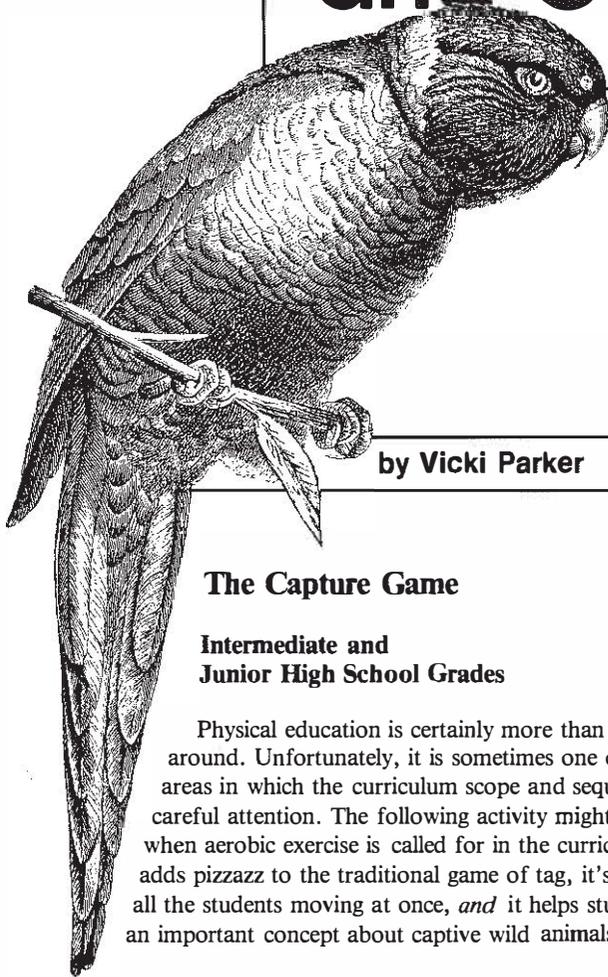


# Physical Education and Captive Wildlife



by Vicki Parker

## The Capture Game

### Intermediate and Junior High School Grades

Physical education is certainly more than just running around. Unfortunately, it is sometimes one of the last areas in which the curriculum scope and sequence receives careful attention. The following activity might best be used when aerobic exercise is called for in the curriculum. It adds pizzazz to the traditional game of tag, it's easy, it gets all the students moving at once, *and* it helps students learn an important concept about captive wild animals!

### The Lesson

• **Background Information:** Each year hundreds of thousands of wild animals are captured and brought to the United States. A small percentage of these animals supply zoos or dealers. Most captive animals are imported to the United States to become pets or tools for research labs.

Most animals captured for these purposes do not survive the trip to this country. The stress of capture and the poor shipping techniques are often fatal to the animals. Dealers often intentionally or unintentionally mistreat captive animals. Pet traders in particular anticipate a high mortality rate among the animals they take, so they sometimes capture as many as twice the number of animals they actually need.

Capture techniques are usually painful and frightening to the

animals. Snares of sharp metal wire often are used to capture single animals. Huge nets are used to capture flocks of wild birds. The nets are shot over a large area, capturing birds and other nontarget, or unwanted, animals beneath the nets.

Capturing nursing baby primates is particularly wasteful of wildlife. After discovering a mother primate and her young, many collectors kill the mother animal if she does not leave her baby and retreat. (Abandonment by the mother is rare. They are very protective of their young.) After killing the mother, the collectors pry the frightened, sometimes injured baby from her body.

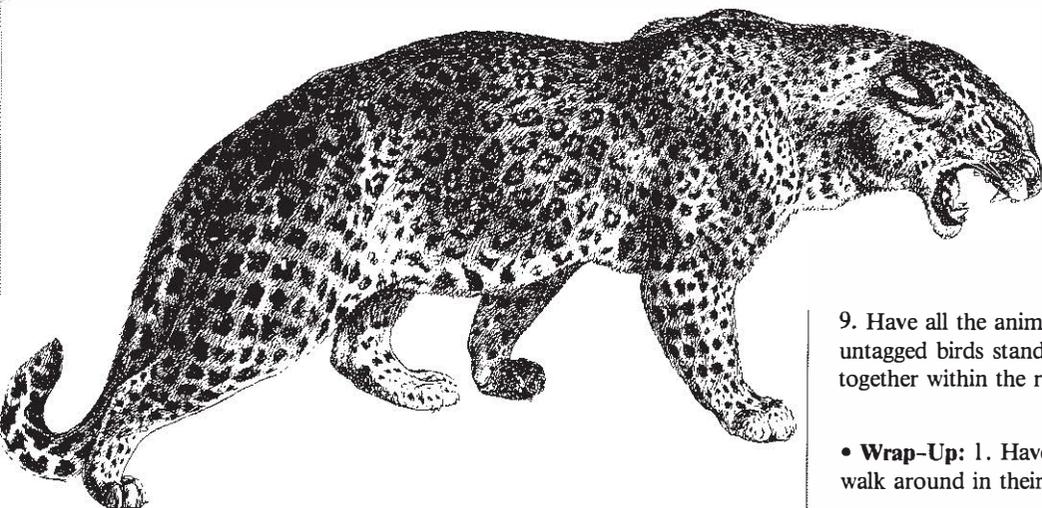
The importation of many species of wild animals is banned by the United States Government, so many "pet" traders smuggle animals into the country. Wild birds have their beaks taped closed and their wings taped to their bodies for shipping. Then the birds are packed in luggage or hidden among objects being shipped to the United States. Customs agents do not suspect that there are animals in these shipments and often do not detect them.

