African Pygmy Hedgehog

Drs. Foster & Smith Educational Staff

As well as being able to roll into a tight spiny ball when frightened, African Pygmy Hedgehogs, *Atelerix albiventris*, are also bundles of personality, loyalty, and activity. They can be trained to use a litter box, are virtually odor free, and will happily spend the day riding around in your breast pocket. It's no wonder they are gaining popularity as a great, family-orientated small pet.

INTERESTING FACTS

Characteristics: Hedgehogs can run over 6 feet per second when needed. They are nocturnal. While exercising, foraging, and cleaning, they emit a huffing or snuffling sound. Average life span is 4 to 6 years.

Appearance: Adults of both sexes weigh an average of 1 pound and measure between 6 to 9 inches in length. Their belly and face is covered in soft fur. Their backs are full of quills - which are modified, hollow hairs. These spines vary in density and measure between 1/2" and 1" in length. Normal coloring is a white or cream colored belly, face, and quills with black or brown quill banding (known as salt-and-pepper, or agouti, variety). Other common color variations include snowflake (75-100% white quills) and cinnamon (cream quills with light or reddish brown banding). Breeding has also created panda, mocha, cream, smoke point, albino, and pinto (spotted) varieties.

#1 Preventable Health Problem: Hedgehogs are susceptible to tooth and gum disease, vitamin and mineral excess, or deficiencies from an improper diet.

Preferences: Hedgehogs prefer to live alone; however, they can form strong bonds

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with the right human friend. They relish controlled periods of light and darkness. They like warm (75° to 80°F) temperatures and low humidity. Temperatures below 45°F are potentially deadly for pet hedgehogs.

Best Features: Strong muscles that act as a drawstring to pull a hedgehog's skin tight around his sides and down over his feet and head when frightened. These complex muscles can also individually move each spine. A confident, happy, well cared for hedgehog, however, seldom rolls into a ball.

Housing: Cages at least 36" w x 24" l x 15" h are preferred, with a cozy, dark sleeping spot. Any well maintained, soft, absorbent recycled paper or aspen shaving bedding is suitable. They should have adequate and stimulating solid floor exercise wheels, tunnels, mazes, and interactive toys.

Diet: Classified as insectivores (bug-eaters), hedgehogs are opportunistic feeders that will eat almost anything they find. In the wild, where they are very active, they are known to eat 1/3 of their body weight in food each night. Pet hedgehogs, though, have less access to exercise, so obesity can be a common problem. Hard, pellet, hedgehog-specific food is best, supplemented with small amounts of moist food and fresh fruits and vegetables. Adequate, clean water is also essential.

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