

Tail-WAAGin News

September, 2011

Videos:

See videos of animals needing forever homes and pet care videos by visiting our website and clicking on the **Youtube** button



2011 Upcoming Events:

September 10: Dog Olympics

September 17: Petco in Knightdale

October 8: Unleashed in Raleigh

November 12: PetSupermarket in Raleigh

December 10: Petco in Knightdale

December 11: Lake Wheeler Vet. Hospital in Raleigh

Contact Us At:

P.O. Box 58766
Raleigh NC 27658

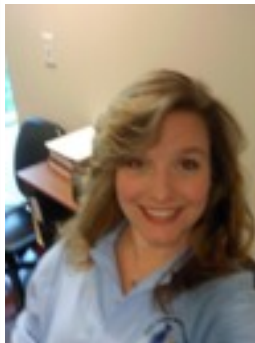
E-mail:
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We're on the Web!
See us at:
www.waagnc.org



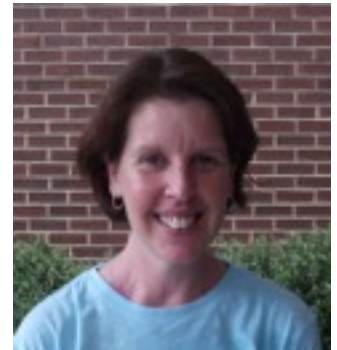
The newsletter of:
Wake Animal Advocates Group

Welcome!



Lisa

We are pleased to announce the installation of two new officers. Lisa Holmes Barcinas is our new vice president and Trish Soysal is our new secretary. We are pleased to have them join our organization to help us help animals.



Trish

Special Edition of Tail-WAAGin News

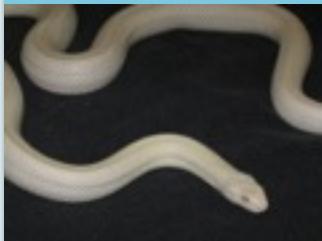
This edition of our newsletter will feature exotic pets. A special thanks goes to Dr. Dan Johnson, DVM for this article. Dr. Johnson's practice is Avian and Exotic Animal Care Veterinary Animal Hospital here in Raleigh.

www.avianandexotic.com

Adopting or Purchasing an Exotic Pet

Over the last 20 years, exotic animals have become very popular as pets. Generally speaking, exotics include all of the small mammals, birds, reptiles, and amphibians commonly kept as pets. In recent years, small exotic mammals (aka "pocket pets") are rapidly becoming as popular as birds in the USA household. This group of animals includes ferrets, rabbits, guinea pigs, chinchillas, sugar gliders, rats, mice, hamsters, and gerbils. A survey conducted by the American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA) concluded that rabbits are the third most commonly owned pet in the USA. Pet birds include parrots (parakeets, cockatiels, lovebirds, conures, African greys, amazons, cockatoos, macaws), finches and canaries. Common reptiles include water turtles, tortoises, snakes (boas, pythons, king snakes, rat snakes), and lizards (geckos, bearded dragons, iguanas). Even amphibians are now frequently kept as pets (white's tree frogs, tomato frogs, Pac-man frogs). According to a 2010/2011 national pet owner's survey by the American Pet Products Manufacturers Association, 6.3% of households own reptiles, 6.8% own small exotic mammals, and 7.8% own birds. The study estimated that there are approximately 13 million reptiles, 16 million small mammals, and 16.2 million pet birds in the USA.

Exotics



Exotics have gained popularity for a number of reasons. Cable and satellite television have helped to fuel the exotic animal explosion through nature programming on channels like Animal Planet, Discovery Channel, and National Geographic. The internet has made it easier for animal lovers to get information concerning exotic animals, and has provided ready access to animal breeders and brokers/dealers.

These animals are fascinating to watch, interesting to learn about, and fun to keep. Many develop personalities (including some reptiles) and enjoy human interaction. Most exotics are small and can therefore be maintained indoors. Exotics are generally popular with apartment dwellers because they do not require a yard or outdoor exercise. They are also popular with people who have allergies to more traditional pets as they are rarely the cause of that type of allergic reaction. Of course, many people have exotics just because they prefer unusual pets.

