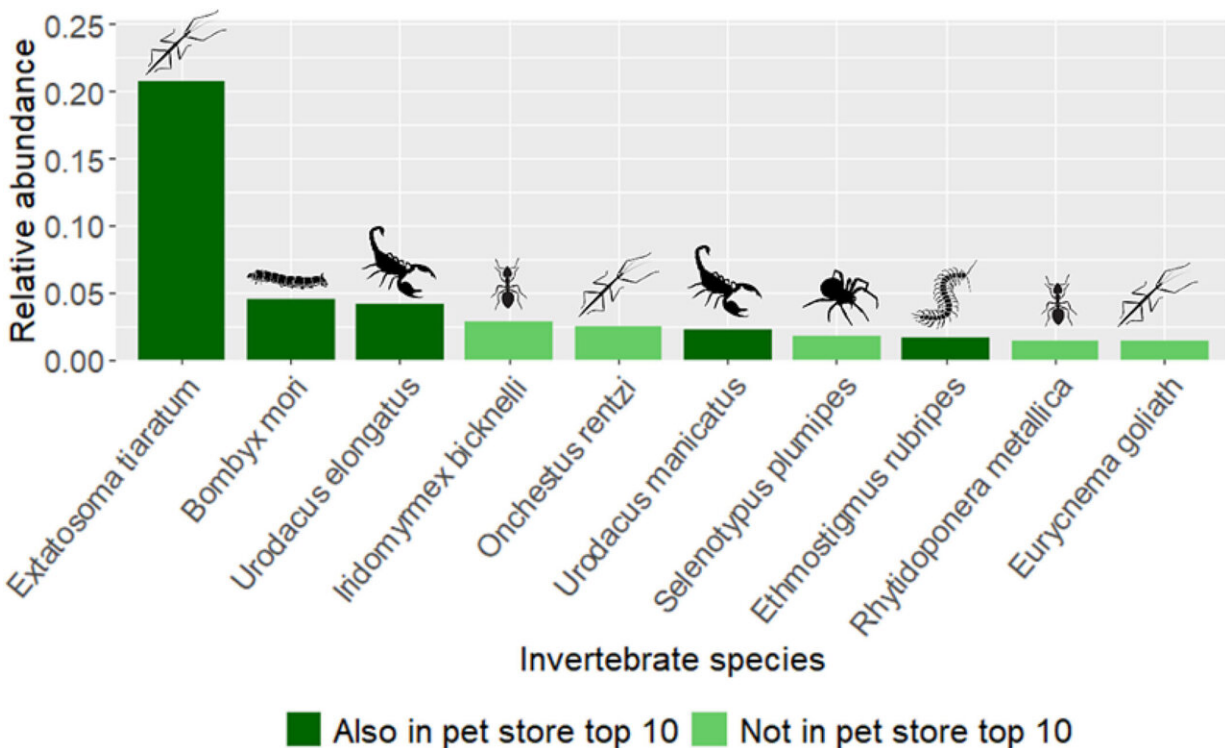


Uncovering online sales of Australian invertebrates

June 23 2023, by Poppy Nwosu



Bar graph of the top 10 most popular invertebrate species on the classifieds website by proportion of total listings, and those that also feature in the top 10 most popular species in online pet stores. Credit: *Austral Entomology* (2023). <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/aen.12662>

In the first study of its kind, researchers from the University of Adelaide have investigated the level of online trade in invertebrates in Australia

and believe they have only uncovered the tip of the iceberg.

"In a one-year period we found 264 different species of terrestrial invertebrates that were for sale online in Australia," said University of Adelaide Ph.D. student Charlotte Lassaline, from the Invasion Science and Wildlife Ecology Lab, who led the study.

"This is the first time that anyone has looked at the number of invertebrates— both native and [non-native species](#)—that are being traded online in Australia.

"The most traded species was the spiny leaf stick insect and the Flinders Ranges scorpion. Other popular species included tarantulas, scorpions, and ants. We even uncovered the [trade](#) of 57 species of ant.

"Buyers are looking to acquire unusual species of invertebrates—even those that are lethal or dangerous to humans."

While the online trade in reptiles, birds and other mammals has been studied within Australia highlighting the threat to species, there is no similar research into the extent of terrestrial invertebrates.

"While most of the invertebrates were native species, our investigation exposed the trade of three [invasive species](#): the white garden snail, the Asian tramp snail, and the African big-headed ant which pose serious threats to Australia's biosecurity," said Lassaline.

"The African big-headed ant is even listed among the worst 100 pests in the world.

"Most traded invertebrates are bought as pets and remain captive all their life but if they are released—intentionally or otherwise—they can cause millions of dollars in damage consuming [agricultural crops](#) and

competing with [native species](#)."

The team investigated 23 Australian online pet stores and one popular classifieds website as part of the study that has been published in the journal *Austral Entomology*.

"Invertebrates are often neglected in [conservation efforts](#) and research, with majority of focus on larger-bodied charismatic species. We hope our research can start to change that," said Lassaline.

"Encouraging people to learn more about and develop a passion for invertebrates is highly important for their conservation; however, it is equally important to regulate the trade of these [species](#) to mitigate associated risks,"

"Despite the startling range of threats identified in our research, regulation is currently lacking on the trade of invertebrates for pets in Australia."

Legislation concerning the import and export of [invertebrates](#) across state borders exists to some extent in all Australian states and territories but variation in legislation across the country hampers biosecurity and conservation efforts.

"Australia's online invertebrate trade presents a delicate balance between encouraging passion for these underappreciated critters, and promoting sustainable trade practices to minimize risks to Australia's environment," said Lassaline.

"Strengthening regulations, encouraging responsible practices, and fostering collaborations between researchers, hobbyists, and conservation organizations are vital steps towards ensuring the preservation of Australia's unique invertebrate biodiversity."

More information: Charlotte R. Lassaline et al, Untangling the web: Dynamics of Australia's online terrestrial invertebrate trade, *Austral Entomology* (2023). onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/aen.12662

Provided by University of Adelaide

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