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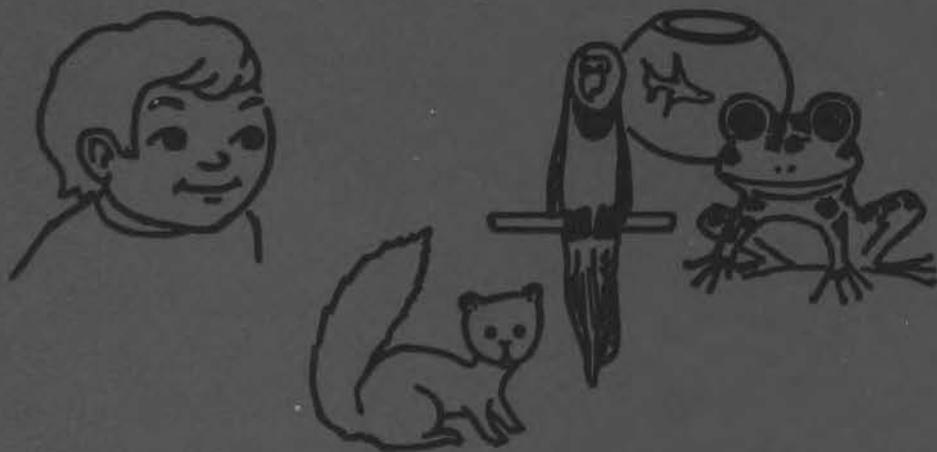


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Pets

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Credits

Information contained in this bulletin has been reviewed by Raymond B. Solac, D.V.M., assistant professor, Extension veterinarian, University of Minnesota, St. Paul, Minnesota 55101.

The Agricultural Extension Service gratefully acknowledges the use of the following publications in the preparation of this manual:

EXPERIENCES WITH PETS, Ralston Purina Company, St. Louis, Missouri 63136.

PETS, Equitable Life Assurance Society of the U.S., Bureau of Public Health, New York, New York 10019.

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Pets

Pets

The 4-H Pet Project is open to owners of many different kinds of pets. Dog owners would select the 4-H Dog Project.

Your pet may be an animal not specifically mentioned in this bulletin. Then, it will be your responsibility to find information on your particular pet.

Suggestions For More Information

Pet Stores: Most pet stores sell inexpensive manuals on many different small animals.

Libraries: Public libraries and school libraries often have reference books on pets.

Book Stores: A number of excellent reference books on pets can be purchased.

Wild Animals

Wild animals shouldn't be captured and kept as pets. These include squirrels, raccoons, chipmunks, moles, rats, mice, groundhogs, deer, coyotes, bobcats, and opossums. They are difficult to tame and seldom become tame enough for a suitable pet. Many states have laws against capturing and keeping wild animals captive.

Some small wild animals such as squirrels and chipmunks often make their homes near the homes of people. You can encourage

these animals to live near your home if you feed them nuts, peanuts, or grain. Don't leave feed outdoors overnight; it might attract rats and mice.

The Pet For You

What is a pet? Strictly speaking, a pet is any living thing that takes up residence in your home and becomes dependent on you for its survival. Almost any kind of creature can be considered a pet. Just as you are free to choose your friends, you are equally free to choose a pet. But pets are your companions and only a limited number qualify as truly satisfactory. Rabbits, hamsters, mice, fish, and birds are among the most popular pets, while dogs and cats remain where they have been through the ages—in the top spots as man's best friends.

Which one for you? Everyone knows that a pet can join a household by accident, whim, or chance. You might inherit a parrot, or give a night's shelter to an abandoned kitten (who insists on repaying you by living with you forever). In these instances, after mother and dad agree, you have little choice; all you can do, if you decide to keep it, is make it a pleasant addition to your family.

Often you will have needed time for reflection, time to look over pet possibilities with

your family. Then you can vote for the pet most appealing to all of you and best-suited to your life style. After all, you may be choosing a companion for the next 10 or 15 years. You should ask yourself how much you are willing to give—not only in terms of money—but in terms of your own time. Chances are the whole family will enjoy thrashing out the pros and cons of each possible pet.

Be realistic about your living conditions and your own capacities. If you feel a certain type of pet would burden your family too much—**ADMIT IT!** Even so, you needn't face a petless future. You can get pleasure when your canary sings, when your tropical fish swarm to the side of the tank, and when your white mice do wild acrobatics. None of these pets scratches at the door and imperiously demands to be taken for a walk in the rain just when you're deep in a mystery story or putting a soufflé in the oven.

Who owns whom? Ideally people own animals. Sometimes the reverse is true. Families can become dominated by their pets.

Remember, you are completely responsible for your pet. If your pet misbehaves or causes damage you may blame the pet, but everyone else will blame you. Because you are completely responsible for your pet, it is important to train him to be well behaved.

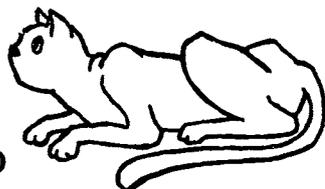
PETS AT A GLANCE

A quick rundown of the habits, needs, and characteristics of the most popular pets:

	Equipment and living space?	Common ailments?	Length of life?	Period of gestation?	Necessary immunizations?	Easy to train?	Can be handled?
GERBIL	Square aquarium 3-15 gallons with lid or metal or wooden cage.	A healthy animal not prone to disease.	3-4 years	24-25 days	None	Gentle, timid, and curious	Yes
CATS	Your home, with a special cushion or box.	Worms, distemper, enteritis, hairballs, bladder troubles, pneumonia, skin disorders.	Up to 15 yrs.	59-65 days	Distemper	Very, (but independent)	Yes
RABBITS	An airy hutch with an exercise run and a sleeping compartment. Keep dry.	Colds, slobbers, eye, ear, and skin infections.	Up to 8 yrs.	30-33 days	None	For tricks, and sometimes for housebreaking	Yes
MICE	Metal or wooden cages with removable, easy to clean pan. Cages need daily cleaning.	Colds, fungus, fleas, lice, cuts from fights.	3-4 years	20 days	None	For tricks, but not house-breaking	Yes, but frighten easily
HAMSTERS	Small metal cage with solid bottom. Newspaper, sawdust for bedding. Clean—no odor.	Usually a healthy animal not prone to disease.	3 or 4 years	16 days (can bear 12 litters a year)	None	Less trainable than mice	Yes
BIRDS	Roomy, rectangular cages, metal or wooden with removable pan.	Colds, intestinal ailments, lice, mites, ticks, moult, psittacosis.	*5 to 50 yrs.	*Eggs hatch in 12-30 days	None	Can sing, talk, do acrobatics. Parakeets can fly outside cage	Don't like handling (except parakeets and parrot family)
FISH aquarium varieties	Rectangular tanks with large air surface, sand, plants. Some need lights, thermostat.	Shakes, skin ailments, fungus, bruises.	*Up to 10 yrs.	*Live bearers, 1-3 months. Egg bearers: eggs hatch in 2-14 days.	None	No	No

* varies by breed

Cats



BACKGROUND

The cat is a member of the Felidae family—the best known of all the carnivora. The wild relatives of the tame house cat include the lion, tiger, jaguar, and leopard.

