

## CARESHEET: Gerbil

Common Name :- Gerbil

Classification/Latin name :- *Meriones unguiculatus*

Size :- approx 15cm as an adult (including tail)

Description and sexing:-

Pet gerbils are a lively animal available in a wide variety of colours, they are very active and quite fast so are probably better to be kept by older children and adults.

Enclosure size:-

Glass tanks are ideal as a deep substrate can be used which they will enjoy rearranging and burrowing through, if a barred cage is used give them plenty of things to gnaw or they are likely to gnaw the bars constantly.

Heating and temperature:-

Gerbils DO NOT need to be heated, they should be kept at room temperature but away from draughts. As mammals, they maintain their own body temperature. Ventilation is needed to prevent over heating and damp within the enclosure, therefore a mesh lid works well.

Lighting and day length:-

No lighting is required other than a natural light source preferably not in direct sunlight as this may cause stress if the gerbils cannot hide and also risks overheating in summertime. They are nocturnal rodents and will rest and sleep during the day. In the evening, they will venture out of hiding to forage for food.

Humidity:-

The enclosure is best kept as dry as possible to prevent damp and otherwise unsanitary conditions.

Substrate and decoration:-

Wood shavings are a suitable substrate in cages and tanks, in tanks a mix of peat and hay works very well giving them plenty of exercise burrowing. Cork bark can be provided, the gerbils will love chewing it up, cardboard tubes and boxes can also be provided for the same purpose. A drinking bottle is the most hygienic way of providing the gerbils with water as they have a habit of fouling water bowls and also piling substrate into it. Food dishes should be heavy so they cannot be tipped over and preferably ceramic as they will chew up plastic bowls.

#### Feeding and vitamins:-

Gerbils are best fed on a good quality specific gerbil food which will have plenty of variety. A good treat is a carrot to help keep their teeth healthy.

#### Handling:-

Gerbils are quite fast and active they are best scooped up with your hands or in a cup, If they are picked up by the tail it must be by the base or they may shed the skin on the tail which is very distressing for it. Feel free to ask for a handling demonstration when buying a gerbil from us.