While people often treat their exotic pets like members of the family, one of the biggest problems exotic animals face is the “disposable pet” mentality. A child’s first pet is traditionally an exotic animal such as a hamster or gerbil. These pets are usually inexpensive, simple to care for, and easy to replace. Parents choose these animals believing they will be cheaper to manage than traditional pets. In some cases this is true: most small mammals, birds, and reptiles do not routinely require vaccinations, receive monthly parasite prevention, or need to be neutered (spayed/castrated).



When these non-traditional pets become ill, most veterinarians do not charge any less to treat them than a dog or cat. In fact, many veterinarians will charge more to see exotic pets because they are more time consuming to examine and diagnose. Clients sometimes complain that they can replace their pet for less than the cost of veterinary treatment. However, the same can be said for dogs and cats. It is not the cost of a pet that determines what pet owners are willing to spend. Rather, it is the value they place on their relationship with their pet. Veterinary care is essential to resolving most animal diseases. With proper care, many species of birds, snakes, lizards, and turtles, and can outlive dogs and cats. They need and deserve a similar level of commitment from their owner.



Many exotic pets are unsuitable for beginners because of their complicated husbandry, dietary, and behavioral requirements. Every pet has associated costs; however, some exotic pets are more likely to develop problems than others. For example, rabbits and rats are very prone to cancer if they are not spayed. Ferrets have a high cancer rate, too. Certain birds are exceptionally loud, while others are prone to feather destructive behaviors or even self-mutilation. Sugar gliders, parrots, and iguanas need lots of attention and have elaborate daily feeding regimens. Many of these animals do better when housed with a buddy instead of alone. When exotic pet owners are misinformed and under-prepared, it is the animal that suffers the consequences.



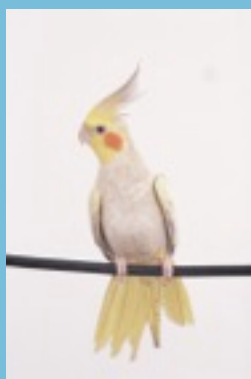
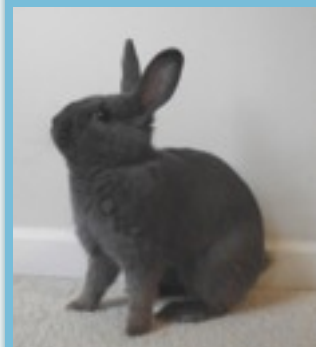
Improper nutrition and husbandry are the primary cause of disease for non-traditional pets. If your pet’s basic needs are not met it is not a matter of “if” it will get sick but “when”. Dog and cat care is almost common knowledge. Most of us grew up with a dog or cat, and learned how to properly care for them by example. With exotic pets, however, this is not the case. The dietary and environmental requirements of exotic animal species vary widely. It has only been in the past 10 or 15 years that quality exotic pet foods have become readily available. Even now, commercial diets are available for only the most common pet species. Exotic pet owners must do thorough research in order to prevent problems.

Many people have the mistaken impression that exotic animals do not require regular veterinary care. This is because veterinary training on non-traditional animals was rare until 15-20 years ago, and few veterinarians actually knew how to treat these pets. Therefore, when asked about routine care, veterinarians would naturally say that veterinary care was not needed. Exotic animal veterinarians have been fighting this misconception for many years.



Today, exotic animal care is part of the veterinary curriculum in many veterinary schools and there are many opportunities for veterinarians to learn how to take care of small mammals, birds, reptiles, and other exotic pets. A knowledgeable exotic animal veterinarian will regularly attend continuing education on these animals in order to keep up with the latest information from the experts in the field. There are many journals and periodicals that cater specifically to exotic animal veterinarians, in addition to numerous veterinary textbooks.

Exotics



Before getting an exotic pet, research as much correct information about the particular animal you are interested in owning. How hard is it to feed properly? Sugar gliders have several items on their daily menu, as do iguanas. How hard is it to house adequately? Desert tortoises and iguanas cannot withstand the Carolina winter outdoors, and like many reptiles, they need specific sources of heat and light. Certain substrates can cause impaction. What diseases is it prone to. Because the amount of information available to the general public has become so vast, consult with your exotic animal veterinarian for a list of reputable books, magazines, and web sites.

