

Reptile Business Analysis 2025

An assessment of the commercial pet reptile retail sector in the UK



Executive Summary

The 2025 REPTA Commercial Pet Reptile Sector Analysis assesses the economic and infrastructural impact of the UK reptile industry, focusing on retail and supply chain businesses rather than private keepers. It evaluates the sector's contributions to employment, taxation, and animal welfare, while capturing business sentiment on regulation. The 2024 Post Implementation review (PIR) of Licensing of Activities Involving Animals (LAIA) regulations identified **2,169 businesses** licensed to sell animals as pets. With 77% of pet businesses stocking reptile-related products, this represents **1,678 retail stores who sell reptiles**, or reptile related food & accessories in addition to the wider network of manufacturers, importers, wholesalers and livestock producers which support the retail sector.

REPTA's Key Proposals to Reform LAIA

1. **Standardising licensing costs across the country.**
2. **Removing burdensome and ineffective red tape, maximising economic impact whilst retaining welfare standards, to include:**
 - III. Removal of daily welfare record keeping. This is done naturally anyway, and the record keeping element is onerous and irrelevant.
 - IV. Weekly temperature record keeping should be one of two options; the second being the ability to install thermostats which regulate temperature, therefore removing the need for manual logging of temperatures and recording them.
 - V. Weekly UVB checks should be either once every 3 months, or at the point an animal is placed into a new enclosure; whichever comes first.
 - VI. Removal of weekly cleaning record keeping, which is naturally done anyway.
 - VII. Reducing importance of Q3 education and training requirements in store.
8. **Based on the reforms in point 2 coming to fruition, the introduction of LAIA regulation to rescue and rehoming centres.**



The Commercial Pet Reptile Market



In 2023, Exotics Keeper Magazine conducted a nationwide survey with nearly 6,000 participants to collect vital household data to better understand the reptile population across the UK. In combination with the PFMA survey, their findings demonstrate there is a total population of 7.2million reptiles and amphibians kept as pets in just over 1 million households. This is particularly noteworthy, as the reptile category has continued to grow over the past two decades, and now surpasses pet keeping of hamsters, guinea pigs, rabbits, birds and other small animals.

Key Store Data

979 Stores Sell Live Reptiles	1,678 Stores Sell Reptiles or Products	£633m Industry revenue contribution	14 Years Average Business Age
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Live Animals in Stores Data

162k Live Reptiles in Stores	103k Live Invertebrates in Stores	2.2% of all Reptiles in the UK currently reside in Pet Stores
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Reptile Store % Who Also Sell:

41% Also Sell Aquatics or Related Products	30% Also Sell Pet Birds or Related Products	15% Also Sell Dog/Cat Related Products
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Assessing business health

Businesses were asked about their current business health. 69% reported at least some level of growth, 19% are in a period of stasis, whilst 12% are in decline.

We also asked shops how they saw their business in 5 years' time:

1%	Convinced they will not be trading.
23%	Not confident they will be trading.
11%	Believe their business will be smaller.
39%	Confident their business will be trading.
26%	Very confident their business will be trading.

Exchequer Contributions



Through our survey, we know the average business turnover is £314,563 (net annual turnover per business).

Our survey estimates the following tax is collected across the sector each year:

TAX TYPE	AMOUNT (£)
VAT	£125,172,847
Self-Assessment & Corporation Tax	£19,605,468
Part time employment contributions	£245,189
Full time employment contributions	£20,182,391
Total industry taxation yield	£165,205,895 (£165 million)
Taxation yield per business (1,678 businesses)	£98,454

On average, 26.1% of a reptile-related business's turnover is directly taxed through VAT, self-assessment, corporation tax, and employment-related contributions. This means that for every £1 earned, over a quarter is returned to the UK Exchequer in various tax streams.

Given this level of contribution, it is essential that policymakers recognize the reptile sector's value and ensure that any regulatory or legislative changes do not jeopardize its financial sustainability.

Employment Data

7,148 People Employed by The Reptile Industry	3,927 are Full Time	3,221 are Part Time
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With approximately 1 million people owning a pet reptile, **each business supports around 600 customers** with the reptile foods and supplies.

Volunteer or work experience placements

The reptile business sector plays a **key role in skill-building and career progression** by providing structured placements that benefit **both participants and the wider industry**:

Many placements involve **students pursuing careers in animal care, veterinary sciences, zoology, and wildlife conservation**.

These opportunities **bridge the gap between academic learning and practical application**, strengthening **career pathways** into the industry and giving students **real-world experience**.

On average, surveyed businesses provided **5.21 placements per year**.

When extrapolated across the sector, we estimate **8,746 placements per year**.

Welfare & Rehoming



Businesses selling giant species of reptile

REPTA sought to understand how stores operate when it comes to larger reptiles, often considered inappropriate as pets, particularly in the wrong hands. We asked stores if they supply “giant” species:

66%	Do Not Sell
24%	Limited Sale
10%	Sell Regularly

Why Businesses Are Moving Away from Giant Species

Rather than being driven by regulation, this transition has been shaped by **industry-led social responsibility**. Many reptile retailers, based on their extensive experience, have **actively decided that giant reptiles are not appropriate for most private keepers**.

This demonstrates that the sector is **capable of responsible decision-making without external intervention**, reinforcing the **credibility and professionalism of reptile retailers**.