Since the time of the ancient Egyptians, the cat has been a domestic animal wherever man has made his home. Moreover, *Felis Catus*, to use his scientific name, has been idolized as a god, feared and persecuted as the companion of witches, and caressed and loved as a fireside pet.

The cat has never turned his paws or jaws to the kind of man-serving tasks the dog has performed, but as a house pet he has more than earned his keep. Moreover, he has been and still is the supreme catcher of rats and mice—pests that for centuries have raided the food supplies of men and spread bubonic plague and other dangerous diseases among humans. Each year the cat saves millions of dollars' worth of food that would otherwise have been destroyed by rodents. If people realized how valuable the cat is as a rodent-destroyer, they would think twice before abandoning kittens or allowing stray cats to go hungry and homeless.

Scientists haven't determined with accuracy the origin and development of the domestic cat. Nevertheless, they know that all domestic cats are of the same species.

Within this species they recognize a number of different breeds. The best known are:

LONG-HAIRED	SHORT-HAIRED
Persian	Abyssinian
Angora	Domestic short-hair
Peke Face	
SPECIAL SHORT-HAIRED	
Manx	
Siamese	
Burmese	

CAT CARE

Housing

Like the dog, the cat is a free pet—meaning the family usually allows it the run of the house. In other words, your home is your cat's home—or, as has been often suspected, vice versa.

Although your cat may roam your home, he should always have a box or basket of his own. Furnish it with a washable pad or covered cushion. Place the box or basket in a warm, quiet spot. Also, be sure to elevate it an inch or two above the floor. When a cat retires to his "little room" to sleep, respect his privacy by leaving him alone. Like a dog or any other pet, your cat should have some time alone—when not being petted or played with.

Although you have made a comfortable bed for your cat, don't be surprised if he chooses another place to sleep—the top of the sofa or the corner of a closet. Your cat is independent and this is part of his charm.

Housebreaking

Provide your cat with a sanitary pan made of rustless metal, perhaps enamel, rubber, or plastic and filled with earth, sand, sawdust, strips of newspaper, or one of the highly efficient commercial litters. Clean the pan once or twice a day for sanitary reasons and because cats prefer to use a clean pan. In cleaning the pan, use only water and unscented soap. Any strong odor remaining on the pan may drive the cat away. Keep the pan in a permanent location—one that is secluded.

To pan train a new kitten, place him on the pan when he first arrives and then after every meal, nap, or play. The mother cat will keep her kittens clean and tidy until they are about a month old. Then, if she herself has been pan trained, she usually will teach the kittens.

A cat who can get outdoors regularly during the day doesn't have to be pan trained.

Collar, Name Tag, and Leash

With patience and persistence, most cats can be taught to walk on a leash. After such training, you can take your cat out safely—he can't stray away. Also, it is easier to take your cat along on family travels.

Fit your cat with a light collar with a tag giving his or your name and your address attached to it. Some communities, by law, require that you tag your cat. Whether or not your town has such a law, you will want to tag your cat so that if he is lost, the finder will know where to return him.

Scratching Post

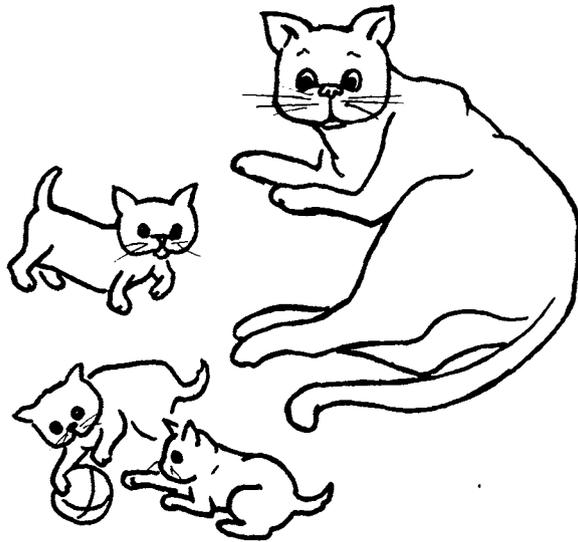
For the indoor cat, a scratching post is a necessity. It enables him to keep claws in trim without scratching furniture or rugs. (Whether or not you have a scratching post, you may wish to spray your furniture with a stainless commercial detergent having an odor that repels cats.)

The scratching post should be tall enough so that the cat can stretch full length while scratching. It also should be sturdy enough so that the cat can't knock it over. If you fasten a strip of carpeting around the post, and sprinkle some catnip around its base, your scratching post will be more appealing.

Toys

Your kitten or cat will enjoy the simplest of toys and will play with them often. Here are some suggestions:

- Celluloid ball that rattles.
- Cellophane and catnip bag.
- A spool attached to a strong piece of string and hung from a chair or door-knob.
- A rubber mouse that squeaks.



Cat Carrier

This is a piece of equipment you will value, especially in an emergency. All too often, the owner bundles his cat or kitten—frightened and resentful—into the handiest cardboard box for transportation.

Purchase a regular carrier. Then allow your cat to get used to it by having him sleep in it and by carrying him around in it at home. Then, when your family goes on a trip, your cat will be happy to live and travel in his carrier.

Grooming

Cats are meticulous about keeping themselves clean. They use their small tongues with remarkable efficiency as washcloth, comb, and brush.

Even so, you should comb and brush your cat every day. By doing this, you pick up loose hairs that the cat might otherwise swallow or shed. By brushing your cat regularly, you help stimulate the hair follicles and produce a beautiful glossy coat. If you start to brush your cat early in his life, he will actually look forward to daily brushing. If you have an indoor cat, his nails should be clipped. Have a veterinarian show you how to do this. Then buy a professional nail clipper and do the nail clipping yourself. If your cat runs loose outside much of the time, don't clip his nails. He needs sharp claws to defend himself against dogs and other cats.

Feeding

When a kitten is about 4 weeks old, he will start to eat and drink milk or water from a dish. About 6 weeks after birth, a kitten is usually weaned. For this reason, a person should probably not take a kitten away from his mother until he is 6 or preferably 8 weeks old.

Some suggested feeding practices follow:

1. Feed your kitten four times a day, your adult cat twice. They like a regular routine: feed your pet in the same place and at the same times every day.
2. Many cat owners prefer to warm the milk before they give it to their pet, but this isn't necessary.
3. If your cat doesn't eat all the food, remove what is left and cut down the portion at the next meal.
4. Some people prefer to feed their cats a variety of food to avoid fussiness. Others like to accustom their cat to a fixed diet of one staple. People, like cats, make up their own minds.
5. Your adult cat will enjoy eating some meat. Although cats have been domesticated thousands of years, remember that they are still carnivorous.

Suggested Feeding Program

Feed your cat a good prepared food: either canned or dry food will form an adequate basis for a good ration.



In addition you may want to add meat, either raw or cooked, to your cat's ration. This can include beef, (chunks or hamburger), lamb, veal, liver, kidneys, or heart.

If you add fish, be sure it is cooked. Raw fish may transmit tapeworms or even produce a nutritional deficiency since some fish contains enzymes that may destroy the vitamin thiamine.

You may also want to feed your cat milk; most cats enjoy warm milk.

Provide clean water at all times.

