

Brief Description:

The sugar glider (*Petaurus breviceps*) is a small, omnivorous, arboreal gliding possum belonging to the marsupial infraclass. The common name refers to its preference for sugary nectarous foods and ability to glide through the air, much like a flying squirrel. Sugar gliders can be found throughout the northern and eastern parts of mainland Australia, Indonesia, and in Tasmania, Papua New Guinea and several associated isles.

Are Sugar Gliders the right pet for you?

Sugar gliders are colony animals and are required to be kept in pairs or more. A single glider will become stressed and depressed. They require daily human interaction but no amount of human interaction can take the place of another glider. Single gliders have been known to over groom, causing bald spots throughout their body, as well as self-mutilate or develop abnormal behavior such as doing back flips and circling their cage. They may even attempt to call on other gliders by barking.



Lifespan: With proper care, Sugar Gliders can live 12-15 years.

Housing:

Sugar Gliders need a large, properly ventilated cage for adequate room to jump and glide. Large aviary cages make excellent homes for gliders; keeping in mind, bar spacing should be no greater than ½" wide. Cages can be covered with a large fleece blanket or waterproof cover to decrease the amount of light and provide the Gliders with privacy (It also reduces food getting thrown on walls!)

Sugar Gliders also need a safe place to sleep during the day. Safely sewn fleece pouches make great sleeping places for gliders. Coconut hides also work well. Hammocks, bridges, and vines can also be made out of fleece. There is less risk of injury when using fleece compared to other fabrics. Nails and limbs can get caught in threads of clothing, ropes, and other items.

Toys: Sugar Gliders are very smart and often get bored if they aren't provided with anything to stimulate their minds.

Goodwill and dollar stores are great places to find toys suitable for gliders - Items such as plastic army men, ping pong balls, bracelets, and toddler floor toys. Toys made of plastic are generally considered safe, unlike toys made of rope, metal, or wood. *Wood items soak up urine and can produce a foul odor over time. Hamster balls are not appropriate for gliders! These can cause the animal to overheat or even receive a physical injury from the thin open slits.

Wheels: Providing a Glider with a wheel is extremely important and allows proper exercise and stimulation. Unfortunately, there are no glider safe wheels that can be found at pet stores. Proper wheels can be found at www.atticworx.com.

Why are pet store wheels not safe?

Wodent Wheel: This wheel has been known to seriously injure or cause deaths in gliders. This wheel, specifically, has a bar directly in the center that attaches both front and back together. When Gliders jump, they've been known to get caught on that center bar.

Silent Spinner: Gliders' nails can get caught in the plastic slits of this wheel and cause serious injury.

Flying Saucer: Gliders have been known to 'fly' off of this wheel and slam against their cage walls. This can cause serious injuries!

Other wheels: Most other wheels are too small or just not designed for sugar gliders. Gliders can get caught in small plastic slits, or get caught in the large wired wheel. *There is absolutely no store bought wheel that is glider safe.

Water:

Gliders do require fresh water at all times! A water bottle or silo works well. Bowls are not recommended as they could cause a glider to drown, or they may tip the bowl.

Climate:

Sugar gliders are most comfortable in rooms between 65° and 80° F. If your home gets any colder, consider covering the cage with a fleece blanket or adding small square fleeces into their sleeping pouches. Heat rocks and lamps are hazardous and should not be used under any circumstance. Humidity is also important for a glider to have a healthy coat and skin. In a dry climate, a glider's coat can become cracked and their ears can potentially chip. Investing in a humidifier to place near a gliders' cage can greatly improve their skin and coat.

Cleaning:

Cages should be deep cleaned once a month with a 50/50 water and distilled vinegar solution, then rinsed. Daily wipe down of the tray and lower cage bars is important to maintain a clean environment and keep away any insects (ants, fruit flies, etc.). Fleece bedding should be washed once a week or at least once every 2 weeks. Toys should be cleaned once weekly and wheels bi-weekly (at least).

