



Hedgehog Husbandry Sheet

The African hedgehog (*Atelerix albiventris*), also known as the African pygmy hedgehog, is rapidly growing in popularity as a family pet. In the wild, they live in the forests and deserts of central Africa. They are a lot more prone to cancer than other small mammals. The life span of an African hedgehog is approximately 4 years.

It is important to note that hedgehogs are prone to a variety of diseases, so regular visits with an exotic veterinarian is recommended. Progressive paresis syndrome also known as Wobbly Hedgehog Syndrome is another potential disorder. This is a degenerative neurological syndrome that typically occurs around 2-3 years of age and death typically occurs within 2 years after the onset of clinical signs. Hedgehogs are also prone to neoplasia or tumors, dermatitis and obesity.

Behavior

When frightened, hedgehogs will roll into a ball with their spikes facing outwards, and they can remain that way for hours. You should never try to force them out of that position. It is because of this that sedation is sometimes needed for a thorough veterinary examination. Hedgehogs rarely bite but will hiss when they get angry. Hedgehogs have a unique behavior known as self-anointing. Whenever they encounter a new food or smell, they place it in their mouths, salivate excessively, and spread the foamy saliva all over themselves. The exact reason is unknown, but it is no cause for concern.

Housing

Hedgehogs should not be housed with other hedgehogs, especially males, as they will fight. Hedgehogs are very active and need a lot of room to exercise. Their cage should offer at least 4 square feet. Do not use cages with a wire bottom, because this can harm their feet. A cage with wire sides should have a bar spacing no greater than 1 inch and terrarium tanks can also be used. Paper towel or newspapers make a great, inexpensive bedding material for a hedgehog. Cedar chips are potentially toxic and should be avoided.

Due to the high temperatures of their natural habitat, hedgehogs may require heat source. The temperature of your hedgehog's enclosure should be 75-85°F. If it falls below 65°F for an extended period, they may start to hibernate. Humidity should be at 40-70%. Hedgehogs are nocturnal and should have about 12 hours of mild light and 12 hours of darkness a day to maintain a normal schedule.

Feeding

We highly recommend the food Spike's Delight pelleted diet or Mazuri insectivore/hedgehog diet for your hedgehog. These are two of the only nutritionally balanced pelleted diets available for hedgehogs. You can also feed insects such as mealworms, crickets or snails. Fruits and vegetables such as kale, spinach, apples or bananas can be given as treats. The ideal diet should be high in protein and low in fat.

Cleaning

The cleaner your cage is, the healthier your pet will be. The bedding should be spot cleaned regularly and fully replaced approximately every week. The cage should be thoroughly cleaned with a commercial cage cleaner or dilute bleach solution. Be sure to rinse the cage fully and allow the cage to completely dry before replacing bedding and furniture. All wooden toys should be discarded after a while because they cannot fully be cleaned. Water bottles and food dishes should be cleaned and disinfected weekly with the cage as well. Some of these accessories can also be placed in the dishwasher for easy cleaning. If your hedgehog uses a litter pan, the pan should be emptied every 1-2 days.

Enrichment

Even though we do our best as pet owners to provide the best care possible, sometimes that is just not enough. Some pets need additional stimuli/enrichment in addition to the right food, water and housing. Below are some options to increase the value of your pet's day-to-day lives:

- Hide outs: Hedgehogs naturally desire to hide and enjoy hide boxes and tunnels.
 - PVC piping can be used to create tunnels and cardboard boxes provide nice hiding opportunities.
- Nesting: Most hedgehogs like to create an extra cozy sleep spot. Some extra nesting material can be helpful for this.
- Chewing: Hedgehogs like to chew and explore new things with their mouths.
- Wheel: Hedgehogs are very active creatures; a wheel provides that ability to burn off the extra energy.
- Foraging: Hiding high value treats (such as fruit or insects) in something to make your pet work a little for their food is beneficial.
- Destruction: Anything that your pet can rip apart such as crumpled up paper ball, toilet paper tubes, or newspaper is simple and fun!

Just make sure if making anything at home to avoid sticky tape, sharp edges, and chemicals. Be careful about disease transfer using anything from outside or another animal. Keep in mind that your pet can and will eat things they are not supposed to – monitor closely.