Handling

Contrary to what you may have heard, never pick up a kitten or cat by the scruff of the neck. Such handling may cause serious internal injuries. Never lift him by his front or rear legs, or by holding the middle of the body.

Always place your left hand under the cat's hindquarters, and slip your right hand between his front paws and under his chest. Use quiet, slow movements to win the cat's confidence.

Never play roughly with your cat. He won't endure the same amount of handling as a

dog. Whether your cat scratches you intentionally or accidentally, it is equally painful.

Health Care

With reasonably good care the average cat lives 10 to 14 years. Some have reached the ripe old age of 19 or 20. When your cat becomes ill, take him to a veterinarian at once.

External parasites: These include ticks, lice, fleas, mites, and fungi. Before you buy preparations to exterminate these parasites, read the labels carefully. Some preparations are unsafe for use on cats. Consult your pet shop or veterinarian for suggested medication. To prevent reinfestation, be sure to disinfect your cat's bed and box.

Skin Diseases: Several different skin ailments present look-alike signs. Therefore, for diagnosis and treatment of such ailments, take your cat to a veterinarian.

Colds: Provide your cat with quiet and warmth. If your cat's cold doesn't clear up, take him to a veterinarian. A cold may be the forerunner of something more serious, such as pneumonia.

Constipation: Give your cat a meal of raw liver together with a dose of olive oil or milk of magnesia. If this doesn't correct his condition, take him to a veterinarian. He will probably recommend changes in your cat's diet to prevent recurrence.

Diarrhea: If diarrhea persists, see a veterinarian. It could be a symptom of a serious disease.

Worms: Worm your cat only on the advice of a veterinarian. There are several varieties of worms: each calls for a different treatment.

Teeth: Have a veterinarian check your cat's teeth once or twice a year. He may scrape off any accumulated tartar and extract any loose teeth.

Infectious enteritis: All cats should be immunized against this feline equivalent of dog distemper. Fortunately, it is not contagious to humans or dogs. If your cat becomes infected, see a veterinarian. Afterward, provide the best possible home nursing care.

Pills and liquid medicine: Ask your veterinarian for advice on how to give pills or liquid medicine to your cat.

Ear mites: If your cat frequently scratches his ears or shakes his head, he may have ear mites. If he does, gently clean each ear with a swab stick moistened in quaternary ammonium disinfectants, or, if not available, hydrogen peroxide. Repeat this treatment a day or two later.

Safety: To protect the health and life of your cat, observe the following safety rules:

1. Screen all windows.
2. Do not leave needles, thread, tacks, pins, or buttons where the cat can get them.
3. Never put rat or roach poison inside the house where the cat may get to it.
4. Never leave a paint or varnish can open.
5. Remember that certain preparations, such as those containing DDT, strychnine, tur-

pentine, lead, lysol, or mercury, are dangerous to cats.

Breeding

If your cat is a mature, unaltered male, he isn't a safe or satisfactory house pet, especially for children. Unless this cat is pedigreed and you intend to breed him for commercial sales, have a veterinarian castrate him preferably at 5 or 6 months old. A neutered male remains gentle, reliable, and free of the odor that can make his presence very objectionable. Castration is a minor operation for cats, one that will make the cat a happier, more placid house pet.

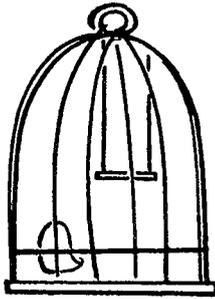
The surplus of unwanted cats is already a serious problem, so you should think twice before you allow your adult female to add to the cat population. You may believe that you can find good homes for her kittens, but it is best to make sure beforehand. You may decide to let your cat have only one litter and then have the veterinarian spay her.

If you decide to let your female cat have just one litter, this can be a very enjoyable and worthwhile experience for children. A cat's gestation period is variable—between 56 and 65 days. During pregnancy, the average cat remains in good health and spirits. She should be handled as little as possible.

Before the kittens are born, provide the expectant mother with a comfortable box set in a dark and secluded place. When newly

born, kittens are helpless, blind, and have little hair, but she will take excellent care of all the needs of her babies. In fact, cats are among the best mothers in all the animal kingdom.

Birds



BACKGROUND

Birds belong to the scientifically designated class Aves. They are warm-blooded, oviparous, vertebrate animals. They usually have ultra-light bones and extra-strong flight muscles. Usually, their eyesight and hearing are acute. Birds, of course, vary tremendously in size, appearance, and habits. They have adapted themselves to different kinds of climate and food.

For many people, a bird is an excellent pet. Generally, it requires much less care than a dog or cat, and is usually a pleasure to watch and a joy to hear—if its song is melodious. If the bird can be handled, taught to speak, or do tricks, it is a fascinating home companion.

The most popular bird pets are the parakeet, canary, and finch.

BIRD CARE

Housing

Cage: Provide a large cage. Set it on a table or hang it from a wall bracket or floor stand in a light, airy room (not the kitchen), but away from windows, doors, or radiators because drafts and sudden temperature changes are harmful to a bird.

Perches: Inside the cage, provide several

hardwood perches of varying thicknesses. These perches enable the bird to change its grip. Oval or square perches provide such variation, and are better than round ones. Purchase a spare set of perches to install while washing the other set.

Seed, water, and grit cups: Use hooded cups for parakeets because they fling seed about. Glass cups are easiest to wash.

Bird tub or hanging bath: A caged canary or finch will probably enjoy a bath, but a parakeet may not. If not, spray the parakeet lightly with water, or allow it to roll about in a large piece of wet lettuce. Water for any type bird bathing should always be room temperature.

Toys: Although a canary or finch doesn't need a toy, a parakeet likes a mirror, bell, ladder, or swing. Parrots appreciate exercising their powerful beaks: a few links of chain or a spool gives them this endless pleasure.

Gravel: It is common practice to supply commercial bird gravel which helps the bird to grind its food.

Cage cover: At night, cover the cage with a cloth. This protects the bird from chills and insures rest and quiet. You may also use this type shield for the cage at any time to keep the bird quiet.

Seed catcher: Around the lower part of a parakeet's cage, attach a seed catcher to

prevent the bird from scattering seed and gravel on the floor.

Feeding

Seed: Feed your bird a ration obtained in the pet store.

Fresh food: Parakeets, canaries, and finches relish lettuce, grated carrot, cabbage, watercress, spinach, apple, orange or a grape.

Water: Give your bird fresh water daily. Before you replace the water, always clean the water cup thoroughly.

Cuttlebone: Clip a piece of cuttlebone onto the cage. Change this bone every 3 months. Cuttlebone helps your bird keep its beak trimmed and supplies minerals in the diet.

Handling

Although a canary or finch rarely becomes tame enough to be handled, a parakeet responds readily to training, particularly if it is young.

Allow a young parakeet a week or two to settle down in its new home, then start to train it. Move your hand quietly around the bird's cage. Then offer your finger as a perch. At first, the bird may flutter away in fright. Wait awhile, until the bird settles down, then offer your finger again. Your patience and persistence will win the bird's confidence. Then

it will perch on your finger—just inside the cage—with little or no hesitation. After the bird perches confidently on your finger, slowly take it outside the cage.

