

SUGAR GLIDERS

~by Dr. Kay Bishop; APS of Durham Veterinarian

Basic Information

Origin: Sugar Gliders (*Petaurus breviceps*) are small, arboreal, gliding marsupials native to Australia. Night hunters, they typically feed on insects and small vertebrates, as well as the sweet sap of certain trees.

Specialized flaps of skin, stretching between their arms and feet, allow the Sugar Glider to glide (volplaning) long distances, using its tail to steer. Sugar Gliders average about 5-6 inches in length, not including the tail which adds another 6 inches; they typically weigh from 4-5 ounces.

Behavior: Sugar Gliders are playful, inquisitive, and endearing. While they have sharp teeth, they will usually not bite unless threatened. They have become popular pets due to their curiosity, intelligence and ability to bond with humans with regular handling. They are night hunters and therefore are most active at night.

Lifespan: Sugar Gliders will generally live between 10 and 15 years in captivity.



Housing

Cage: Large cages with narrowly-spaced bars are best; coated wires are also much easier to clean than are galvanized wires. Bigger is better, especially when it comes to height. Be sure to use a cage which features either horizontal bars or a mesh -- this will allow your Sugar Glider(s) to naturally grasp onto the cage. A good latch is recommended, as well -- gliders are intelligent and have been known to let themselves out! The cage should be located in a spot out of direct sunlight and away from any drafts. A warmer section of the house (such as upstairs) is preferable.

Perches: Gliders love to climb and jump, so it's essential to have perches available for them! Natural wood, cement, rope and plastic are all good choices.

Nest Box or Sleep Pouch: Sugar Gliders need a place to sleep; typically this can be with a nest box or a sleep pouch. Nest boxes should be placed at the top of the cage, so as to prevent the glider from defecating on top of the box. Wood or plastic are acceptable materials, however wood will absorb urine and so will need to be occasionally replaced. Sleep pouches are cloth pouches that are suspended in the cage; these have the advantage of being washable and also can double as a carry pouch.

Health Care

Gliders are generally healthy pets, but can suffer from several maladies; these include Hind Leg Paralysis which can be brought on by mineral deficiencies or, in some cases, stress.

Shopping List

- Cage:** Minimum size for a pair of gliders is 30" x 18" x 36". Bigger is better when it comes to cage size. Bar spacing must be no wider than 1/2" to prevent escape of young gliders. Coated wire is much easier to clean than galvanized wire. Visit www.martinscages.com to see some nice housing options.
- Food Dishes:** Get two, heavy ceramic dishes sold for guinea pigs or other small critters. Plastic dishes are too light and will get tipped over.
- Water Bottle:** 8oz. or 12 oz. size
- Perches:** Select several perches of natural wood (e.g. Manzanita), cement (e.g. Polly's Pastels), rope, or plastic. Concrete perches will help keep nails trimmed. Perches can be found in the bird section of most pet shops. Look for items that are easily cleaned and provide a variety of diameters and textures.
- Nest Box or Sleeping Pouch:** Avian nest boxes, pocketed hammocks, and glider pouches can all serve as a suitable sleeping nest within the cage. Provide several comfortable 'nests' within the cage so your gliders can decide which they prefer, and to allow them to sleep separately if they choose. (Note: Gliders MUST have a covered/enclosed area to sleep in during the day or they will become dangerously stressed and ill.)
- Bonding Pouch**
- Carrier:** Hard-sided plastic cat, bird or small mammal carrier is best. Soft-sided pet carriers are hard to clean and sanitize properly and do not provide adequate protection from crushing/injury in case of an accident or fall.
- ReptiCal and ReptiVite**
- Organic Honey**
- Fresh Fruits and Vegetables**
- Glider Chow:** Or High quality ferret kibble.

Crickets and Mealworms: Must be gut-loaded prior to feeding to have proper nutritional value. Mealworm colonies can easily be maintained and perpetuated at home.

