



Care of African Pygmy Hedgehogs

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African Pigmy Hedgehogs (APH) (*Atelerix albiventris*) are small insectivores from Central and Eastern African savannahs and woodland. They are becoming increasingly popular, both the wild type and albino varieties. With proper care, APHs can live up to 3 to 6 years.

Diet

In the wild, APHs eat mostly insects and other invertebrates. They are nocturnal animals so food should be offered accordingly. In captivity the following food items can be offered:

- Hedgehog dry food – alternatively, high quality dry cat food (high protein and no grain) can be used.
- Insects – mealworms, crickets and other feeder invertebrates. These should also gut-loaded before being offered.
- Treats – small amounts of hard boiled egg, bits of fruit and other vegetables can also be offered.

APHs are prone to obesity so food items with high fat content should be limited.

Fresh water should be available at all time in a water bowl and a bottle, and replaced daily.

Housing

APHs are solitary animals and should be kept by themselves. Despite being small animals, they are quite active (specially during the night), so a 100 x 60 cm cage is adequate for an adult. The bottom should be solid (no wire mesh) and covered with a deep layer of wood shavings or shredded paper.

A few hiding places and an exercise wheel suitable for hedgehogs can also be provided for added environmental enrichment. APHs should also have daily supervised exercise outside their cage.

APHs don't normally use a litter tray and they can be quite messy, so their enclosures require frequent cleaning.

Because they are tropical species, APH never hibernate (unlike the European hedgehog) and should always be kept above 25 °C. Most households require some form of heat support (a heating bulb or a heat mat) to keep them on their favorite temperature range.

Veterinary care

APHs should have a yearly health check. Due to their usual behavior of curling into a spiky ball when handled, clinical exam has to be performed under a light gas anesthesia. If requiring a nail clip, that also has to be done under a very brief gas anesthesia.

Sadly, APHs have somewhat short lifespans and are prone to some of the following health problems:

- Obesity.
- Cancer – specially different types of skin cancer. Females can also develop uterine cancer.
- Skin infections – caused by mites or bacteria

If an APH develops any of the following signs, they should be examined by an exotic vet:

- Hair or spike loss, or itchy skin
- Any lump or swelling
- Sudden weight loss
- Passing blood in urine
- Passing loose stool

Hedgehog behavior

Every hedgehog, including APHs, are well known for some typical behaviors:



Curling into a ball, when being handled or when feeling threatened. In doing so, APHs protect all their vital parts, leaving only spikes on the outside.

Annointing – this is not fully understood, but when finding a new object or scent, hedgehogs start salivating and spreading that saliva all over their skin.