To protect your parakeet against injury from wild flights around the room, have your pet store or a veterinarian clip the bird's flight feathers. This won't injure the bird. Also by the time its feathers grow back, the bird will probably be tame and may even ride on your shoulder as you walk around in the room.

Before you let your parakeet out of its cage, be sure to close all windows, doors, and water faucets; turn off the stove, fan, vacuum cleaner, and iron.

Don't let your bird outside the cage in a room where your dog or cat is loose. Many dogs, and even some cats, will come to accept a bird's presence with tolerance, but it isn't safe to leave these pets together unless the bird is locked securely in his cage.

Training

If you wish to teach your parakeet to talk, you will have to use patience and persistence. You—and nobody else—should train your bird, individually, when no other bird is near. Be sure that the room is quiet. If you shade the cage somewhat, the bird will be able to concentrate better. (Children are excellent trainers because their higher-pitched voices are much easier for the bird to imitate.)

Start with a single word or phrase, such as

“hello” or “pretty bird.” Use a high-pitched voice, as the bird can more easily imitate it. Repeat the words slowly and clearly. Keep the training period short. Have a regular training period daily. Do not become discouraged if the bird seems to be a slow learner. When the parakeet first repeats a word or a phrase, you will get a thrill—and know that all your time and trouble was well spent.

Breeding

Both parakeets and canaries will breed in captivity. Nest-making, egg-laying, and chick-raising entrance youngsters and have educational value. They will be particularly interested to note that the father bird as well as the mother participates in the feeding and care of the young. If a pair of parakeets or canaries is to breed, provide a relatively large cage (at least 16 inches x 18 inches x 36 inches) and a nest box. Canaries require a round wire screen-type nest and a supply of nesting material. After breeding, the female bird will lay an egg every other day. The average clutch contains 6 eggs. After a 17- to 21-day incubation period, the chicks will hatch out in the same order the eggs were laid.

Parakeet chicks are tiny, featherless, and blind. Within 2 weeks they open their eyes and grow their first feathers. During the first few weeks, as the chicks are growing, adult parakeets will conscientiously and assiduously feed them. After about 3 weeks, the chicks

may be handled. If this is done, they usually become very tame as they grow up. If you breed pet birds, keep the breeding to two families a year to limit numbers. You can prevent breeding by removing the nest box.

Health Care

Feed your bird the recommended diet. Provide fresh water every day. Keep the cage away from drafts and dampness. Cage, water, and feed cups should be kept scrupulously clean. If you observe these simple rules, your bird should stay healthy.

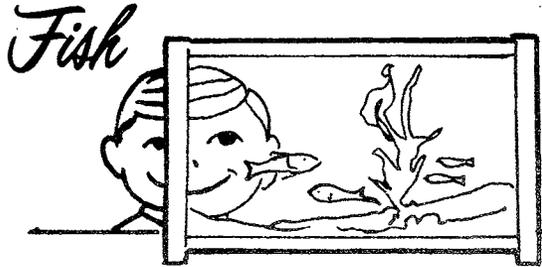
If your bird has any of the following signs of sickness, and especially if they persist, consult a veterinarian:

listlessness	excessive scratch-
ruffled feathers	ing (distinguish
no appetite	from preening)
closed eyes	
soft watery droppings	

Trim your bird's nails if they are unduly long and the bird has difficulty perching.

In trimming, hold the bird's foot in front of a strong light to locate the end of the vein. In trimming the nail, be sure not to cut the vein. If unsure of correct and safe procedure, have a veterinarian show you.

Feather picking is a common habit of birds, perhaps caused by boredom and dietary deficiency. Keep the bird occupied and amused by providing it with toys. Feed with a complete well-balanced ration.



BACKGROUND

Fish are vertebrate animals belonging to the class Pisces. Fish possess gills for underwater breathing, have skeletons of bone and fins for swimming, and most have a covering of overlapping scales for protection.

The age of a fish can be determined by studying its scales. Every year, as the fish grows, a thin ring forms on each of its scales. By counting the rings on a scale from a carp or whitefish, for example, age can be determined. This counting, of course, requires a magnifying glass or microscope.

Numerically, fish constitute the largest class of vertebrates. They are distributed throughout the world—in ponds, lakes, rivers, and oceans. Since fresh water goldfish and tropicals are the varieties usually kept by children, these are the only fish discussed here.

For young people, for those with little time for pets, and for families in small or crowded homes, fish make good pets. After the fish tank or bowl is set up, the everyday care is simple. Fish, under ideal conditions, may be safely left alone for 1 or 2 weeks. The collection and care of fish is a hobby that can grow with interest and knowledge. Some people remain content with a few bright goldfish in a bowl, but others become so engrossed in the study and care of fish that they buy and breed the more unusual tropical

varieties, grow exotic plants in their aquariums, and progress to more elaborate tanks and equipment.

FISH CARE

Housing

The Tank: Fish should never be kept in a tiny round bowl because it doesn't have adequate air surface for oxygenation. Instead, house them in a large square or rectangular glass aquarium.

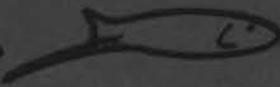
Start out with the best and the largest tank you can afford. Remember—the fish population can always expand but the tank can't! For the beginner, the 10-gallon aquarium is an excellent size.

Never overcrowd your tank with fish. Follow this basic rule: Allow 1 gallon of water for every inch of fish. This rule may be modified somewhat according to the kinds of fish, number and variety of plants, and aeration equipment, if any.

Setting up the aquarium: Planning and fixing up the new home for pet fish can be fun. This project provides youngsters with many varied opportunities to use their constructive and creative abilities. As initial steps, they can perform the following tasks:

1. Scrub the tank with clean hot water with added vinegar, then rinse. Never use a soap or detergent as it is harmful to some fish.

2. Line the bottom of the tank with about 2 inches of coarse sand. Allow roughly 2 pounds of sand per gallon of water capacity. Before putting in the sand, wash it thoroughly under a stream of water. Meanwhile, stir the sand until all soil and other impurities are washed away. Inside the tank, slope the sand so that it is deepest at the back where plants will be placed. Because of this slope, waste material will drift toward the front of the tank where it is easily seen and can be readily removed with a dip tube or siphon.
3. Lay a dinner plate or clean, folded wrapping paper over the sand to hold it in place. Then, slowly pour in water until the tank is about two-thirds full. Next, remove the paper.
4. Plan and prepare "the sea-scape" of rocks and plants. If this is done well, the aquarium will have an attractive appearance.
5. Place your rocks. In selecting rocks, a word of warning: Some rocks are poisonous to fish. Therefore, obtain your rocks from a dealer or check with an expert on the rocks you have.
6. Set your plants. Carefully rinse your plants. Then plant them—tall one toward the back; and stubby ones toward the front. In setting each plant, push its roots gently into the sand to a depth of an inch or so. Leave the crown of the plant (area where the stems start to branch)



above the sand. In setting your plants, leave adequate free swimming space in the front and the center of the tank.

- Cover the water surface with paper. Then fill the tank. If your tap water has chlorine in it, remove this chemical because it is harmful to fish. To remove chlorine, use one of the preparations available in a fish pet store, or use 3 drops of a saturated solution of sodium thiosulfate (hypo) for each gallon of water. If you use the hypo, stir, let tank settle for 5 minutes, and place the fish in it. Sodium thiosulfate can be obtained in drug or photo stores. Before you put your fish in the tank, be sure the tank water is about the same temperature as the water in the containers in which you brought them home from the store. This is extremely important.

