



**Maddie's Shelter Medicine Program**  
Cornell University




## CARING FOR EXOTIC PETS IN THE SHELTER

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### "Why is this important...?"







'Abandoned puppy' found in local canyon turns out to be a coyote

47 cockatiels rescued from small apartment up for adoption

<https://www.insideedition.com/>

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### "What are they doing here?"




Enrichment

- OWNER SURRENDER**
  - Get all the information you can!
    - Medical
    - Behavioral
- OWNER DEATH**
  - Long lived animals....
- TRANSPORT?**
- STRAY**
  - Almost any species
- CRUELTY/HUMANE SEIZURE**
  - Many species
  - Many at a time. So so many.

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## “What is this?”



**IDENTIFY THE SPECIES YOU ARE WORKING WITH**

- Small mammals are familiar
- Birds: so many species
- Reptiles, amphibians and fish

**TOOLS:**

- Thorough description, including colors and weight if possible.
- Google image search
- Avian and herpetologically minded friends
- Care and husbandry sheets



<https://pethelpful.com/reptiles/amphibians/exotic-animals>

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## “What kind of ... is it?”



**Try to identify the individual**

- Microchip! Scan everyone
- Advertise on FB, websites, etc

**Try to identify gender**

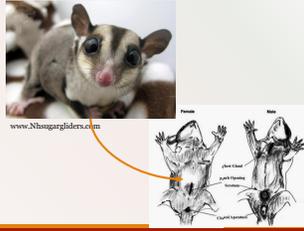
- Difficult if you don't know species
- May be impractical in some species
- Separate male and female mammals
- Spayed/neutered?

**Try to identify life stage**

- Birds: leg band
- May be challenged by illness/poor care

**Some do much better housed together**

- Others **do not**
- Quarantine considerations




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## Intake and pathway planning



**Some things DO NOT differ by species**

- Unique ID number + computer record
- Photograph
- Intake examination
  - Technician
  - Veterinarian
- Location in shelter
- Plan for ongoing care
- Plan for outcome



**Some things DO differ by individual/species**

- Surgical planning
  - Rabbits
- Microchipping
- Vaccination
  - Ferrets
- Endo- and ectoparasite treatment
  - Routine or as-needed
- Husbandry considerations
- Enrichment




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

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## Let intake history guide you...



**2014 Oregon Humane**  
 • 10.3% of total intake

1. 312 Rabbits
2. 222 Rats
3. 148 Guinea pigs
4. 133 Other rodents  
 • Hamsters, gerbils, mice
5. 119 Birds  
 • 47 Parakeets, 30 Finches, 10 Cockatiels, etc
6. 8 reptiles



**2019 Tompkins Co SPCA**  
 • 9.6% of total intake

1. 46 Guinea pigs
2. 45 Rabbits
3. 20 Rats
4. 6 Birds  
 • 5 parakeets, 1 parrot
5. 3 Other rodents  
 • 2 Chinchilla, 1 hamster
6. 1 Bearded Dragon

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## Husbandry Considerations



**PRIMARY ENCLOSURE**

- Cage materials
  - Plastic + rodents = bad idea
  - Glass = less escape (maybe), less air flow
- Cage shape
  - Species appropriate size, dimensions
  - Partals? Rooms?
- Substrate
  - No aromatic hardwoods, grated floors
- Heat and humidity and water
  - Esp. reptiles, amphibians, fish. Look up POTZ.
- Hiding/resting space
  - Everyone



Barking dogs

Feral cats

Hay?  
Hiding place?  
Space?

Wire floor

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## Husbandry Considerations



**DIET**

- Species specific
- Pellets > seeds
- May need to make grocery run

**CLEANING**

- Reptiles, birds & small mammals can be very sensitive to cleaners that don't bother dogs and cats (esp bleach)

**MACRO-ENVIRONMENT**

- Housing predators and prey species together is unacceptable (ASV guidelines)
- Loud noises vs too quiet
- Light cycles/heat cycles



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## Enrichment is brain food

Maddie's Fund

**NECESSARY, VARIABLE**  
Sensory, Manipulatory, Environmental, Foraging/feeding, Social, Training

- Small rodents
  - Food puzzles
  - Climbing/obstacles
- Snakes
  - Peg boards
- Birds
  - Whole nuts (not peanuts)
  - Water spray
  - Target training




<http://blog.purina.com/2014/05/06/10-ways-to-enrich-your-pet/>

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## Medical conditions: top 10

Maddie's Fund

Prioritize the protocols you write based on what you commonly encounter.

- HUSBANDRY ISSUES:** extremely common!  
Skin, feathers, eyes, teeth, body condition, diet
- External Parasites**  
Mites, lice, fleas, etc
- Pododermatitis**  
Birds, rabbits, guinea pigs
- Oral disease**  
Roots, occlusion, fractures
- Fractures**  
Legs, wings, carapaces




Reprints of Maddie's Fund

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## Medical conditions: top 10



6. **Respiratory disease**  
Snuffles and URI, psittacosis, pneumonia
7. **GI parasites and disease**  
Coccidia, regurg, stasis, prolif. bowel disease, wet tail, psittacosis
8. **Reproductive disease**  
Dystocia, egg-binding, neoplasia
9. **Metabolic/endocrine disease**  
Insulinoma, adrenal disease, mineral deficiencies
10. **Neoplasia**  
Uterine AC, Lymphoma, adrenal, etc




When in doubt: do your research, call for help, and/or REFER

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## Surgery: rabbit spay/neuter





**Difficult to intubate**

- Mask or injectable

**Higher anesthetic risk**

- use multimodal protocols

**Friable tissue**

- take care shaving and in sx

**Vascular broad ligament**

- ligate

**Mobile, long, soft testicles**

- check complete excision

**Reproductive tract disease**

- Very common

**Post-op pain, GI stasis**

**All of this is manageable!**



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## Exotic Outcomes



**Los Angeles Times**

**More than 1,000 game fowl used for cockfighting seized during animal cruelty investigation, authorities say**

April 11, 2018



AP Photo/Chris Wedel

THOUSANDS OF BIRDS: A large number of game fowl, used for cockfighting, were seized in San Marcos, Calif., on Tuesday.