Nutrition:

A proper diet is essential to Sugar Gliders, however those needs are often not met through most available diets. Previous diet formulations like GOHPW (Reduced Sugar Green Original HPW) or BML (Bourbon's Modified Leadbeaters Diet), for example, attempted to replicate their natural diet of pollen, nectars, and insects. However, in addition to requiring significant preparation time and effort they tended to be inconsistent nutritionally and higher in fat than necessary. The most current recommendations are based on a good, quality sugar glider pelleted diet for about 75% of the diet. Recommended brands include Exotic Nutrition's Premium Diet, Mazuri Insectivore Diet, and Nutrimax sugar glider diet. Feed approximately 1/4 to 1/3 of a cup (2-3 oz.) daily.

The remaining 25% (about 2-3 tablespoons) should include a variety of fresh fruits and veggies each night is required in addition to pellets. Example of safe fruits and veggies: carrots, cucumbers, peppers, mustard greens, turnip greens, collard greens, kale, bok choy, apples, dragon fruit, cantaloupe, honeydew, kiwi, mango, grapes, and blueberries. Gliders should be fed in the evening when they start to become active. Yogurt drops, mealworms, or honey are great treats for Sugar Gliders but should not be given too frequently! Avoid foods like spinach, lettuce, blackberries, raspberries, strawberries, cheese, milk, chocolate, corn, grapes, raisins, bird food, cat food, dog food, nuts, and seeds.

A calcium based multivitamin like VitaMax or Glide-A-Mins should be lightly sprinkled over fruits and vegetables every other day.

Other People and Pets:

Sugar Gliders bond to scent and generally have their 'favorite' person (owner). A well socialized Glider may be more willing to go to another person than a Glider that is not properly socialized. Sugar Gliders and other pets should NOT interact whatsoever. Even supervised play time is NOT recommended as any well trained pet can become unpredictable with Sugar Gliders' quick movements. This type of interaction can also be extremely stressful on the Glider. The bacteria in cat saliva is toxic to Sugar Gliders.

Vocalizations: Sugar Gliders are known to make a unique variety of vocalizations.

Barking: Used to alert the colony, call for other gliders, or if they want something

Crabbing: A high pitched warning. A common sound they make if they feel threatened. Gliders may charge or bite if provoked after making this sound

Hissing: A small warning given to gliders in their colony. This can also be a sign of a potential UTI

Chattering: Gliders talking to each other

Popping: Generally made when a glider is sleeping and is content

Singing: A female glider vocalizes when there are joey(s) in pouch or nursing

Sneezing: Often used to groom themselves.

Bonding and Handling:

Bonding is very important and an integral part of owning Sugar Gliders. When first brought home, gliders should be allowed roughly 2 days to adjust to their new surroundings before attempting any interactions. Sugar Gliders are delicate marsupials and are not the type of animal that like to be cuddled or held. Gliders would prefer to run freely on you than to be held. Patience is key to successful bonding as it can take months to even years for your glider to be completely comfortable with you. It is NOT recommended to place a piece of clothing into a Glider's cage. Doing this may cause a Glider to get caught in threads and can result in injury or even death. Placing small fleece squares under clothing and wearing them throughout the day provides the Gliders with a proper "blanket" that still has your scent on it. These can be placed in their sleeping pouches to encourage bonding. During the day when Gliders are sleeping, remove their pouch from the cage and place it on your lap. Do not attempt to handle the Glider at this time. Allow them to relax and fall asleep in their pouch. This method works well and allows the Gliders to gain trust.

Introductions to Other Sugar Gliders:

Before introducing your gliders to one another you can get them more familiar with each other's scent by swapping pouches so they can sleep in the other one's pouch (alone). This can be done every other day to every day for a week prior to physical introduction. Swap pouches during the day rather than at night or when they're awake and let them sleep in the pouch. After about a week or so you can place both gliders in their pouches facing each other with the pouches open. Tempt them to come out and have a positive experience with treats in the middle. Have a fleece ready to break up a fight if needed. Once they are comfortable with each other or go into the same pouch together they can be kept together with close monitoring at first, especially the first night and during feeding.