Healthy fish generally can be obtained from a reputable pet store. Buy young fish, and put them all in the tank at the same time. Because fish are often aggressive toward strangers, add new fish at night, then the oldtimers are less likely to bully the newcomers.

Cover the top of the tank with a sheet of clean glass. This will keep out dust, prevent the fish from jumping out, and reduce chilling and evaporation of water. For most tropical fish, both a heater to warm the water (78-84° F.) and a thermometer to check the water's temperature are necessary.

Every day, the tank should receive from 8

to 10 hours of light, either natural or artificial. Too much direct sunlight will cause an overgrowth of algae along the tank's walls.

Fish Selection

You may decide to keep a number of fish of the same species in your tank. If children are to have the main responsibility for the fish, they should probably choose goldfish since they are usually hardier than the tropicals. But if a parent or other adult assumes responsibility for supervision, tropical fish may be the better choice. A community of bright tropical fish is a beautiful and fascinating display. For many people, it is worth the slight extra work involved.

When selecting tropical fish, be sure that the species can live together as a community. Some fish are quarrelsome. Others aren't. Still others are very delicate, requiring special tank conditions if they are to survive and flourish.

For beginners, guppies may be the perfect choice. They have bright colors, peaceful dispositions, and tend to multiply rapidly.

The lively zebra fish is a suitable candidate for group living in your aquarium. It requires relatively little oxygen so a number of them can thrive in the tank. The zebras are at their best when they are flashing about in a lively school.

Other recommended species are the Platys and the Neon or Glow-light Tetras, both hardy and attractive fish.

A male and female, or a single male Siamese fighting fish will add marvelous color to the tank. Contrary to its belligerent name, this species is really quite harmless to other species of fish.

The well-balanced aquarium needs some scavengers—water animals that serve as sanitation workers. Probably the best are the snails, such as the Cornucopia, Mystery, and Red Ramshorn. Catfish also help to keep the water clear of animal and plant wastes.

For the well-stocked, 10-gallon aquarium, here are two suggested lists:

LIST A

- 3 guppies (1 male, 2 females)
- 4 zebra fish
- 1 catfish (small)
- 1 Siamese fighting fish (male or pair)
- 2 neon tetras
- 2 snails

LIST B

- 2 glow-light tetras
- 2 black mollies
- 3 platys (2 males, 1 female)
- 2 rosy tetras
- 2 head and tail light tetras
- 1 catfish
- 2 snails

Some of the most popular and useful plants that are well-suited to your aquarium are: Vallisneria, Sagittaria, Nitella, Cabomba, and Ludwigia. Plants are not only decorative, they perform many useful and valuable serv-

ices: supplying oxygen, providing food, and offering hiding places for shy fish and baby fish (the very young, called fry).

Feeding

Feed your fish a well-balanced commercial ration. Though it isn't a basic requirement, some pet owners may enjoy feeding live foods (if available) such as daphnia, brine shrimp, mealworms, or chopped-up earthworms.

Never overfeed your fish. Overfeeding can be one of the greatest causes of fish mortality. If food remains uneaten after a 5-minute period, reduce your next feeding slightly. Always remove all decayed food as well as dead fish, snails, plants, and fish excreta.

Health Care

It is exceedingly difficult to recognize and correctly diagnose fish ailments. Sickness among fish, however, can be kept to a minimum if the aquarium is well-balanced, temperature is even, fish aren't overfed, and the tank isn't overcrowded. Even under the best tank conditions, an occasional death must be expected. Never place pet fish in cold tap water. Promptly replace smelly or milky water.

Overcrowding Symptoms: Fish all gasp at the surface of the water. **Treatment:** Remove some of the fish.

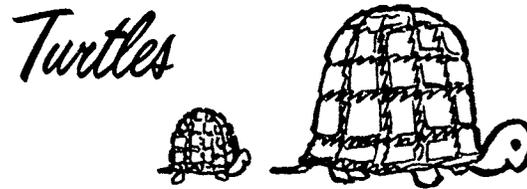
General Suggestions for Treatment:

1. Remove sick fish at once. Put them in a small, shallow, hospital tank.

2. Add about 2 teaspoons of salt to every gallon of water in the hospital tank.
3. Continue the treatment for several days.
4. If there is no improvement, consider disposing of them: a sharp clean blow or decapitation, is the quickest and kindest way.
5. If disease is widespread, remove all the fish to the hospital tank. Then, clean out the main aquarium completely, sterilize it with 10 drops of household chlorine bleach to each gallon of water and let stand for 30 minutes. Rinse thoroughly. Refill with water, add hypo and restock with fresh sand and plants.

Breeding

Breeding is by no means a simple project. Exacting conditions must be met if fish are to propagate successfully. Consult a reference for details.



BACKGROUND

Turtles are members of the reptile family. Their relatives include snakes, lizards, alligators, and crocodiles. Turtles, whose ances-

tors include dinosaurs, have been on earth for some two million years. Dinosaurs became extinct, but turtles proved adaptable to changing conditions and today may be found living out their long life not only on land (their original habitat), but in fresh water ponds, rivers, swamps, lakes, and open sea.

One of the best ways to help people overcome their unreasonable fears of reptiles, especially snakes, is to acquaint them with the amusing box-turtles, or the semiaquatic map terrapin. These small animals have immediate appeal and turtles provide a wonderful opportunity for comparison and introduction to their brothers, the snakes and lizards. Turtles cost little, are easy to feed, their lives are long, their care is simple.

TURTLE CARE

Housing

A regular turtle tank or aquarium makes the best turtle home. Always try to approximate his natural habitat as closely as possible. A tank 15 inches long by 8 inches wide by 8 inches deep will make a good home for a number of the semiaquatic terrapins. A bottom layer of coarse sand or gravel will supply drainage for several inches of good soil. The turtle will get valuable exercise digging, and you can make the terrarium look attractive by planting moss, small ferns, and plants. Rocks and stones can be arranged as hills and shady resting places.

For the terrapin, a deep bowl or an oval or square pan sunk into one corner of the terrarium doubles for swimming and eating purposes. This setup also makes it easy to remove and clean the bowl to change the water without disturbing the landscape. A bridge or shallow stone steps must be provided so the turtle can move easily from the land to the water area.

The box-turtle can be kept in almost any enclosure and needs only a pan of drinking water, though he, too, enjoys an occasional swim.

Temperature

The temperature in the terrarium should be kept as constant as possible. It should never be allowed to drop below 68° F. At night or in very cold weather, keep the terrarium warm with a 15-watt electric light bulb or a small aquarium heater. This must be done because the turtle is very sensitive to extremes of heat or cold. Constant temperature is necessary to prevent this pet from hibernating in the winter. In captivity, such hibernation may result in death from starvation.

In the summertime, the turtle likes direct sunlight, which is highly beneficial, but he also needs a shaded area in the enclosure.

Feeding

Feed your turtle about three times a week. After an hour or so, remove all uneaten food,

and thoroughly wash the food container. To avoid shocking the turtle, let fresh water reach room temperature before adding it to the turtle's bowl or pan.

