



**HUMANE SOCIETY  
INTERNATIONAL**

## Mercy Release

### Kind Intentions, Cruel Consequences

**E**very year around the world, hundreds of millions of animals are released into the wild through the Buddhist practice known as “mercy release.” The tradition is based on the belief that freeing a captured animal creates good karma, bringing a person good fortune in this life and better prospects for the next. This tradition began hundreds of years ago with spontaneous acts of compassion toward animals. Unfortunately, the modern version of mercy release causes enormous animal suffering and environmental damage.

#### Tradition Gone Awry

Many people don’t realize that the vast majority of animals used in mercy release were captured for the sole purpose of being released. Large Buddhist temples may purchase hundreds or thousands of animals to be “freed” in a single day.

Mercy release is practiced in places around the world, including Taiwan, China, Hong Kong, Thailand, Singapore, Nepal, India, Australia, England, France, and the United States,



and has created a thriving industry for those who trap, trade, and sell animals for release. Birds, fish, and turtles are the most commonly used animals, but a wide variety of species—native and imported—are victims of this misguided ritual.

Animals trapped for mercy release can sustain fatal injuries from the nets or snares. Others suffocate or starve during transport, when they’re kept in tightly packed crates for days or weeks. Animals who survive to be released often collapse from exhaustion, illness, or injury or become easy prey for predators. Many die after they’re released into



## How You Can Help

Whether you're a Buddhist or a visitor to a country where mercy release is practiced, please don't participate in this ritual. Instead, create good karma through acts that truly help animals, such as supporting a legitimate wildlife sanctuary, donating to programs that aid street dogs, or adopting a more humane diet. To learn more, visit [hsi.org/mercyrelease](http://hsi.org/mercyrelease).

## About HSI

Humane Society International is the international arm of The Humane Society of the United States, a nonprofit organization backed by more than 11 million people. For more than half a century, The HSUS has been fighting for the protection of all animals through advocacy, education, and hands-on programs. HSI coordinates the work of The HSUS abroad, addressing animal issues that cross many borders and impact billions of animals worldwide.

inappropriate habitats. For example, freshwater turtles may be let loose in the ocean, and saltwater fish may be placed in ponds or rivers. In some cases, hunters wait just beyond the ceremony sites to recapture the animals so they can be resold.

## Environmental Damage

Mercy release can also harm ecosystems. Animals may be released outside their natural ranges, sometimes thousands of miles from where they were captured and in groups large enough to establish breeding populations. They can spread diseases to native species, compete for food and territory, or mate with indigenous animals, threatening gene pools.



Celebrating Animals | Confronting Cruelty  
Worldwide



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