CONCERN over breeding rodents for use as food for reptiles depends on one’s whole attitude to the use of animals for food more generally and the value of their lives. Ruminants are killed to produce cat and dog food of course, not to mention our own, so unless we take a strict vegan attitude (which may of course be a valid stance – I have good friends who are vegans) breeding rodents as reptile food is no different from breeding cattle for dog, cat or human food, as long as the animals are kept with a good level of welfare. If we do this, fulfilling their five freedoms as well as is possible, their use as food should not, in my opinion, concern us unduly whether they are rats or cattle.

What is a more concerning area is the feeding of live rodents to reptiles. Legally in the UK under the Animal Welfare Act 2006, live vertebrate prey kept by owners to feed to their reptiles are as much covered by that legislation as the animal being fed, and it might well be said that feeding live rodents to a reptile is causing unnecessary suffering under section 4 and contravening its five freedoms under section 9. In addition, the risks to the reptile from potential attack from the rodents are high. Reptiles use olfactory and often also thermal cues as well as visual ones in prey detection, so with care killed rodents can be fed to almost every reptile. This may not be the case with predator fish, where live feeder fish have to be used, but in most cases invertebrates can be used instead, which might bring up all sorts of questions as to whether they can feel pain, but perhaps this should be left for another ‘Everyday ethics’ piece!

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Have you faced a dilemma that you would like considered in a future installment of Everyday Ethics? If so, e-mail a brief outline to inpractice@bva-edit.co.uk. We pay a small honorarium for contributions that are published.