The turtle's diet can include raw beef, lettuce, tomato, and any live foods such as earthworms, mealworms, and insects.

Handling

Because turtles are usually placid pets, they patiently endure quite a bit of handling. Turtles soon become so tame that they will learn to eat from your hand.

Health Care

Soft Shell: This may be caused by a lack of calcium or disease. Mix bonemeal, crushed fish backbone, or pulverized white blackboard chalk with the turtle's meat.

Lack of Appetite: Coax the turtle to eat in the following ways:

1. Offer the turtle more exercise—for example, a swim in a large tank, an opportunity to dig in soft earth, or a walk around a table top or other safe area.
2. Feed the turtle live food, if available. If not, stimulate the turtle's interest in food by putting a small piece of raw meat on the blunt end of a toothpick and waving it back and forth in front of the turtle's mouth.

Blindness: May be caused by faulty feeding or disease. In early cases, turtles may respond if their eyes are washed regularly with

a mild boric acid solution and if they are fed a balanced ration.

Painted Shell: Paint may inhibit and distort normal shell growth. The all-too-common practice of painting a picture or phrase on the back of a baby turtle is a cruel practice and youngsters should be made to understand this. Furthermore, the natural color and design of a turtle's back are attractive—much more so than anything a person can paint there.

If a turtle has paint on its back, remove the paint by gently flaking it off with a fingernail.

Hamsters



BACKGROUND

The hamster, as a member of the rodent family, is related to mice, rats, and squirrels.

Physically, the hamster is very attractive, resembling a miniature bear.

The hamster is small, takes up little space, and makes an excellent home pet. When fully grown, he weighs about 4 ounces and measures some 6 inches from the tip of his nose to his stubby tail. He keeps himself spotlessly clean and has no perceptible body odor. If the hamster is fed correctly and is kept in a dry, draft-free cage, he is seldom sick. He usually lives 3 or 4 years.

HAMSTER CARE

Shelter

An excellent hamster cage with a removable metal bottom, to facilitate cleaning and an upstairs platform and exercise wheel can be purchased in many pet stores.

A person can make a satisfactory hamster cage from a discarded bird cage or aquarium. Don't use wood because a hamster, with his rodent-type teeth, soon gnaws his way out of a wooden cage.

For bedding in your hamster cage, use shredded paper, cedar shavings, sawdust, or any commercial cat litter.

Because a hamster selects one corner of his cage as a permanent bathroom, you need to clean that corner every day. However, once a week, scrub the entire cage with a mild antiseptic and change the bedding. As a warm-blooded animal, the hamster appreciates a handful of shredded paper or absorbent cotton to construct his nest. In cold weather, he will weave this material into a tiny igloo. In the summer, however, his little home will resemble a bird's nest.

Feeding

Feeding a hamster is never a problem. By nature he is omnivorous. While a hamster is in captivity, it is probably wise to avoid giving him meat. Feed him dry dog food and green vegetables such as lettuce, cabbage, or other green-leafed vegetables. Provide a



piece of hardwood for the hamster to grind down his continually growing incisor teeth.

Feed your hamster once a day, preferably at the same time daily. Like many other animals, he seems to possess a built-in clock. He will soon learn to come to his cage door at mealtime.

Provide a food dish. He will probably load up his cheek pouches, and then store everything tidily away in a cage corner. Let your hamster hoard a certain amount of food, since hoarding is one of the animal's instincts. However, remove any uneaten greens as these soon spoil.

Provide water in a gravity flow bottle. This glass bottle has a rubber cork. In a hole through this cork there is a short piece of glass or copper tubing. When the bottle is attached upside down to the cage, it allows water to flow slowly into the tube as your pet drinks from it.

Handling

Because hamsters are rather quarrelsome, you will probably want to have only one in a cage—unless you plan to breed them. Daily handling of your hamster will insure that he remains tame and friendly.

Never pick up your hamster until he is fully

awake. The hamster is a deep sleeper; he is also shortsighted. If you surprise him, he may nip your finger.

In handling your hamster, scoop him up gently in the palm of your hand. Next, have him walk from hand to hand and at the same time stroke him and talk to him.

The hamster is a playful creature. Once he learns to trust you, he will hang by one foot from your finger, climb a toy ladder, and provide endless amusement. That is why this animal delights children. The hamster may be allowed to move freely outside his cage, but he must never be left alone on a table or other high place, since he can't judge height and may try to walk on air—with disastrous results.

Breeding

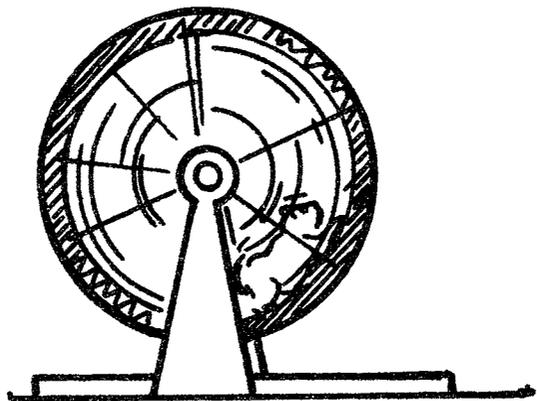
Hamsters are a good example of the need for humane control of pet mating. Consider these facts about the hamster's breeding habits. The gestation period is only 16 days. Then the female will bear from 3 to 12 babies. Less than a week later, the mother hamster can breed again. Two months after birth, a hamster becomes sexually mature. Theoretically, a single pair of hamsters can produce some 36-144 offspring in 1 year!

If you want your hamsters to have a litter, find a home for the babies in advance. Many of your friends will be interested. For young people, this hamster breeding project is a fascinating and valuable firsthand experi-

ence. Within a single month, the entire life cycle of the hamster can be observed and recorded.

When breeding hamsters, watch carefully when you put a male and female together in the same cage. If the female attacks the male, remove him at once. Then try again the following day.

Some 10 days after the hamsters have mated, place the female in a separate cage. Provide ample dry food, bedding, and absorbent cotton or paper. Disturb her as little as possible. Do not handle the babies until they are at least 1 week old—and, even then, very little. Hamsters are born with little hair, blind, and helpless. Within 16 days, their eyes open. And, when 3 weeks old, they can safely be taken away from their mother.



Mice and Rats



BACKGROUND

Mice and rats belong to the Rodentia, popularly known as the order of gnawing animals. The Rodentia contain more species than any other mammalian order. Rodents of the Muridae (to use their family name) are prolific, omnivorous, and hardy. They flourish where man does.

Wild mice and rats are pests. They destroy stored food, and they carry diseases that are harmful or even dangerous to other animals and to man.

Domesticated mice and rats, however, have been extremely valuable to man in all kinds of psychological, biological, medical, and nutritional studies.

Because these tame rodents are sociable and curious, they make excellent pets at home or in pet clubs.

It is regrettable that even among adults, the bad reputation of wild mice and rats has spread to their tame relatives. From their elders, many youngsters have picked up feelings of fear and dislike of domestic mice and rats. However, those who have observed, fed, cared for, and handled these tame, intelligent, and affectionate little animals have come to love them.

