

features

CARE

Exploring the exotics

Learning about less common animals helps pet owners make right choice

Anne Woodbury
Animal Talk



Exotic animals belong to species not native to this country.

You've likely encountered exotic pets throughout your lifetime without realizing it, such as your childhood hamster, grandma's parakeet, and the ball python your friend's older brother had. An exotic pet can be a fascinating and truly enriching companion to care for, but consider carefully before adding a scaly, feathery, or furry exotic into your household.

The P.E.I. department of communities, land and environment maintain a list of prohibited wildlife. Along with obvious species such as hyenas and crocodiles, it includes any venomous animals. Also prohibited are snakes that grow to an average size of greater than three metres. The department does not allow ownership of species when there is a concern regarding animal welfare, public safety, or potential damage to the ecosystem if released into the wild, or where



ANNE WOODBURY/THE GUARDIAN

Nicholas the Bearded Dragon receives regular baths to keep him hydrated.

an animal has been obtained illegally.

Find out the origins of the exotic pet you are considering. Ask to see the supplier's permit to sell the species you are interested in, and determine that the animals are bred in captivity and not wild caught. The animal itself should look healthy and not lethargic or in obvious discomfort. Ask what kinds of treatments and vet care, if any, it has already received.

It is crucial to consider the specialized dietary and housing needs of exotics. For example,

corn snakes need a humid environment with access to an area that provides heat to aid in digestion. A bearded dragon requires basking heat in a dry environment and crickets for food that have been dusted with calcium supplementation. Some vitamins and minerals are essential for certain species, and that can be costly.

Adult size and life expectancy can both vary greatly depending on the species—be sure to find out before you commit to an animal's care. Macaw parrots, for instance, can live anywhere between 50 to 100 years. Who will care for the animal when you are unavailable? Providing proper veterinary care is also very important, and not all veterinarians are experienced with exotics.

Inquire whether your veterinarian can offer emergency services and routine check-ups for your potential new pet. If not, they may be able to refer you to

At a glance

Why consider an exotic pet?

- ◆ Exotic pets can make wonderful companions for people with dog or cat allergies.
- ◆ Space requirements are generally smaller compared to cats and dogs, and they don't need to be walked.
- ◆ Exotic animals have very specialized needs; caring for them properly is a challenge, and also an incredible learning experience.

a veterinarian who has a special interest and experience with exotics, and will provide knowledgeable advice about your animal's needs.

Deciding to take in an exotic animal should not be done in haste. Research all the factors above, and keep in mind that each animal is unique—the playful ferret you saw chasing a ball on the internet does not mean all ferrets behave that way. Remember that exotics' needs vary in complexity and expense. If you think an exotic pet is the right choice for you, some essential research and preparation beforehand will go a long way in helping to create a healthy and enriching experience for you and your new pet.

Next month in Animal Talk: Adopting seniors.

Anne Woodbury is a third year vet student at the Atlantic Veterinary College. Animal Talk is a monthly column in The Guardian produced by the Companion Animal Welfare Initiative (CAWI), the goal of which is to improve the welfare of owned and unowned companion animals on P.E.I. CAWI consists of the P.E.I. Humane Society, SpayAid, Cat Action Team, P.E.I. Veterinary Medical Association, PEI Department of Agriculture and Forestry, PEI 4-H, and Sir James Dunn Animal Welfare Centre at AVC. More information is at gov.pe.ca/agriculture/CAWI. Readers may send questions related to the well-being of owned and unowned companion animals to cawipeigmail.com.



ANNE WOODBURY/SPECIAL TO THE GUARDIAN

Sherry the chinchilla is one of many exotic pets adopted from the P.E.I. Humane Society. Others include guinea pigs, ferrets and birds like budgies.

AJ goes home



ERIN MULLEN/SPECIAL TO THE GUARDIAN

Mireille Poirier appears with AJ. Her cat was born at the P.E.I. Humane Society and spent just over three months there before Poirier adopted him. She took him home to join Ricky, her other cat and two rabbits, Shadow and Miranda, also adopted from the Humane Society. AJ needs medication in his eyes and Poirier was willing to give him the special attention he needs.

