



HUSBANDRY FOR EXOTIC ANIMALS

HUSBANDRY

- ❑ Husbandry in exotic animal medicine encompasses the comprehensive care and management practices necessary to ensure the health, welfare, and longevity of exotic animals in captivity.
- ❑ Proper husbandry is critical for preventing diseases, reducing stress, and promoting natural behaviors. Here are the key components of husbandry for various groups of exotic animals:

BIRDS

Housing:

- ☐ Cages and Aviaries: Provide ample space for flying and movement. Cages should be made of safe, non-toxic materials.
- ☐ Perches: Offer a variety of perch sizes and textures to prevent foot problems.
- ☐ Nesting: For breeding birds, provide appropriate nesting materials and boxes.

Diet:

- ☐ Balanced Nutrition: Species-specific diets, including seeds, pellets, fruits, and vegetables. Some birds may require insects or other protein sources.
- ☐ Fresh Water: Ensure a constant supply of clean water.

Environmental Enrichment:

- ☐ Toys and Activities: Provide toys, puzzles, and foraging opportunities to stimulate mental activity.
- ☐ Social Interaction: Many birds are social and require interaction with other birds or humans.



REPTILES

Housing:

- ❑ Enclosures: Appropriately sized terrariums or vivariums with secure lids. Provide hiding spots and climbing structures.
- ❑ Temperature and Humidity: Maintain species-specific temperature gradients using heat lamps or pads. Monitor humidity levels with hygrometers.
- ❑ Lighting: Use UVB lighting for species that require it to metabolize calcium.

Diet:

- ❑ Species-Specific Diet: Insects, rodents, fish, fruits, and vegetables, depending on the species. Ensure prey items are appropriately sized.
- ❑ Calcium and Vitamin Supplements: Dust prey with supplements as needed.

Environmental Enrichment:

- ❑ Habitat Complexity: Include branches, rocks, and plants to encourage natural behaviors.
- ❑ Feeding Enrichment: Scatter food to encourage foraging.



SMALL MAMMALS (RABBITS, GUINEA PIGS, FERRETS)



Housing:

- ☐ Cages and Hutches: Spacious enclosures with solid flooring to prevent foot injuries. Provide hiding spots and nesting areas.
- ☐ Bedding: Use appropriate, non-toxic bedding materials like aspen shavings or paper-based products. NO CEDAR!

Diet:

- ☐ Balanced Diet: High-quality hay, fresh vegetables, and species-specific pellets. Avoid sugary or fatty treats. Ferrets are strict carnivores and need a ferret specific diet!
- ☐ Fresh Water: Provide clean water at all times, using bottles or bowls.

Environmental Enrichment:

- ☐ Toys and Chew Items: Provide toys, tunnels, and safe chew items to prevent boredom and dental problems.
- ☐ Social Interaction: Many small mammals are social and benefit from companionship of their own species or human interaction.

SMALL MAMMALS (MICE, RATS, HAMSTER AND GERBIL)

Housing:

- ☐ Cages: Use secure, escape-proof cages with solid floors to prevent foot injuries. Wire cages are suitable for good ventilation, but not suitable for burrowing.
- ☐ Bedding: Use appropriate, non-toxic bedding materials like aspen shavings or paper-based products. NO CEDAR!

Diet:

- ☐ A mix of commercial pellets or high-quality rodent blocks or pellets supplemented with treats and seeds when appropriate. Too much leads to obesity.
- ☐ Fresh Water: Provide clean water at all times, using bottles or bowls.

Environmental Enrichment:

- ☐ Toys and Chew Items: Provide toys, tunnels, and safe chew items to prevent boredom and dental problems.
- ☐ Social Interaction: Many small mammals are social and benefit from companionship of their own species or human interaction. Hamsters tend to be solitary.



AMPHIBIANS

Housing:

- ☐ Aquariums and Terrariums: Appropriately sized with secure lids. Include water features for aquatic species.
- ☐ Temperature and Humidity: Maintain appropriate temperature and humidity levels using heaters and misting systems.
- ☐ Substrate: Use species-appropriate substrates, such as moss, coconut fiber, or gravel.

Diet:

- ☐ Live Food: Insects, worms, and other small invertebrates. Some species may require small vertebrates.
- ☐ Calcium and Vitamin Supplements: Dust food items as needed.

Environmental Enrichment:

- ☐ Habitat Complexity: Provide hiding spots, water features, and plants to mimic natural environments.
- ☐ Feeding Enrichment: Use live food to stimulate natural hunting behaviors.



FISH



Housing:

- ☐ Aquariums: Appropriately sized tanks with adequate filtration and aeration. Ensure water quality parameters are suitable for the species.
- ☐ Temperature: Maintain species-specific water temperatures using heaters.
- ☐ Lighting: Provide appropriate lighting to support plant growth and display natural behaviors.

Diet:

- ☐ Species-Specific Diet: Provide a varied diet, including commercial fish food, live or frozen prey, and vegetable matter.
- ☐ Feeding Frequency: Adjust feeding frequency based on species and age.

Environmental Enrichment:

- ☐ Aquascaping: Use rocks, plants, and other decorations to create a stimulating environment.
- ☐ Social Structures: Consider the social needs of the species, providing appropriate groupings or solitary environments.

SUMMARY

- ❑ Proper husbandry for exotic animals involves providing appropriate housing, a balanced diet, environmental enrichment, and regular health monitoring.
- ❑ Understanding the specific needs of each species and providing a stress-free, stimulating environment is crucial for their overall well-being.
- ❑ Regular interaction and handling, along with attentive care, will ensure that exotic pets thrive in a home setting.

RESOURCES

Photos: Meri Kosman

<https://www.cliniciansbrief.com/article/guinea-pig-husbandry>