COCKFIGHTING: A cockfighting arena in San Marcos, Calif., on Tuesday.

COCKFIGHTING: A cockfighting arena in San Marcos, Calif., on Tuesday.

**PLAN PATHWAY ASAP**

**ADOPTION**

**RESCUE PLACEMENT**

- Sanctuary?
- Wildlife, birds, farm animals

◦ Rescue

- Herps, birds

**TRANSPORT**

- Other shelters
- Pets
- Rehabilitation
- Wildlife

**RELEASE?**

**EUTHANASIA**

- Medical, behavioral, mandated

<https://www.latimes.com/local/lanow/la-me-ln-cock-fighting-lancaster-20180411-story.html>

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 **Wildlife: a quick note** 

In many states, wildlife rehabilitation requires a separate **license**

Most shelters are not set up for wildlife rehabilitation

- Some do have great facilities and trained personnel

Shelter protocol for wildlife:

1. Assess the patient. If gravely injured and not a protected species, **euthanasia** is recommended if allowed in your jurisdiction.
2. If injured but not life-threatening, **contact** the nearest wildlife rehabilitator. Number should be included in protocol.
3. If uninjured, encourage surrenderer to **release** back into same area captured. Try not to admit.




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 **Zoonoses from exotic pets** 



**RABIES:** Vectors may require mandated euthanasia. Laws are different from dogs/cats.

**SALMONELLA:** Asymptomatic reservoirs, transmitted fecal/oral route. Reptiles & birds. GI disease and septicemia. Esp kids.

**CHLAMYDIA PSITTACI:** Birds may or may not be symptomatic. Pneumonia, diarrhea, splenitis, hepatitis.

**DERMATOPHYTOSIS:** Guinea pigs, rabbits, and other furred mammals. *Trichophyton* and *M. canis*.

**RAT BITE FEVER:** Streptobacillus moniliformis and spirillum minus- indigenous flora in rats. Fever, chills, lymphadenopathy.

And many more!

Pets4homes.co.uk

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 **Exotic Adoptions** 

Have a conversation with the adopter about their **experience level** with this species

- Be compassionate!

Shelter should be a source of **education** and educational materials, and set adopter up for husbandry and care success

- Set expectations for enclosure, diet, enrichment, cleaning, **time**, vet care.

May choose to **send enclosure home** with new owner.

- Can be part of the adoption fee

Inform the new owner of **public health and legal** considerations.

- Roosters, ferrets



http://www.backyardbird.com.au/

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 **The Case of the Itchy Ears** 



Overwhelmed "breeder" surrendered 39 rats to a small shelter in S. Oregon  
 22 were euthanized for illness and poor condition  
 2 were adopted out, noticing some sneezing and some skin disease  
 15 were transferred to Oregon Humane  
 2 were accidentally "cleared" and adopted before getting their technician exam

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 **The Case of the Itchy Ears** 



Vet check request for "constant scratching" and "bite marks" on ear margins.  
 Diagnostics performed:  
 13 physical exams  
 3 skin scrapings  
 Diagnosis:  
***Notoedres muris***  
 "the rat ear mange mite"  
 Closely related to *Sarcoptes* ...  
 Zoonotic  
 What do you do next?

www.multipix.com

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 **The Case of the Itchy Ears** 



Treatment: (rats weighed 350g-650g)  
**Selamectin** topical 60mg/ml  
 - 0.1-0.15ml applied to each rat  
 Contacted adopters!  
 Contacted other shelter!  
 Biosecurity!  
 Recheck:  
 10 days later, lesions improved but visible  
 17 days later, skin scraping clear of mites  
 - Applied second dose  
 - Cleared for adoption  
 Adoption considerations:  
 Medical disclosure to adopters

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 Thank you!   
Maddie's Fund

Questions?  
Comments?

   
J. Monkiewicz S. Gonzalez

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 Extremely useful resources:   
Maddie's Fund

**Ferrets, Rabbits, and Rodents: Clinical Medicine and Surgery**, 3rd Ed. K. Quisenberry and J. Carpenter. Elsevier

**Current Therapy in Avian Medicine and Surgery**, B. Speer. Elsevier

**Current Therapy in Reptile Medicine and Surgery**, D. Mader and S. Divers. Elsevier

**Exotic Animal Formulary** 4<sup>th</sup> Ed. James W. Carpenter, Christopher Marion. Elsevier

lifelabvet.com

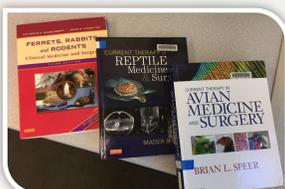
- Free online resources for vets!
- Husbandry/care sheets - print out/ send home

House Rabbit Society: <https://rabbit.org/>

Avian Welfare Coalition

- "How to" guides and webinars for shelter care of pet birds

Banfield's Responsible Reptile Selection and Husbandry



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