Even when wild animals are shipped legally, they suffer in transport. Cargo sections on airplanes are cold and decompressed. Often the animals are shipped tightly packed in cages with little or no food or water.

Studies on the importation of wild animals show that the "pet" trade is severely and adversely affecting the populations of many species. For each wild animal that arrives at the pet shop, up to ten animals have died in the process. For wild birds, the numbers are even higher.

• **Preparation:** Have on hand two red dot stickers and approximately forty blue dot stickers (other colors may be substituted.) You will also need ten to twenty-two pinnies or ribbons of one color each long enough to tie around a student's waist. Finally, you will need a long jump rope and a large playing field area available for use.

Note: This activity is designed for a class of twenty to thirty-three students.



• **Activity:**

*Introduction*

1. Ask students to regenerate quickly some of the list of wild animals that they created in Lesson 1 of our *Kind News* Feature.
2. For each animal listed, have students try to name at least one problem that an owner might encounter in the keeping of that wild animal *and* one potential problem for the animal involved during capture, transportation, or captivity.
3. Further discuss some of the problems of the captive wild animal trade. (Refer to the background information accompanying this activity and to our article "Sharing the Spotlight: Averaging and Captive Wildlife" also in this issue.)

*Playing the Game*

1. Explain to students that they are going to play a game in which animal dealers (or pet traders) try to capture wild birds to export to the United States as pets.
2. Outside in the schoolyard or on the playing field, have students do some warm-up calisthenics in preparation for the running involved in the game.
3. Outside, mark out the boundaries of the playing area (about half the size of a football field). Then use the jump rope to make a circle on the ground to serve as a "cage" for the captured birds.
4. Choose eleven students to be the animal dealers. The rest of the students are the wild birds. Each wild bird student wears a pinney or ribbon tied around the waist.
5. Give nine of the animal dealers several blue stickers. Give the other two animal dealers just one red sticker each.
6. Before beginning, explain to students that everyone must freeze when you blow the whistle to end the game. If some animal dealers use all their stickers, they may pretend they still have stickers in order to scare the birds to run toward another dealer.
7. The game proceeds much like tag. The eleven animal dealers try to tag birds by pressing colored stickers onto the birds. If a bird is tagged, it must go stand in the cage (even if the sticker falls off!). The cage may get very crowded, which is a realistic depiction of what actually occurs in the pet trade.
8. Begin the game. After about  $\frac{3}{4}$  of the birds have been tagged, blow the whistle.

9. Have all the animal dealers come stand in one area and all the untagged birds stand in another. All the caged birds remain together within the roped area.

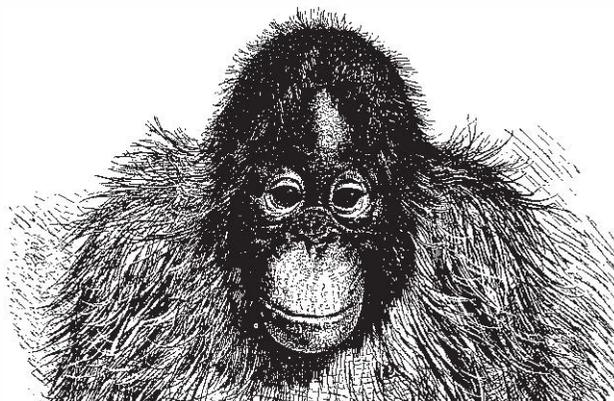
• **Wrap-Up:** 1. Have students shake out their arms and legs, and walk around in their area a bit to cool off.

2. Have students sit down in their area. Ask the caged birds how they feel or how they think an animal would feel in this situation. (You may want to explain to students that many scientists believe that birds can experience fear, stress, joy, etc. Do students' experiences with birds confirm this?) Ask the safe birds how they feel. How would they feel if they were baby birds whose parents had been captured? Who would feed them? How did the animal dealers like their role?

3. Ask the birds with the red tags to stand. Explain that if they were all real birds, there is a good chance that only two of them (in this case, the two with the red tags) would have survived the capture and transport process. (Note: The actual ration is as low as one out of eleven in delicate species.)

4. Explain that even when birds survive the capture and transport, ninety percent of them will probably be dead within two years. Ask students: If fifty birds survived the capture and transport to become "pets," how many would still be alive at the end of two years?

5. Finish by discussing with students what was realistic or unrealistic about the game. You may also want to share more of the background information with the students at this time. Do they think wild animals should be captured to be pets?



**Please Note:** The Capture Game is a simulation. It does not realistically simulate the capture techniques used for wild birds. Most wild birds are captured en masse, not one at a time as in tag. The statistics in The Capture Game are accurate and may possibly be conservative in number. ♡