MICE AND RAT CARE

Housing

These pets should be kept in a good-sized wire or metal cage; they will gnaw through a wooden cage. If the cage has a raised wire floor—for cleaning purposes—provide a solid upper platform. Connect both platforms with a ramp or ladder. Furnish the cage with branches, swings, perches, and an exercise wheel. If the cage has a solid metal floor, line it with sawdust, shredded newspapers, or commercial cat litter.

Clean out and disinfect the bottom of the cage every other day and scatter fresh litter on it.

For an efficient deodorant, mix 1 teaspoonful oil of eucalyptus in a cup of water. Sprinkle a few drops of the solution daily on the cage floor to prevent any mousy odor.

For a nest box, use an empty cottage cheese carton for mice and an empty cereal box for rats. Absorbent cotton or shredded paper should be furnished for nest material.

Feeding

Because mice and rats have similar nutritive needs, they will eat about the same foods. Dry dog food and water will keep them in good health. Seeds, nuts, rabbit pellets, hard-boiled eggs, bread, breakfast cereals, rice, leafy foods, and raw potatoes are used by some pet owners, but they aren't required foods.

Because mice and rats are gnawing animals, provide a piece of wood to help keep their teeth in good condition. Supply fresh water in a gravity flow bottle.

Handling

White mice and rats are usually very docile, tame pets. The simplest and safest way to pick one up is by the tail. (This does not hurt it.) Place the animal carefully in the other hand, and then stroke its head and back gently. Never hold the animal too tightly. If you do, it will struggle to get away; it may even bite. Youngsters should learn that all animals fear physical restraint.

Once accustomed to you, a mouse or rat will come to the front of the cage, climb on your hand, and even explore your pocket.

Grooming

If mice or rats are kept under sanitary conditions, they will keep themselves spotlessly clean and well-groomed. If you smell a mouse or rat, don't blame the animal! Blame the person who is supposed to take care of it and its cage.

Health Care

To keep pet mice and rats in good health, observe the following rules:

1. Keep the pets clean and dry.
2. Isolate immediately any pet that looks or acts sick.
3. If a mouse or rat has lice or fleas, dust it with a pyrethrum dusting powder and disinfect its cage.

4. Keep food dishes fastened to the side of the cage and well above the floor. This prevents the contamination of food by urine or feces. The dish should be small enough so the animal can't sleep in it.

With reasonable precautions, these pets should stay in good health and live out their full life span of about 3 years.

Breeding

A female mouse is ready to breed at 8 to 10 weeks old; a female rat at 3 months. For either, the gestation period is about 21 days. The average litter is 6 to 10 babies. They are born without hair and with their eyes closed. Mice and rats are good mothers: they will even accept and nurse orphans that are about the same age as their own litter.

After a pair of mice or rats mate, they may be left together for a time in the same cage. However, remove any spare male until the babies are weaned or are 3 weeks old.

Youngsters should be warned that baby mice must be handled carefully since they have a habit of jumping. They may leap from the hand onto a hard floor, injuring themselves. As the babies approach maturity, the sexes must be separated or the animals will multiply very rapidly. Youngsters should realize if they carelessly allow their pet mice or rats to breed, as owners, they have the responsibility of disposing of the babies. They may offer them to their friends or phone the local humane society to see if they will accept them.

Guinea Pigs



BACKGROUND

The guinea pig is another member of the rodent family. In many parts of the world this is a very popular children's pet and also widely used as a laboratory animal.

A mature guinea pig weighs about 2 pounds, measures some 10 inches in length, and is relatively strong and hardy. As a pet for very young children, the guinea pig is preferable to white mice, whose fragile bodies can be easily crushed by eager young hands.

Guinea pigs are docile, sociable animals that live together peaceably. They accept much stroking and other attention from humans.

Guinea pigs have quite a vocabulary—grunts, squeaks, and whistles. You will soon learn the meanings of these noises—the soft, contented grunts; the sharp hunger squeaks; and the high-pitched whistles of alarm. Many youngsters come to realize that so-called dumb animals do possess quite a language of sounds and gestures of their own.

GUINEA PIG CARE

Housing

For your guinea pig, provide a hutch—a fairly large wooden box. It should be at least 36 inches long, 24 inches wide, and 14 inches high. Fit the box with a door that is covered

with 1/2-inch wire mesh. Inside the box, put a removable bottom. If you use an all-metal cage, place a board inside—for the animals to sit or lie on. For litter inside the cage, use wood shavings, or sawdust. Weekly, clean, disinfect the cage and change litter.

Feeding

Feed your guinea pig rabbit pellets, also leafy, green foods once or twice a week. Wash the leafy, green foods before serving them. Remove leftover greens. Provide fresh water daily in a heavy container, which can't be knocked over easily, or in a gravity flow bottle.

Handling

Although a guinea pig isn't too responsive to training, you can teach him to sit up by tempting him with a grape. The guinea pig is remarkably tame and seldom bites. The owner should pick up the animal with both hands—not just one hand—and cradle the animal's heavy hindquarters in the palm of one hand.

Once the guinea pig is comfortably ensconced in the lap, he settles down contentedly for long periods of time.

Grooming

Brush the guinea pig with a soft-bristle hairbrush. Then stroke him with your hand.

Brushing the animal stimulates the secretion of oil from his skin and makes his coat glossy. If you observe any signs of fleas or lice, apply a pyrethrum dusting powder to your pet's coat.

Health Care

For guinea pigs as for other pets, scrupulous cleanliness is the best health insurance. If the guinea pigs' cage isn't kept clean or if there is dirty food, they are more likely to become diseased.

With reasonably good care, a guinea pig will live 4 to 5 years.

Breeding

Unlike a mouse or hamster, the young guinea pig is born with his eyes open and with teeth and hair: the guinea pig has a gestation period of from 63 to 75 days. The mother suckles her young for about 2 weeks. The babies, however, are able to eat solid food within 2 or 3 days. At 3 weeks old, guinea pigs can take care of themselves. And at 2 months, they are ready to breed.

Just after the babies are born, remove the male for a day or two, lest he accidentally step on them. Afterward, reunite the entire family. When the babies are 1 week old, you can pick them up freely without fear of resentment on the part of either parent.

Gerbils



BACKGROUND

The Mongolian Gerbil, a member of the rodent family, was introduced to the United States in 1954 for medical research. Gerbils come from the deserts and sandy wastes of Asia and Africa. Most of the water that gerbils need comes from the food they eat. At times gerbils can go months without drinking water. Gerbils are diurnal: meaning they sleep at night and are awake during the day. Most rodents sleep during the day.

GERBIL CARE

Shelter

A square aquarium (3 to 15 gallon size) makes a most interesting home. At times, leaking aquariums can be purchased for a modest cost and used as a cage. Metal or heavy wooden cages can also be used. A lid made of metal or hardware cloth should be used to keep the cage covered. Litter of any clean and absorbent material should be used: cedar chips, sawdust, or commercial small animal litter is preferred. One inch of litter should be sufficient and don't be surprised if your gerbil rearranges the material for his nest. Try placing a piece of burlap sack in the cage for gerbils to chew up and nest in.

Cleaning the cage can be done about once a month as gerbils are fairly odorless. A small amount of additional litter should be

added weekly. Gerbils enjoy temperatures between 50 and 80° F. It is important to keep the cage dry.