Rehoming and rescue undertaken by sector

REPTA sought to understand the **extent to which reptile businesses accept surrendered, rehomed, or rescued reptiles, amphibians, and invertebrates** from private keepers facing changes in circumstances. The **high percentage (82.1%) of reptile businesses accepting rescues and rehomed animals** highlights a strong **culture of responsibility and welfare** within the industry. While not all businesses have the capacity to take in surrendered animals, those that do **provide an essential service** that supports both **pet owners and animal welfare efforts**.

82% Stores will rehome reptiles & amphibians	77k Reptiles rehomed via Pet Stores Annually	1% of the UK's population rehomed Annually
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By comparison, 76,773 animals estimated to be rehomed via reptile stores **dwarfs** the estimated **7,000** rehomed by the **combined UK network of dedicated rescues and ad-hoc rehoming groups**. REPTA wishes for Industry and policymakers to **acknowledge the critical role** that reptile businesses play in the **welfare of surrendered animals**.

LAIA, Inspections & Licensing



Under the **Licensing of Activities Involving Animals (LAIA)** framework, businesses are assigned a **star rating** when they receive their license. This rating—determined by **local authority inspectors**—reflects the **standards of welfare, husbandry, and business operations** within the establishment.

The highest achievable rating is a 5-star license valid for three years, signifying that a business has met or exceeded all higher welfare standards outlined in the regulations. A higher average star rating suggests that businesses across the sector are actively striving to maintain and exceed best practices in animal welfare and management.

2%
★

2%
★★

12%
★★★

10%
★★★★

73%
★★★★★

Prevalence of Level 3 animal management related qualification

Survey results show that only **16%** of businesses require staff to hold an Ofqual Level 3 Animal Management qualification or similar. **84% do not.**

While the LAIA framework places strong emphasis on this qualification, several challenges make it unsuitable for much of the reptile trade:

- **Non-Specialist Content** The syllabus lacks focus on reptiles, amphibians, and invertebrates, making it poorly aligned with sector needs.
- **Limited Practical Relevance** Employers prioritise hands-on experience, confidence, and species-specific care over theory.
- **Regulatory Disconnect** Despite guidance allowing for experience-based competency, some local authorities insist on formal qualifications, excluding skilled individuals.
- **Sector Specificity** Reptile-focused businesses often find the course content irrelevant, especially if their only likely diversification is into aquatics or birds.

If regulators continue to prioritise formal qualifications over experience, it risks excluding capable individuals, disadvantaging specialist-run small businesses, and failing to improve welfare outcomes—since theoretical learning alone does not guarantee better animal care without hands-on expertise.

Business opinion on star rating system's future

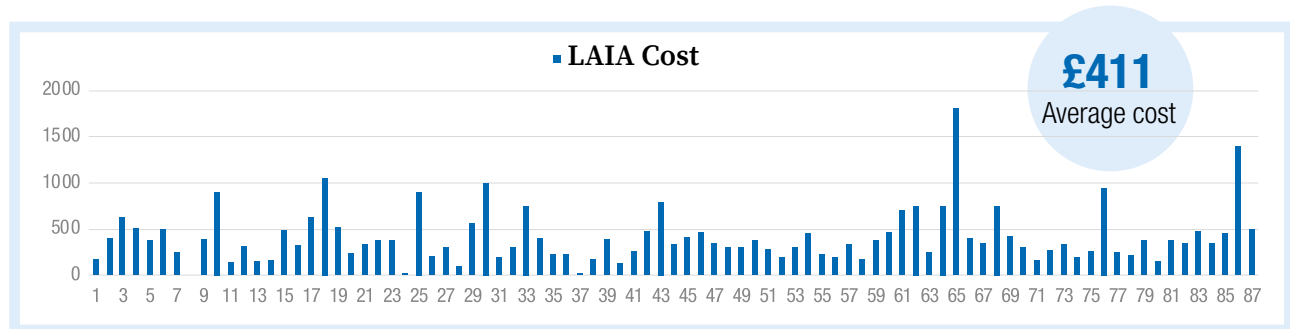
With nearly **two-thirds of businesses dissatisfied with the current system**, it is clear that the LAIA star rating framework in its present form is unsustainable. Whether through complete removal or significant revision, the **system requires urgent review** to ensure it aligns with the needs and expectations of the businesses it regulates. REPTA will seek for greater consistency and more transparency.

LAIA, Inspections & Licensing



Cost of license renewal

The **application, inspection, and approval process for a License for Activities Involving Animals (LAIA)** is fully **devolved to local authorities**. This means that each council sets its own fee structure, despite the licensing process being fundamentally the same across all boroughs. In theory, one would expect pricing to be relatively uniform, yet REPTA's survey reveals a **significant variation in costs**.



The wide variation in LAIA licensing fees—ranging from under £100 to over £1,800—despite a consistent regulatory process, highlights a lack of fairness and transparency across local authorities.

- Fee variation—from <£100 to >£1,800—shows clear inconsistency across councils.
- Unpredictable costs unfairly impact small and independent businesses.

REPTA will call for national reform to standardise and clarify licensing fee

Business opinion on the licensing of rescue centres and their inclusion in LAIA

REPTA found strong industry support for bringing rescue and rehoming centres under LAIA regulation, highlighting concerns over inconsistent welfare standards and lack of oversight.



Who is REPTA?

The Reptile and Exotic Pet Trade Association (REPTA) works to promote responsible practices, education, and the showcasing of positive aspects of keeping reptiles. REPTA serves as a dedicated advocate for the reptile and exotic pet industry and actively engages in political efforts to protect and support the interests of the industry.

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