Before you purchase or adopt an exotic pet you will need to get prepared for its arrival. Get a list together of the things you will need, and have everything in place **before** you bring your new pet home. Use defensive purchasing. Don't buy just anything the pet store offers to sell you. Be aware that misinformation concerning exotic animal diets and husbandry is commonplace. Just because a product is sold or recommended for a certain species does not mean it is beneficial or even safe. One example is food mixtures containing seeds. Rabbits, guinea pigs, rats, parrots, and many other species will fare better on pelleted diets formulated to prevent them from being able to pick out their favorite seed, thus preventing dietary imbalance. Dietary supplements are another example. Many of the vitamin/mineral supplements for sale in pet shops are either ineffective or dangerous to use unless the diet and husbandry of the individual animal has been taken into consideration. Caging systems, cage substrates, cage furnishings (e.g. running wheels, heat lamps), and even toys are other examples of products that can cause harm and even injury if used inappropriately. Check with a qualified exotic animal veterinarian **before** you acquire a new pet to see if you have planned accordingly. They may be able to suggest healthier alternatives based upon the problems seen with their patients, and be able to help you avoid common mistakes.

Pet stores are one place to find an exotic pet. A good pet store will have small mammals, birds, reptiles, and amphibians in clean cages housed in separate areas. The animals will be alert, active, and have a good appetite. Healthy animals will have bright eyes and no nasal discharge. Stools should be formed, and the rectum (mammals) or vent (birds and reptiles) should be clean and free of feces. Exotic animals are able to hide their signs of illness until they are very sick. In the wild this adaptation keeps them from being killed by predators or being kicked out of their social group. When you are choosing an exotic pet from among several at the store, look for subtle signs of illness such as lameness, lack of coordination, unthrifty appearance, or an unusual breathing pattern. To be sure of a pet's health, always have a new pet checked out by a qualified exotic animal veterinarian within a few days.

Instead of buying an exotic pet, consider **adopting** one that needs a home. You can find needy pets through rescue organizations, on the internet, the humane society, veterinary offices, news papers and pet periodicals. When adopting a pet through such channels it is important to get as much medical history as possible. Approximate age, previous medical problems, and dietary history are important.

When you finally bring it home, let your new pet settle in for a while before showing it off. Change of ownership is a stressful time for new pets, and many diseases become evident during this period. A new environment, new handlers, new diet all result in stress on you new pet. Once it has had several days to acclimate to its new home, then it will be safer to take it out and handle it more. Again, it is important to have your new pet examined by a veterinarian within several days. Your veterinarian will want to give it a complete physical examination. An examination for both internal and external parasites is strongly recommended. Depending on the species, other laboratory tests may be important. Do not expose your new pet to any of your current pets for several weeks. Under certain circumstances, this quarantine period may need to be extended to 90 days or more in order to give time for signs of disease to appear. Signs may be very subtle: a change in activity pattern, loss of appetite, a change in stool, and/or weight loss. Call your veterinarian immediately if any unusual symptoms are noticed.

Owning an exotic pet is an interesting and rewarding experience when prospective owners take steps ahead of time and become properly prepared. The correct diet, cage setup, and environmental conditions will help to prevent the majority of disease problems. By gathering all of the facts beforehand, and getting the help of a qualified veterinarian, you can make exotic pet ownership safe and enjoyable for your family **and** your new pet.



Contact us at:

P. O. Box 58766
Raleigh, NC
27658

Email:
info@waagnc.org

*Supporting
the animals
at the
Wake County
Animal Center*

We have a
Web site!

Visit us at:

www.waagnc.org



How You Can Make Difference

Many animals at the Wake County Animal Center in Raleigh are in need of our help.

With your contributions, WAAG can make a difference in the lives of the animals. Become a member today!

Levels of Membership are:

- Bronze: \$25
- Silver: \$50
- Gold: \$75
- Platinum: \$100+

Help Protect Your Pets

To help raise funds to support our efforts, WAAG is selling speciality decals.

The Pet Alert Window Decals could save your pet's life.

Put one on your front window to alert emergency services personnel about your pets. So, if there is an emergency, they will know to rescue your pets from your home.

To purchase decals you can see us at any of our upcoming events (see page 1).



About Our Organization

The purpose of WAAG is:

- To support the adoption efforts of the Wake County Animal Center (WCAC) and other Wake County animals
- To prevent cruelty to animals
- To increase the adoption of homeless animals.
- To educate the public on pet care
- To support spay/neuter programs

