Restraint and Handling of Small Companion Mammals
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I. Introduction
A. Predator species
   1. Generally quite bold, e.g. Ferret
   2. Can be approached in a manner similar to that used for cats and dogs
B. Many exotic companion mammals (ECM) are prey species
   1. Can become easily stressed in a hospital setting
   2. Approach these patients calmly, gently, quietly
   3. Minimize stress whenever possible
      a. Gather or prepare all items that may be needed for exam or procedure
      b. Visual exam before you lay hands on your patient
         i. Observe the appearance and mentation
         ii. Up to the stress manual restraint?

II. Chinchillas (Chinchilla lanigera)
A. Capture
   1. Most pet chinchillas are used to being handled
   2. Relatively easy to capture and restrain
B. Manual restraint
   1. Place one hand under the body
   2. The other hand gently grasps the tail base
   3. Brief video clip illustrating technique
C. Cautions
   1. Fur slip
      a. Warn client in advance
      b. Uncommon
      c. Never scruff or handle roughly
   2. Jumping

III. Guinea pigs (Cavia porcellus)
A. Capture
   1. Calm, gentle animals
   3. Rarely bite
B. Manual restraint
   1. Place one hand gently around the thorax
   2. The other hand supports the rump
C. Cautions
   1. Bottom heavy
2. No scruffing

IV. **Rabbits** (*Oryctolagus cuniculus*)
   A. Capture
      1. Usually very docile
      2. Rarely thump feet and nip
   B. Cautions
      3. Broken or dislocated back or leg
         a. Lightweight, delicate skeleton
         b. Well-developed back and leg muscles
   C. Manual restraint
      1. Non-slip surface
         a. Large, heavy towel
         b. Pad
      2. Light restraint
      3. ‘Bunny burrito’
      4. Tuck against body like a football
         a. Tuck head between side of body and arm
         b. Use other arm to support rabbit’s body against handler’s body
      5. Returning safely to the cage: rear end first

V. **Rats** (*Rattus* spp.)
   A. Capture
      1. Most pet rats are good-natured, friendly
      2. Used to being handled
   B. Minimal restraint
   C. Manual restraint
      1. Technique 1
         a. Thumb on one side of rat’s head and index finger on other side
         b. Support the body
      2. Technique 2
         a. Forefinger just beneath jaw on one side of head
         b. Thumb beneath opposite elbow, gently yet firmly pushing forelimb up towards rat’s face
      3. Gently scruff if necessary
      4. Tail base can be gently grasped prn

VI. **Gerbils**
   A. Capture
      1. Typically docile
      2. Loosely cup in hands
      3. Thump feet +/- bite when threatened
   B. Manual restraint
      1. Grasp tail base in one hand
      2. Scruff loose skin along neck and back
   C. Tip of tail: risk of degloving injury
VII. Hamsters
   A. Capture
      1. More likely to bite when awakened from deep sleep
      2. If not startled, can be scooped into hands
      3. Do not tolerate excessive or prolonged handling
   B. Manual restraint
      1. Large amount of loose skin over neck, shoulders, back
      2. Scruff
         a. Like a cat: grasp skin between thumb and fingertips
         b. Full hand grip
            i. Use all five fingers plus lower palm
            ii. Support body with other hand

VIII. Mice (*Mus musculus*)
   A. Capture
      1. Very active, quick to jump away
      2. Avoid chasing around enclosure, scoop into small container like a cup instead
   B. Small, clear container for visual exam
   C. Manual restraint
      1. Large, amount loose skin around neck, shoulders, back
      2. Gently grasp tail base
      3. Scruff

IX. Hedgehogs (*Atelerix albiventris*)
   A. Spines can cause some discomfort in all but the tamest pets
      1. Towel, light leather gloves
      2. ‘Puff up’ as a defensive behavior while hissing and spitting
   B. Techniques to unroll the hedgehog have been described
      1. Work best on hand-tame pets
      2. General anesthesia is generally required for complete physical exam
      3. Subdued lighting in a quiet room can help put the conscious hedgehog at ease

X. Sugar gliders (*Petaurus breviceps*)
   A. Easy to handle but difficult to restrain
   B. Manual restraint
      1. Do not tolerate being scruffed
      2. Technique
         a. Grasp the tail base while allowing the glider to hold onto a surface with its forefeet
         b. Then place your thumb on one side of the glider’s head and your index finger on the other side while still supporting the body
      3. Towel or light leather gloves
4. General anesthesia

XI. Ferrets (*Mustela putorius furo*)
A. Capture
   1. Usually easily handled
   2. Rarely bite, exceptions:
      a. Nursing females
      b. Kits nip
B. Minimal restraint
   1. Little petting
   2. Slow administration of high calorie paste to distract
B. Manual restraint
   1. Necessary when obtaining a rectal temperature, giving injections, or during other uncomfortable procedure
   2. Scruff
   3. Stretch
      a. Grasp over the pelvis and not the caudal abdomen
      b. Do not hold the legs since most ferrets will struggle
   4. Review of brief video clip

XII. Restraint for common techniques
A. Oral examination
B. Oral medication
C. Nutritional support
D. Venipuncture
E. IV catheter placement
F. Face mask induction

XIII. Approach to less commonly seen species
A. Degu (*Octodon degus*)
B. Prairie dog (*Cynomys* spp.)
C. Fennec fox (*Vulpes zerda*)

XIV. Conclusion

XV. References


XVI. Resources

- www.LafeberVet.com
- www.ahwla.org.uk/site/tutorials/BVA/BVA02-Introduction.html
- www.brookfallsveterinary.com
- www.barbarasffat.com/small-mammal-training.html

XVI. Summary of key points