurity Queensland on 13 25 23. Until an authorised officer contacts you, please take reasonable and practical measures to prevent the leopard gecko from escaping.



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Penalties apply

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# Chameleon (*Chamaeleonidae*)

## Prohibited invasive animal

Chameleons can spread diseases to our native reptiles and pose a threat to native species. They are vulnerable to a variety of parasites which can harm other animals, including humans. They are also difficult to eradicate due to their ability to change body colour to match their surroundings.

### Legal requirements

You cannot keep a chameleon as a pet in Queensland. Penalties may apply. The chameleon is a prohibited invasive animal under the Act. It is illegal to import, keep, breed or sell chameleons in Queensland. Chameleons must be reported immediately to Biosecurity Queensland on 13 25 23.

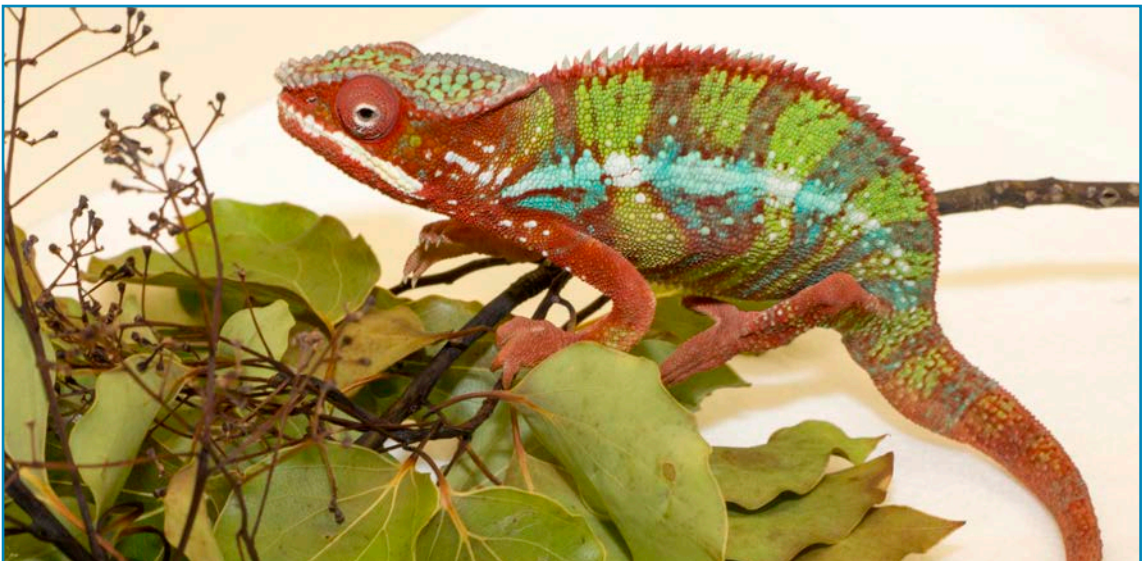
### Description

Chameleons can grow up to 25 cm long, however, some species can be as small as 20 mm or grow up to 70 cm long. Hands and feet have large toes to enable climbing. They vary in colour and patterns. Colours can range from dull greens and browns through to vibrant blues and reds. Their colour can change rapidly and be influenced, by light, temperature, or the emotional state of an individual animal.

Chameleons have scaled cone shaped eyes capable of moving independently of each other. They use their tails to wrap around objects to assist climbing. Some chameleons have small spikes along the spine; with spike sizes varying between species. They can have as many as three long horns projecting forward on their head.


### What should I do?


If you think you have seen a chameleon or have one in your possession, report it immediately to Biosecurity Queensland on 13 25 23. Until an authorised officer contacts you, please take reasonable and practical measures to prevent the chameleon from escaping.



## More information

 [biosecurity.qld.gov.au](https://biosecurity.qld.gov.au)

 13 25 23

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 [youtube.com/biosecurityqld](https://youtube.com/biosecurityqld)

# Report an illegally kept pet!

Biosecurity Queensland

**13 25 23**

