# Adopt a Rescued Guinea Pig Month: March

*Drs. Foster & Smith Educational Staff*

Every year, thousands of unwanted guinea pigs are brought to humane societies, animal shelters, or rescue organizations worldwide. Oftentimes, pets are abandoned to rescue organizations because people purchase an animal without first considering the involvement needed to properly care for him, no matter what the animal's size. But as with all pets, behind the unwavering loyalty, cuddly disposition, and individual personality of each guinea pig is an animal wholly reliant on his human owner for food, shelter, protection, and companionship. Because the yearly influx of guinea pigs into animal shelters and rescue organizations has continued to increase over the years, March 2006 has been designated "Adopt a Rescued Guinea Pig Month" by the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (ASPCA). The goal of this program is two-fold: to educate the public on the uniqueness of these treasured pets and help rescue and "rehome" abandoned guinea pigs.

## The Great Guinea Pig Pet

Guinea pigs have a long history of domestication. First kept by the Incas in South America, *Cavia porcellus* were brought to Europe in the early 1500's and quickly became the favored pet of royalty. It is easy to see why. Unlike many small pets, guinea pigs communicate with each other and their human companions through a series of grunts, squeaks, gurgles, and chirps. When excited they also "popcorn," or jump up and down in one place. In addition, where many small pets are entirely independent or their nocturnal schedule does not coincide with the lives of humans, guinea pigs crave interaction, enjoy cuddling, and are diurnal (awake during the day).

Today, these naturally social and affectionate animals are a popular and common household pet. Because cavies crave social interaction, many people find guinea pigs to be the perfect pet. However, unlike some small animals who may fit into a behavioral mold, each cavy is - and always remains - an individual. As such, the only golden rule for successful guinea pig ownership is to bond with your pet and understand his particular tendencies, while also ensuring he is always supervised when out of his cage. Unfortunately, some people don't appreciate the independence most guinea pigs exhibit. Sometimes these animals are abandoned in spite of the very uniqueness that makes them potentially wonderful pets.

## The Adoption Advantage

There are many advantages to adopting a rescued guinea pig from a humane society, animal shelter, or rescue group. These organizations are staffed by knowledgeable and caring individuals who are invested in the well-being of both your chosen pet and yourself and your family. These groups are also a wealth of knowledge and resources who will work with you to evaluate your interest, attitude, home, and resources to help you choose the best pet for you and your family's lifestyle. As such, you may be required to fill out an application, interview, and, sometimes, open your home for a friendly inspection. Each of these avenues helps ensure



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both you and your new pet experience the least stress possible. Thus, your new life together can start off right and quickly become as rewarding as good companionship should be.

Another advantage to adopting a shelter guinea pig is that the knowledgeable staff has observed the cavy for signs of behavior or health problems and either corrected, or has begun to remedy, any potential problem. In addition, rescued guinea pigs have already been exposed to humans and may be eager to interact with you. Plus, many shelters have access themselves, or can refer you, to a knowledgeable, local veterinarian to help ensure your new pet receives the professional care she will need for a long and happy life.

All pet adoptions should be preceded by extensive research, planning, and careful decisions. But once you have educated yourself - and if you still feel prepared - now is the perfect time to use the resources offered by all humane societies, animal shelters, and rescue organizations to adopt a guinea pig.



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