

## Our pets may carry diseases that decimate wild amphibian and reptile populations: the Bern Convention launches 'Think Outside the Box' - a campaign to raise awareness about this issue

- Reptile and amphibian populations are declining worldwide, contributing to the decay of many ecosystems
- The 'Think Outside the Box' campaign raises awareness about one of the factors at play: the diseases that exotic pets carry with them, that spread and kill local amphibians and reptiles

**Strasbourg, 21<sup>st</sup> November 2018** - Reptile and amphibian populations worldwide are a great concern for nature conservation. The Global Amphibian Assessment found that 43% of amphibian species are declining in numbers, and 32% are threatened. One of the main causes for their decline is the diseases found on exotic pets that can be spread accidentally (escapes) and voluntarily (releases). However, these problems are not widely known. For this reason, the Bern Convention launches 'Think Outside the Box' - a creative campaign to raise awareness in terms of biosafety for the benefit of public health and nature conservation, with particular attention on amphibian and reptile species.

The campaign features species such as the fire salamander, which has suffered a 96% decline in population in the Netherlands. The salamander has almost been wiped out by the fungus *Batrachochytrium salamandrivorans*, spread -among others - by the Chinese fire bellied newt, usually kept as an exotic pet.

As part of the campaign, a set of posters showcases exotic pet species in different environments and the negative effects they have on local populations of European amphibians and reptiles. 'Think Outside the Box' also comprises a social media campaign including, for instance, a set of banners with recommendations on how pet owners or researchers working with animals can avoid spreading diseases. The campaign is published on the website [unboxingdiseases.eu](http://unboxingdiseases.eu) and can be followed on social media through the hashtags #ThinkOutsideTheBox and #ExoticPetsMayCarryDiseases.

'Think Outside the Box' is promoted by the Bern Convention, a binding international legal instrument in the field of nature conservation at the Council of Europe. It has been developed by Scienseed, an agency specialised in scientific communication.

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