Feeding

Gerbils live on grains, seeds, roots, and grasses. Sunflower seeds, corn, oats, wheat, watermelon seeds, bits of apple and lettuce are popular foods. Fresh grass is an enjoyable treat. Dry breakfast cereals, potato chips or peanuts are also nourishing. Each gerbil will eat about 1 tablespoon of food a day. Gerbils won't overeat but overfeeding is wasteful. Feed only once a day. If extra food is found when cleaning the cage, you are overfeeding.

Water should be provided in a gravity dispenser. A watering dish is easily upset and it is important the cage be kept dry. Don't be surprised if a gerbil drinks very little.

Handling

Handling your gerbil often and gently will make him a relaxed friend. Gerbils are shy animals with a strong curiosity. They enjoy having their back and ears gently scratched. When picking up your gerbil it is best to grasp the tail portion closest to the body. The reason for this is that it provides a sure hold on the animal and eliminates accidental falls. You may hold the gerbil gently but firmly with your hand around his entire body.

Breeding

One of the unique characteristics of the ger-

bil is that he is monogamous. This means he desires only one mate. If a mate dies, it might even be difficult to replace. Two new mates should be separated by a wire partition until they become accustomed to each other's smell.

The gestation period for gerbils is 24-25 days and litters average about 5 babies. When the babies are born, both parents can stay with the litter. The babies are born without hair and the eyes stay closed for about 3 weeks. About this age they begin to take some solid food and by the 6th week the mother will wean them. Do not touch the babies until their eyes are open as the mother is very protective and will move them if she feels threatened. Privacy is important for the mother and babies during the first weeks.

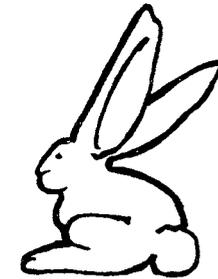
At three months, maturity is reached and gerbils are ready to breed.

Health

Gerbils are quite free of diseases but care should be taken to insure a dry cage, balanced diet, and no exposure to extremely cold temperatures. Harder dry foods are important for proper digestion for this pet. Skin problems are often related to dirty cages. Your gerbil will spend many hours cleaning and grooming himself.

One 4-H project is the 4-H Rabbit Project. It is suggested for members interested in a more advanced phase or in the commercial aspects of rabbits.

Rabbits



BACKGROUND

Rabbits, relatively small mammals, are members of the Hare order, Lagomorpha. Prolific and hardy, rabbits inhabit six of the earth's seven continents. Their perennial popularity has made them the subject of many fables, poems, and tales.

The rabbit resembles some smaller members of the rodent family. Yet in many ways, the rabbit differs from them.

Youngsters will find it interesting to compare the rabbit with each of the other animals they have owned, noting likenesses as well as differences.

The rabbit is distinguished by his long ears, his extra set of incisor teeth, and the fact that the soles of his feet are covered with fur. The rabbit can't turn his front paws inward and use them as hands as the hamster or squirrel can. Highly social animals, rabbits rarely quarrel among themselves. They even live peaceably in a cage with guinea pigs.

If rabbits are properly housed and cared for, they are appealing and satisfying pets. There are, of course, many attractive varieties of rabbits to choose from. Where space is limited, choose one of the small breeds. It may be the Dutch, the Polish, or the Netherland dwarf rabbit. The last weighs no more than 2 pounds when fully grown.



RABBIT CARE

Housing

Rabbits may be kept indoors or out. Even in a city, if zoning permits, a snug outdoor hutch may be constructed—in a backyard, on a building's terrace or on a rooftop.

No matter where a hutch is to be placed or what its design, the rabbit house should be at least 3 feet long, 2 feet wide, and 2 feet high. Indoors, an all-metal hutch is preferable—for sanitary reasons. Whether made of metal or wood, the interior facings must be metal, and the hutch should have a wire-mesh door and floor. A board should be provided for comfort in sitting or lying down. Also, the hutch should be elevated slightly so that a metal tray can be placed under it. This tray will catch all the droppings that fall through the mesh floor.

For the comfort and health of the rabbit, absolute cleanliness is essential. Clean and then disinfect the hutch's mesh floor and the metal tray below it every day. Once a week, scrub and disinfect the entire hutch, using a long-handled stiff brush. Be sure to air and dry the hutch completely before putting the rabbit in it again. Rabbits are very susceptible to dampness.

The rabbit's water container should be cleaned thoroughly every day.

Feeding

Rabbits, of course are vegetarians. They should have a well-balanced diet. For a staple in the diet, you may feed rabbit pellets—available in most pet and feed stores. You may want to treat your rabbit occasionally to a carrot, apple, or lettuce leaf. Attach a block or spool of salt to the inside wall of

his cage, 6 to 10 inches above the floor. Use a heavy ceramic bowl as a feeder.

Make sure your rabbit has clean, fresh water to drink. Put the water in a heavy ceramic bowl or in a gravity flow bottle. Rabbits sometimes knock over a lightweight bowl.

Handling

Never pick up your rabbit by the ears or by the legs. If you do, you may seriously injure him. In lifting him, grasp the loose skin over his shoulders with your right hand. Then place your left hand under his hindquarters. Gently raise him and hold him close to your body. Then he won't struggle or kick because he feels secure. If you learn this rabbit handling technique, you will never have the frightening experience of trying to master and subdue a wildly struggling pet.

Once accustomed to gentle petting, your rabbit becomes very tame. While not as responsive as a dog, he is a peaceful and docile pet.

Grooming

The rabbit himself does a very effective job of grooming. If you have an Angora rabbit, however, comb and brush his hair to keep it from matting. Clip your rabbit's toenails regularly. For the correct method, see the chapter on the cat.

Health Care

The majority of rabbit ills can be avoided by keeping the hutch, all utensils, and food spotlessly clean.

Colds: Since rabbits are very susceptible to colds, always keep the hutch dry and airy, but free from drafts.

Ears: If your rabbit continually strokes or scratches his head, he may have wax or a mild canker in his ear. If there is no improve-

ment in a day or two, consult a veterinarian. **Snuffles:** If your rabbit sneezes loudly and if he discharges mucous from his nostrils, he may have the snuffles. Because this is a serious disease, take your pet to a veterinarian at once.

External parasites: Dust your rabbit with a pyrethrum powder.

Breeding

The thoughtless breeding of rabbits, as of any other pet should very definitely be discouraged. However, if you decide to undertake the project of raising a litter of rabbits, make advance arrangements to sell or give away the babies.

If possible, obtain an already pregnant doe. The buck, it should be noted, takes no part in rearing the offspring. Also, he must always be kept separated from the babies.

The rabbit's gestation period is 1 month. The babies—7 to 10 of them—are born blind, without fur, and helpless.

A few days before the babies are born, supply the doe with a nest box and with nesting material—preferably straw or hay.

Two days after the young are born, examine the nest carefully for any dead babies and remove them. Otherwise, disturb the mother and her babies as little as possible, at least during the first week.

Within 10 days the little rabbits open their eyes; and in 3 to 4 weeks they come out to feed with their mother. She, however, continues to nurse them for several more weeks. At 2 months, the babies should be weaned. Then, too, the sexes must be separated—otherwise, they are likely to mate and "multiply like rabbits," as the expression goes.