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Degus

Natural Habitat

Degus (*Octodon degus*) are naturally found in the Andes Mountains in northern and western Chile. They live near thickets, rocks, or stone walls and dig burrows under rocks or shrubs. They are diurnal (active during the day) and social and live in colonies.

Housing

Degus should have a large multilevel cage (at least 24" × 18" × 24") with connecting tunnels and a nesting box. The cage should be made out of metal because degus are natural chewers. The bottom of the cage should be smooth because degus can be prone to foot problems. We recommend soft bedding (like CareFresh) for digging. Other bedding such as pine or cedar shavings can be irritating to degus. You should also provide your degus with bedding that they can shred themselves, such as paper towels or hay.

Temperature

Degus should be kept at room temperature (68°F) and away from drafts and direct sunlight, because they can overheat.

Diet

Degus should be fed a combination of guinea pig pellets, chinchilla pellets, and rodent chow. Timothy hay should always be available in their cage. You should provide degus with fresh leafy green vegetables daily. Make sure that fresh water is available in water bottles or in heavy ceramic bowls at all times.

Handling

When you handle your degus, do not pick them up by the tail or scruff, because they are prone to "fur-slip." This occurs when they slough off the skin and fur of their tail; it is thought to be a natural defense mechanism.

Information cited from:

Mayer, J and Donnelly, T., eds. Clinical Veterinary Advisor: Birds and Exotic
Pets. Elsevier, Philadelphia, PA. 2013. ISBN: 9781-4160-3969-3

Behavior

Because degus are social animals, it is ideal to have more than one (two or more). However, they should be spayed or neutered so that they do not reproduce. Degus are very playful and curious and should be handled often to keep them used to people. Degus are very active creatures and need an area for exercise and things to chew. Make sure to include connecting tunnels and an exercise wheel in their cage. You can also place clean wooden branches and wooden blocks in their cage for them to chew on. It is important to place a dust bath (a bowl with chinchilla dust) in their cage 1 or 2 times a week for 15 to 20 minutes at a time so that they can get rid of excess oils secreted by their skin.

Lifespan

Degus have a lifespan of approximately 7 years (5 to 8 years).

Common Medical Conditions

- *Diabetes mellitus*. Degus are prone to developing diabetes. Therefore, you should avoid feeding them sweet foods such as fruits (including raisins) and yogurt snacks. To help prevent this disease, keep your degus on a high-roughage diet.
- As mentioned previously, degus are prone to fur slip if not handled properly.
- Degus may develop a condition known as "sore nose." This is characterized by a red, raw, irritated facial skin infection caused by excessive humidity levels and dirty living conditions. See your veterinarian if you see these signs in your pet.
- If your degus are kept separate for an extended time, they may show aggression toward each other when they are reintroduced. It is ideal to avoid this type of separation, but if it is necessary, a slow, supervised reintroduction will be needed.

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