

## **Center for Disease Control Halts Bat Traffic**

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For a brief period recently the newest "thing" in exotic pets was bats. In particular, it was the Egyptian fruit bat, *Rousettus aegyptiacus*, a.k.a. the Egyptian tomb bat or "the flying fox." Several thousand of these bats were imported into the United States under permits intended for science or exhibition. However, many of these animals were actually sold for private ownership. When this situation was recognized, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) of the United States Public Health Service gave notice that any further permits to import bats would be limited to bona fide scientific research, diagnostic purposes, zoologic display, and zoo-affiliated conservation of rare species. Bats in private ownership which were imported or transferred prior to March 22, 1995, may not be sold, transferred, or otherwise distributed except for the approved purposes described above. Furthermore, distribution may only be to a permit holder with a permit issued by CDC after March 22.

The CDC action was performed under their authority to prohibit importation and distribution of etiological agents, arthropod vectors, or other animal hosts or vectors of human diseases (42 Code of Federal Regulations 71). Bats are well-known hosts for rabies virus, and the majority of human rabies deaths in the United States are due to bat-type rabies viruses. In addition, bats in Africa and Europe have other rabies-related lyssaviruses which are not in North America and can cause fatal infections in people. A host of Old and New World arboviruses and an arenavirus also have been recovered from bats. For these reasons, the CDC considers the use of bats for pets, avocational breeding, private collections, or commercial breeding for such purposes to present a potentially serious public health hazard. For more information, contact Dr. S.R. Ostrowski, Division of Quarantine, National Center for Infectious Diseases, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 1600 Clifton Road, N.E., Atlanta, GA 30333 (404-639-8108).