

Despite ban, small turtle online pet trade in the US found to be flourishing

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A team of researchers at the University of Rhode Island, working with a colleague at the University of Richmond, has found that despite laws banning the sale of hatchling turtles, there is a thriving online market for

them in the U.S. In their paper published in the open-access journal *PLOS One*, the group describes their survey of online sites selling turtles and whether such sites were adhering to federal regulations.

Back in the 1960s and early '70s, turtles became popular as pets in the United States. Prior research has shown that as many as 4% of all homes had at least one turtle, and that most of the turtles being sold back then were hatchlings. This arrangement meant that sellers did not have to feed the turtles for very long and buyers had them for as long as possible.

But as turtles became more popular, the [medical community](#) began to see many cases of disease transfer from turtles to their hosts—chief among them was salmonellosis, which sickened children. That led officials in the U.S. to ban the sale of small turtles. In this new effort, the researchers wondered whether the ban on such sales is preventing the sale of hatchlings, the chief carriers of disease, in the U.S. To find out, they began searching the internet for places to buy turtles.

They found 16 websites that were actively engaged in selling turtles that were less than four inches in size. They also note that half of those sites failed to warn buyers of the [disease](#) risk posed by the purchase of such turtles or failed to mention the laws that pertained to their sale.

The researchers conclude that there is a thriving online pet trade involving [hatchling](#) turtles in the U.S. due to a variety of factors. The first is the continued popularity of [turtles](#) as pets, despite the hazards involved. The second is the ad hoc enforcement of the sale of hatchlings. They also note enforcement of such rules is likely a low priority among officials due to much more pressing wildlife issues, such as sales of endangered or dangerous animals.

More information: Lauren E. Montague et al, Online sale of small turtles circumvents public health regulations in the United States, *PLOS*

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