INSPIRATION

A cat with an underwear fetish takes items from owner's drawers

chicken soup
FOR THE SOUL
A CUP OF SOUP
LISA McMANUS LANGE

Cat owners are all too familiar with the mayhem and mischief committed by their felonious furry family members! In her story "Indoor Hunter," Lisa McManus Lange recalls the wacky and humorous behavior of her beloved cat, Snickers:

We had to settle for a cat when our landlord wouldn't allow dogs. One thing led to another, and we eventually ended up with three. One of them, the American tabby we named Snickers, was a natural hunter, confused by the unnatural environment in which we made her live: indoors.

Snickers had a few favorite "prey," and one of them was drinking straws. As you would walk through the house carrying a drink adorned with a straw, a pair of calculating eyes would be

trained on the plastic tube. If you didn't keep your eyes on your drink, if you dared leave the room, the sound of your glass toppling over as she stole the straw would have you running back in.

Eventually Snickers perfected her skill. No sooner would you get comfy on the couch, when the "ferocious" feline would stalk your drink. Delicately tilting her head to one side, she would grasp the straw with her teeth and gingerly pull it out of the glass without knocking the whole thing over.

With her prize in her mouth, she would proudly skulk away, a possessive deep-throated "kill" growl vibrating through your still-standing glass. The grand finale was her attempt at posing her hefty tabby body like the Great Sphinx of Giza, with the straw cradled between her paws.

But it wasn't the straws that were the real problem with our hunter. Unfortunately, Snickers had decided that my husband's underwear constituted worthy

prey as well, and we never knew when a pair of socks or knickers would be on display in our foyer or in the middle of the living room floor for the few guests we managed to invite over.

The mystery was, how did Snickers get "the drawers" out of the drawers? One day, we caught her in the act and watched the process in awe. She climbed up the side of the dresser, using each drawer's edge as a step, until she reached the underwear drawer at the top. With her back legs as leverage on the drawer below, she wedged her front claws into the drawer and pulled.

Then, dangling by her front legs, she hoisted herself into the drawer. After rooting around she emerged with her so-called "kill" clamped in her mouth and jumped down.

Even though we were right in front of her, she didn't care. Our presence was no threat. Down the stairs she stealthily crept, the underwear in her mouth muffling her trademark deep-

throated "kill" growl. As she neared the living room the growling became more intense, and there she dropped her kill and lay on it.

We never figured out what made Snickers pick socks over underwear. What made it a sock day? What made it a knickers day? And it didn't matter whether we were home or not—her fetish had no scheduled time. Seeing as our house was small, we could hear when a drawer was being opened and knew what would come next.

Snickers is no longer with us, but her memory lives on through the claw marks on my husband's dresser drawers. And although I can finally stock straws in my house and use them without incident, I still sometimes hesitate, and reflect. And then I get a little nostalgic for the good old days when glasses got knocked over and I tripped on underwear in the front hall.

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inside



Steps save lives
Safety guidelines important for potato producers to follow. Find out why in the FarmNet column on page... **B6**

THIS
week
tuesday

Dr. Gifford Jones discusses urinary tract infections.



wednesday

Margaret Prouse shares secrets from her kitchen.

thursday

Trinity United Church Summerside plans to receive refugees.

friday

Summerside actress achieves big screen success.

saturday

Chef Ned Bell shares his passion for sustainable seafood.

PLAN
ahead

Fun event for family

The annual Fall Fair is Saturday, Oct. 3 at Winsloe United Church, 8:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. There's a harvest stand and fresh vegetables, treats, coffee, tea, cold drinks, barbecued sausages and hot dogs, as well as children's activities and an indoor yard sale. To book a table, call Sonya, 902-367-6341 after 6 p.m. (\$15 per table). There will also be a silent auction from 8:30 a.m. to 12 noon.

TOP
tips

Safety begins at home

With school now in session, many children may be coming home to an empty house. Weiser, manufacturers of innovative, high quality and secure door locksets, recommend simple, common sense home security when it comes to keeping your home safe. Stay in touch - Ask your children to check in as soon as they arrive home or leave the house. Staying connected, despite the distance, ensures that you know their whereabouts at all times and they know you're always just a phone call, email or text message away.
From www.mnialive.com.

TOP
tips

A family game

Miniature golf day is the ideal opportunity to spend the day in the great outdoors with the family. It's also an excuse to sharpen up your putting skills all in one fun package.

From: www.daysoftheyear.com/