

My name is Melanie Kazmercyk and I was an employee at All Pet Club in Branford, CT from August to November of 2012. I studied animal science and graduated with a degree in ecology and evolutionarily biology from the University of Connecticut. It was my dream to work with hands on with exotic animals and educate the public. I want to share my terrible experience working at All Pet's Club as an employee of the small animal, bird, and reptile department. No department manager, veterinary care, sick, injured, and dead animals, poor living conditions among many other issues made this an extremely heart wrenching and stressful job, and I will do anything in my power to let the public see how terrible this store is run and the abuse innocent animals are put through daily.

There is no small animal department overseer. This means I was trained by fellow employees, most still in high school and unknowledgeable in proper animal care. There was no supervision from any store manager to make sure the animals were properly taken care of, there was little to no veterinary care, and no one to answer our or customer questions we had as concerned and caring staff. Our concerns about animal injuries and health issues were ignored and most times the animal(s) died before seeking care. The only time animals were taken to a vet were when the expensive, exotic birds such as parrots will severely ill, and they were given priority because they of course were a big investment to the store, whereas a mouse or hamster was cheap and not worth healing.

The health and death rate for animals in this department was astonishing. Imagine being a four year old excited to buy your first hamster only to peek in a cage and see a blood stained habitat with half a hamster left. This was a frequent weekly case. Cages were loaded to over capacity with animals, and in species such as hamsters, this leads to fighting, stress, and competition for food and water. There were never enough cages for new animals, so our staff would spend hours trying to separate fighting or injured animals or move some from overcrowded cages, placing them in whatever available containers were in the back room. I would find hamsters missing heads, bloody and half eaten when I came into my morning shift, or even during open hours. Exotic animals never lasted long because they require very specific and knowledgeable care that most employees has no idea of. The procedure for an animal death was to write in down, put the animal in a freezer (the same one frozen feeder mice were kept) and try to prevent it from happening again. During snake feeding, some employees were so careless, snakes were often lost, and later stepped on and severely injured beyond recovery. Small bird without clipped wings were impossible to grab in a cage when selling, and we would spend 20 minutes chasing a parakeet around trying to catch the specific color the customer desired, often loosing birds into the store and stressing out all the others to a terrible degree. If one walked into the back room any given day, there may be a variety of recovering animals – a rabbit with a bloody ear and scratched eye from a fight, a guinea pig sneezing, scratching, and missing fur, a finch with a broken wing, and a snake with broken bones.

The living conditions for animals was tear wrenching. The humidity of the small animal wall cages was so high, the glass would fog, the bedding would become damp, and the animals would in turn get sick. There were no hanging water dishes, and the water bowls on the floor on the cages were knocked over by the animals all day, meaning constant bedding changes and refilling. If this happened at night, the animals would be wet and

without a water source for hours. The guinea pigs and rabbits are kept in large glass enclosures that are overcrowded, do not lock, and the bedding is the same hay that in the majority of their diets, meaning they are defecating and living on their food. Reptile cages were seldom or never cleaned in full. The bird cages were so disgusting, but because of constant new bird shipments, there was never a way to clean the cage.

Animals were often sick with conditions such as ringworm, mites, wet tail, and more. Our staff did all we could to separate and treat these animals, but we had no small animal vet and only the knowledge of care sheets and medicine available in our store. Male and female animals are not separated, meaning fighting, breeding, and confusion selling to customers. We actually had to never guarantee the sex of an animal, and warn that it may already be pregnant, with many times was the case. My own sister bought two guinea pigs from the store, and was promised by an employee they were both female. She later discovered one was male, and she exchanged that one. Very soon after, both females had babies, meaning they were pregnant when she brought them. She and my father were incredibly upset, stressed about the new space, care, and expenses of so many animals. When they complained to the store manager, he would do nothing, not even provide a few bags of complementary hay to help aid my sister in caring for her growing family of pets. She was left to find them new homes on her own.

The pet store was also a donation center for unwanted animals. Customer would bring anything from rabbits, mice, reptiles, and birds to the store they didn't want anymore. The store took them in because it was free money to resell animals they didn't pay for. The staff was then responsible for more animals, most brought in damaged on undersized cages, and had to take care on and find homes for these on top of the store's animals.

The pet store is more like a petting zoo some days. The staff is allowed to take out animals for customers to pet, weather they are planning on buying or not. This is extremely stressful to the animals. The birds that have clipped wings are free to roam about the bird section, and all day are being picked up, poked at, fed, and chased around by customers. There was even a case where a man stole a high priced bird by putting him on his shoulder, avoiding camera, and simply walking out a back open door.

I was fortunate to work at Petco before this store, and the differences in animal care were unbelievable. At Petco there are experienced trainers, online series of tests, and rules to follow when selling. Every hour a walk through inspection of the animals was made to ensure health, happiness, temperature, and food and water were all sufficient. For All animals, even feeder mice, a guest must fill out a detailed information form that was kept on file. Records were kept of cage cleanings, feeding, animal health, and death records. A certified local vet was used frequently at the first sign of illness. None of these things were done at petco, and though I took everything I had learned and tried to pass my knowledge on to staff, I could only do so much.

I would never recommend supporting this company, and would do anything in my power to have them shut down entirely. My experience was tough, between wanting to quit, and wanted to stay to help these poor creatures. There are a lot of truly wonderful young

people that care about the animals and their job at All Pet's Club. But there is only so much we can do, without proper managers who know anything about animals care. I could no longer be in a job where the conditions were so terrible.