



# Traversing the ethical minefield of keeping pets

PHOTOS: **ORCHID CHAKMA**

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First things first, ethical pet keeping is attainable, with a bit of effort. This article attempts to resolve some of the moral dilemmas one might face before introducing a pet into their life.

What does ethical pet keeping in Bangladesh even mean? The answer to this question is nuanced. The rapidly developing cities in Bangladesh house animals that share unique dynamics with the different socioeconomic classes of our society. While the upper class may be busy choosing different breeds of dogs and cats, people from the lower and middle classes might be struggling to cater to the basic needs of their pets. Hence, the ethical questions vary vastly between individuals, depending on who they are and where they are from.

Persian cats, Pomeranians, Golden Retrievers, Ranchu goldfishes, and Parakeets that talk your loneliness away and impress your friends – there is, evidently, a world of unique breeds of pets if one can afford them. Even if one cannot, the biases around us form unspoken beliefs such as Persian cats being somehow better than Bengal cats. Many people refrain from adopting local cats in the hopes of being able to afford a superior breed in the unforeseeable future. Indeed, this is a very pressing issue and raises vital questions.

Is it a matter of preference or prejudice? Whichever it is for you, the choice must

be made with sufficient insight into what that means for the lives of these animals in mind. Persian cats have to be bred to meet the high demand. Buying them may be unethical considering how the breeders treat them prior to selling. Higher demand for them might translate to more abuse of these cats as more people enter the breeding business without proper training and knowledge.

Purchasing dog breeds are trickier since keeping dogs as pets have only recently risen in popularity, due to a previously persistent taboo in the country. Just like unique fish breeds, they remain expensive, and exclusive to aficionados, who sometimes visit neighbouring countries to get them. This might make it particularly difficult to crosscheck the foreign breeder's moral standards.

Even larger moral questions are raised as many animals have been purposely bred purely for aesthetic purposes, disregarding their health and comfort. This is where we need to weigh aesthetics against the animal's right to a comfortable life, the moral answer to which should be exceedingly easy to find. Admittedly, individual breeds do have other desirable traits sought out by different owners which are less egregious than just being nice to look at. This may include behavioural tendencies, such as a calm nature. You must, in that case, look at your preferences more introspectively – should you even have preferences when it

comes to wanting to take care of an animal that is alive and breathing? Because on the flip side, there is a surplus of stray animals in our cities that are in a dire need of the care that selective breeds receive. Resources spent on the latter can arguably be better spent on vaccinating and saving the life of an adopted pet.

Keeping birds, however, is quite different from keeping any of the other types of pets.



Their natural habitats cannot be mimicked inside bars and justifying keeping them can be a challenging feat.

Fishes are tricky as well. Fish sold commercially are, most likely, bred in captivity. Therefore, they should be bought as pets instead of being released to their natural habitat which they are unfamiliar with. The moral dilemma becomes pressing when

you consider the fact that if the demand for having fish as pets don't go down, the practice of breeding exotic fish in captivity won't go away either.

Be that as it may, as caretakers, proper knowledge about the species and their natural environment is crucial. An owner must strive to maintain a comfortable and proper atmosphere for their fish. The most common mistake with goldfish, for example, can be keeping them in fish bowls. They require bigger tanks since they produce toxic ammonia which causes them stress.

This is along the lines of the next crucial pillar of ethical pet keeping which is taking proper physical and psychological care of your pets. Studying about them and attempting to accommodate them comes with the responsibility of having them in the house. If one is not allowed to keep pets because of unwilling parents or if they are not in the situation to take care of an animal financially or due to hectic schedules, it is probably the right decision to not get pets. Having a pet might bring you happiness, but being able to look past that and putting the animal's needs at the forefront is a must.

Animals are not, in fact, possessions. It's a shame that not enough people realise that and make questionable ethical choices with their pets.

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