



THE CENTER FOR

## BIRD & EXOTIC ANIMAL MEDICINE

[www.TheExoticVet.com](http://www.TheExoticVet.com)

### **African Pygmy Hedgehog Care**

The hedgehogs that we keep as pets are most commonly known as the West African or African Pygmy Hedgehog (*Atelerix albiventris* ssp x *A. Algerius*), a hybrid species that does not occur in the wild. Also seen occasionally are the Four-Toed, East African or White Bellied Hedgehogs (*A. pruneri* ssp). These are not to be confused with the European Hedgehog (*Erinaceus europaeus*) or the Egyptian Hedgehog (*Hemiechinus auritus*), as neither of these other species (or the other 11 species scattered around the Old World) make good household pets.

Many states have regulations concerning ownership and importation of African Pygmy Hedgehogs. Although Washington does not have any at this time, many states have strict laws concerning them. Some of these regulations, as well as most of the international regulations concerning hedgehogs, are because they can carry Foot and Mouth Disease Virus, a serious disease that can infect and kill livestock.

#### **Biological Facts:**

African Pygmy Hedgehog (APHs) males are larger than females, with males' range being from 500-600 grams and females 250-400 grams. They are sexually mature at about 2 months, and do not perform seasonal breeding. Gestation length ranges from 35 to 37 days, and their lifespan is 6 to 10 years.

Unlike their northern and southern cousins, APHs do not hibernate. They will, however, go into torpor if their environmental temperatures drop below 70 degrees for any length of time. The problem with this is that their metabolism does not drop but their systems do not continue normally, and the results can develop into disease, or even be fatal. As a result, APHs need to have supplemental heat at all times to keep them at 75 to 85 degrees F.

Breeding is simple, but cannibalism can occur if the male is left with the female at or after the time of birth. Provide a quiet, secluded area for the female to give birth and nurse her young until they are weaned as a stressed female may also kill or cannibalize her young. If the mother is unwilling or unable to nurse her young, use a PMR powder mixed with 25% whole cream for adequate protein and calorie supplementation.

APHs are a solitary animal. They do not get "lonely" for another hedgehog and need to be kept alone, even if initially raised with a same-sex littermate. They will also frequently taste and mark items in their territory, followed by salivating on themselves. This is known as "Anointing" and is considered normal behavior.

## **General Care:**

- ❖ The cage floor needs to be no less than 3 sq feet in size, this is an absolute minimum. Do not use wire bottom cages. Their environment must be kept dry, but do not use cedar, and pine chips are not recommended.
- ❖ Hedgehogs do not tolerate loud environments and will get sick from too much activity. They prefer shady, darker locales and will get stressed from too bright of caging and environment.
- ❖ They are nocturnal to crepuscular, meaning that they will wake up as the sun goes down and be up and down until just after sunrise.
- ❖ APHs need exercise and running wheels should be “bucket-type” to prevent injuries, with plastic much better than metal. Provide a hide area for stress-free, comfortable housing.
- ❖ They love to dig, so loose, clean bedding (CareFresh and comparable) is considered best. When free ranging in house, APHs will seek out “holes” and under furniture, often eating insects found.
- ❖ Diet requires high protein, low fat, and moderate to low carbohydrates. Studies have shown that APHs need chitin in diet, and insects are the best source of chitin. Do not feed hedgegies salt or preservatives.
- ❖ Commonly accepted that they should not be fed nuts, because of mouth size and shape, and dentition. Besides that, nuts are too high in fat.
- ❖ Hedgehogs should never be fed avocados, onions, grapes or raisins, chocolate, any raw meat or egg yolks, or any canned or processed food.
- ❖ Recommended diet for one average hedgehog is 10 grams (1.5 tsp) insectivore diet (Mazuri, Zupreem and Reliable Protein Products), 10 grams (1.5 tsp) high quality kitten chow (Eukanuba, Natural Balance, Evo ), 5-7 grams (1 tsp) fruit/vegetables, chopped and 2-3 medium mealworms, waxworms, roaches or comparable (be cautious of crickets, as they can carry parasites).

## **Disease risks:**

African Pygmy Hedgehogs are generally healthy animals, but they are predisposed to a handful of diseases. Good husbandry, care and diet will prevent much of these, but every owner should be aware of these:

*Salmonella*

*Mites*

*Wobbly Hedgehog Syndrome*

*Ringworm (dermatophytoses)*

*Cancer*

*Obesity*

*Dental problems*

*Parasites*

*Heart disease*

We strongly advise that you consult a veterinarian trained and experienced in hedgehog medicine and care should you have health concerns for your pet. A misdiagnosis or inappropriate treatment may have dire consequences.

Please feel free to refer to our “Emergency Care for Exotic Pets” handout for information concerning 24-hour emergency care, available on our website, [www.TheExoticVet.com](http://www.TheExoticVet.com)

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