



Paws, Claws & Wings

Physical and Behavioral Rehabilitation for Animals



Marmoset Husbandry

Marmosets are beautiful, high spirited animals and are rapidly growing in popularity as pets. The little human like face and hands, the big brown eyes and the bushy ears are hard to resist. Unfortunately many of these monkeys are bought because they are so cute and little thought is given to the purchase. They are very sensitive and need extremely specialized care. People who are immunosuppressed should not keep marmosets as there are serious risks of zoonotic diseases.



General Information

The two most common types of marmosets are the black-eared and the white-eared. Marmosets can live up to 12 years in captivity. These monkeys are very vocal and communicate with a variety of chirps, whistles and noises that are too high pitched for the human ear to hear. Marmosets are extremely intelligent and need varied stimulation to keep them from being bored. It is recommended to keep them in family groups or pairs as in the wild they live in family groups dominated by an alpha male and female. If they are kept singly they will identify with humans as their troop and often develop behavioral problems. A single marmoset will be lonely without company. If the monkey has to be left alone then he should be able to see outside activities, other pets or a TV. A huge problem with these animals in captivity is that as soon as they reach sexual maturity they may change their behavior and become aggressive and unpredictable.

Please remember that all monkeys are wild animals. They retain all their wild instincts and are not suitable as pets for children or inexperienced owners. They can be very aggressive and can inflict severe bites to the face and hands of even favorite owners when threatened or upset. Monkeys cannot be disciplined like a human or a dog and only gentle positive reinforcement of acceptable behaviors will reap rewards. Showing aggression or trying to punish a monkey will only increase your chances of having the monkey attack you.

Marmosets over the age of 18 months to 2 years are sexually mature. At this age many will become unpredictable and unsafe around strangers or non-favored family members.



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A much more stable situation is created when a pair or group of marmosets is housed in a large secure enclosure than when a single pet is allowed the run of the house.

Once a marmoset has shown aggression, the behavior is almost impossible to prevent. Castration, tooth pulling and other physical methods of aggression control are largely ineffective and aggression should be prevented BEFORE you have a problem. Pulling of healthy teeth to minimize biting injuries is unethical and leaves the marmoset without his natural weapons of defense from predators and other aggressive monkeys as well as removing his natural foraging tools.



Enclosures

The smallest cage acceptable for an adult marmoset is 1.5m x 1.5m x 1.5m. They are very active so a bigger cage is definitely better. A family group can be kept outside in a large aviary if the temperature is warm enough. If the temperature drops below 15 degrees Celsius a heated box must be provided and they must always have access to shade. Keeping them outside in a group is the most natural way to keep them and usually creates the happiest monkeys. Climbing branches, swings, chewing branches (chewing is a natural behavior and keeps the teeth and gums healthy) and lots of toys must be provided and rotated regularly to prevent boredom. They have very high Vit D requirements and therefore need access to UV light, so even if the marmoset is being kept indoors, either allow some outside playtime each day or provide a UV bulb. (Remember that even if the monkey receives sunlight through a window, the UV rays are blocked by the glass and are thus ineffective). Newspapers or blankets may be used to cover the cage floor but as these pets are very messy and urinate and defecate all over, they must be changed regularly. Marmosets cannot be toilet trained. Provide a nesting box for your monkey as they love to sleep high up, snuggled up to blankets and especially to a stuffed toy.



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Entertainment.

As these are very intelligent mammals they must have constant stimulation. A good and natural way to provide hours of fun is to hide insects, oats or treats in shredded paper. Make their food difficult to find so they mimic their wild behavior and search for food for the majority of the day, this also alleviates boredom. Drill holes into wooden items and hide food in them, this also exercises the monkey's dexterity. Apples, corncobs, and other foods can be threaded into the cage bars or hung in the cage to provide more enjoyment. Such foraging devices simulate extractive foraging behavior and stimulate the primates' skills. There are many foraging toys manufactured for birds and these may also be used for marmosets, just make sure the monkeys cannot get stuck in or hurt by them.



Disease

One of the most common and deadly diseases that affect marmosets is Herpes Simplex. This is a virus carried by 80% of humans and if your pet has any contact with your saliva (kissing or sharing food from your mouth) he is at serious risk. The marmoset can develop cold sores and fatal encephalitis. The medical treatment for marmosets with Herpes Simplex is extremely specialized, expensive and the survival rate is not high. Untreated marmosets will die.



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'Wasting Disease" is also commonly seen in pet marmosets. This disease has multiple causes and often more than one will play a role. The monkey may develop chronic diarrhea and will eat well but still lose weight. Pancreatitis can be a side effect of this disease and can be fatal.

Marmosets are sensitive creatures and can develop severe disease and die extremely quickly. At the first sign of diarrhea, vomiting, depression, sleepiness, loss of balance, poor appetite or any other changes in wellbeing the monkey should be presented to an experienced primate vet immediately.

Marmosets are also prone to ingestion of toxins, skin infections, Metabolic Bone Disease and Rickets (caused by lack of UV light and malnutrition) and bacterial infections. Caesarian sections often need to be performed due to problems giving birth.



Diet

The correct diet is essential to owning a healthy, happy marmoset. In the wild these primates eat a very varied diet and are gumivores (eat tree gum). The white-eared marmoset's natural diet can consist of up to 75% tree gum. In captivity we need to attempt to mimic the natural diet and provide for all of the marmosets nutritional needs. Some marmosets may be gluten or lactose intolerant so food containing these substances should be used sparingly or not at all. Limit the feeding of foods containing preservatives, colorants and stabilizers. Yogurt, raw peanuts, banana, chopped broccoli or carrot, cucumber, cooked yams, corn on the cob, apples, grapes, peaches, plums, eggplant, celery, papaya, mango, cooked beans, raw string beans, cooked pasta cereal, whole wheat bread, cottage cheese, yogurt, egg, chicken or tuna., lean meat, mealworms, crickets, fruit ring breakfast cereal and cooked oatmeal can be fed daily. A useful staple is a porridge made from:

1packet purity / nestum gluten free cereal

1 cup Ensure (most marmosets like the strawberry flavor)

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1 cup Oat bran

8 tbs Pure Protein USN

1 tsp Gum Arabic

1tsp Beefee

1 tsp Calsup

Mix up with water to the consistency that your pet prefers and feed daily.



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