CARESHEET: African Pygmy Dormouse

Common Name :- African Pygmy Dormouse

Classification/Latin name :- Graphiurus murinus

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

Distribution :- Central & Southern Africa

Natural Habitat:-
Forest and woodland areas.

Description and sexing:-
Pygmy Dormice are small rodents that have dense grey fur all over except their underside which is white. They also have a furry tail which is about half their body length. Their heads are broad and flattened which is perfect for them to fit into small crevices and holes. They have large dark eyes, a pink nose and small ears that twitch at the slightest noise. Gender can be determined after 5 months as the dormice will have reached sexual maturity. The males will have two bulges under their tails where as the females are less pronounced.

Enclosure size:-
A vertically orientated glass tank with a tight fitting lid or sliding glass doors with wire mesh ventilation holes (the smaller the holes the better, pygmy dormice are escape artists!) The size of the enclosure depends on how many dormice you have. A breeding pair will appreciate more space than two dormice of the same sex. It is recommended that the dormice each have a hide/nesting box so that squabbles don't occur. This will greatly reduce the animals stress levels within the enclosure. A suitable hide would be a wooden bird nesting box. Providing climbing branches is necessary to allow the dormice to exercise.

Heating and temperature:-
Pygmy dormice DO NOT need to be heated, they can be kept at room temperature but a small heat mat on one side of the enclosure can be beneficial if breeding or over winter. As mammals, dormice maintain their own body temperature. Ventilation is needed to prevent over heating and damp within the enclosure.
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 dormice cannot hide and also risks overheating in summertime. Dormice are nocturnal rodents (notice their large eyes) 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 as it keeps the tank dry due to its' liquid retaining properties. Shavings should be placed on the floor and on top of any large decorations in the enclosure. Bird houses have proved to be frequently used by the dormice. DO NOT attach the roof, just place it on so that you can check on the dormice if necessary. Providing climbing branches is required to allow the dormice to exercise. Cork bark can also be used to create a wall that the dormice will climb up. A drinking bottle is the most hygienic way of providing the dormice with water as they have a habit of fouling water bowls. Food dishes should be heavy so they cannot be tipped over.

Feeding and vitamins:-

Pygmy dormice are omnivores and should be fed a varied and balanced diet of FRESH food to ensure they live long healthy lives. There are many foods that are suitable for dormice such as; seeds, grains, nuts, fresh fruits, nectar, and insects (crickets/mealworms). Multiple food items should always be available (in separate bowls as needed) so the dormice gets enough vitamins necessary for growth and general well being. Tinned items are processed foods and contain chemicals and sugars, therefore should NOT be fed to a dormouse.

Handling:-

These dormice are not recommended as a handle able pet as they are very quick and skittish. However a dormouse handled from a young age can be easier to handle.

Breeding and rearing:-

Firstly, confirm that you actually have a pair, if you are having trouble looking with them running around, catch them with a net if not tame enough to handle and gently place each one in a plastic tub so that you can compare them as necessary. The breeding of dormice is easy as long as all their
requirements are met as above. A plentiful supply of a variety of food will help but you just have to leave them to it. The male will bite the female’s neck until he has his way. You may notice the female to not be as active as normal and generally fatter but if not the first sign of birth will be seeing the baby clambering around the tank. The gestation period is around 25 days, but after giving birth inside a nesting area the female is prone to eating her young if disturbed so wait an extra two weeks before checking the nest. They should have between 1-6 offspring which won’t leave the nest for about six weeks. Remember, these dormice are escape artists and as babies they can squeeze out of the smallest holes. Check your set-up! Sexual maturity is reached at about 6 months old and it may be an idea to separate them from the parents at this age in case of fighting between males which can be fatal. If you do not wish to breed them, separate them according to their gender, the male siblings can be kept together as long as a female is not introduced. If you do wish to breed them, swapping with another breeder is a good idea as it means new blood lines. Please ask yourself, do you have spare suitable tanks in case of fighting or ill health. Whatever you decide to do, good luck and if you need any more advice, just ask!