GERBIL

Natural history
The Mongolian gerbil or “jird” is a native of the Gobi desert, originating from Mongolia and Northern China.

Taxonomy
Class Mammalia
Order Rodentia
Suborder Myomorpha
Family Cricetidae: same taxonomic family as mice, hamsters

Species
There are 87 known species and 14 genera of gerbil. The Mongolian gerbil is 12-14 cm long including its tail which measures 12-14 cm. The head is broad and short, and the tail is covered in fur with a small tuft at the end.

Diet
Gerbils are omnivores. In the wild the diet consists of grasses and seeds with small amounts of insects. A captive diet consists of a high-quality pellet supplemented with small amounts of fruits and vegetables.

Husbandry
Gerbils are nocturnal, but some daytime activity normally occurs. Gerbils are sociable and generally do not fight when raised together. Breeding pairs of gerbils are usually housed together for life.

Normal physiologic values

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Normal Range</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Body temperature</td>
<td>99.3-100.8 F 37.4-38.2 C</td>
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<tr>
<td>Pulse</td>
<td>260-600</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respiration</td>
<td>85-160</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adult male</td>
<td>46-131 g</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adult female</td>
<td>50-55 g</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean life span</td>
<td>2-4y</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sexual maturity</td>
<td>10 weeks 9-18 wks (M) 9-12 wks (F)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Target environmental temperature</td>
<td>50-68 F 18-22 C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Target relative humidity</td>
<td>45-55%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Gestation</td>
<td>22-26 days</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Litter size</td>
<td>3 to 8</td>
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<tr>
<td>Weaning</td>
<td>21-28 days</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Anatomy/Physiology
Water-conserving physiology means that gerbils produce very dry feces
GERBIL

Large, midventral, abdominal marking glands appear as orange-tan oval areas of alopecia. These sebaceous glands are androgen-dependent, enlarging at puberty and involuting when neutered.

Anatomy/Physiology

The red blood cell lifespan is 10 days leading to pronounced basophilic stippling.

Mongolian gerbils are prone to high cholesterol levels.

Restraint

Gerbils are relatively docile, and may be cupped in the hands. Scruff individuals to provide manual restraint. Never pick a gerbil up by its tail as the skin may slough off.

Important medical conditions

Ovarian cysts, tumors
Squamous cell carcinoma

Venipuncture

Small amounts of blood may be collected from the lateral saphenous vein.

References and further reading


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