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THE CARE OF THE DUPRASI

Also known as fat tailed gerbils, duprasis are fairly new rodents in the U.S. pet market. In the wild duprasis are often found in sandy desert regions of the Sahara and surrounding regions. They are primarily diurnal (day active), although some may exhibit a fair amount of night time activity. They are most often found in colonies and live in small tight knit colonies, in areas where vegetation is sparse but sufficient enough to meet their dietary requirements and provides them with a bit of shelter from predators. They live primarily in tunnels underground that they excavate themselves and only come to the surface to gather nesting materials, food, water, and occasionally to breed.

They are related to the more common Mongolian gerbils, and their maintenance and care is similar to that of gerbils. The average duprasi is about 4-5 inches long with an unusual stubby tail (about 2 inches in length) that is used to store fat. Therefore, a duprasi with a thin tail may be lacking something in their diet or harboring a health condition.

Diet should be mainly a good quality lab block such as Purina rodent chow. This can be supplemented with green, leafy vegetables, and occasional insects such as crickets, meal worms, and beetles. Foods that are high in starches, such as seeds and bread, should be limited or avoided altogether. Starches can cause gastrointestinal problems. Even though these are primarily desert animals and may not drink much at a time, a source of fresh clean water in a water bottle should be available at all times.

Large glass aquariums or chew proof enclosures are ideal for housing; ideally no smaller than a 20 gallon aquarium is recommended. Tight fitting lids are recommended to prevent escape. Duprasis are very active burrowing and excavating new tunnels and cave systems daily. They have been known to dig 3 meters below the surface and 8 meters or more long. Boxes should be provided to hide in, with newspaper to dig in and shred. Newspaper, recycled paper litter, or aspen chips should be used as the cage substrate and should be relatively deep to provide opportunities for burrowing and tunneling. Avoid cedar or pine shavings, as the oils can be toxic to the liver as well as causing respiratory and skin irritation. Dry non-clumping kitty litter or play sand has been suggested by some duprasis owners as a substrate that is similar to their natural environment. Cage accessories for play and exercise should be provided such as clay flowerpots, toilet paper tubes, PVC tubes, objects to hide under. Solid plastic exercise wheels should be available and are preferable over wire ones. A dust bath of chinchilla dust should be given weekly for grooming and fur care.

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Duprasi will breed year round. Gestation lasts approximately 18-23 days, with an average litter size of 3-6 pups. It has been recommended by some breeders to remove the male from the cage toward the end of gestation because some females will become aggressive to their mates at this time. Young are weaned at about 3-4 weeks of age.

Due to their being relatively new to the pet market, there is still much to be learned about health conditions in duprasi. Most problems seen are commonly related to poor husbandry and diet. Diets high in simple carbohydrates such as seeds and breads can cause enteritis (intestinal upset) and diarrhea, leading to dehydration. Skin problems and hair loss can result from cage mate trauma, fungal or bacterial infections, mite infestations, etc. Skin scrapings and fungal cultures may be needed to diagnose and treat skin problems. Respiratory problems and other ailments appear to respond to the same treatments used for other gerbil species, hamsters, etc.

It is recommended that your duprasi have a veterinary examination at least once annually to help detect any medical problems in the early stages.

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