

GERBILMANIA

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Welcome to Gerbilmania!

This newsletter is dedicated to the Mongolian gerbil, *Meriones unguiculatus*. These small, friendly, furry pets are not as well known as the more common hamsters and guinea pigs, but they deserve more attention! This newsletter will help you learn all about these wonderful pets and perhaps persuade you to give gerbils a try in your own home, classroom or workplace. Read on!



GERBIL SHOWS

You've probably heard of horse shows, dog shows and cat shows. But did you know that there are also official gerbil shows? There are!

Twice a year, the American Gerbil Society (www.agsgerbils.org) runs sanctioned shows where gerbils compete against breed standards for color, conformation, temperament, and condition. The next show will be held on June 9-10 in Rutland, VT.

Even before you get out of your car, you can tell that there are gerbil enthusiasts around. Many of the cars in the parking lot have gerbil-related license plates, like GERBILS, or gerbil bumper stickers.

Before any gerbils can enter the hall where they are kept, they must go through health checks. Here, people check over the gerbils to be sure that they are healthy. Otherwise, diseases could spread throughout all the gerbils!

In the huge room where the



Keith beams as his newest gerbil, Titania, brings home the blue ribbon.

gerbils are kept, there are three long tables. You can rent a section of these tables to advertise your gerbils and keep all your supplies and gerbils, because gerbils aren't allowed in the hotel.

The gerbil show is also a great time to mingle with all your other gerbil friends, and make

new ones. Everyone has at least one common interest with you: gerbils.

Set up near the entrance is a table full of American Gerbil Society souvenirs. There are AGS hats, bags, shirts and more. Also, there is a raffle table. There are different

Con't. on page 4.

BIRTH ANNOUNCEMENT

Shawsheen River Gerbils is proud to introduce Sparrow and her litter of eight healthy pups born on April 6, 2005. Her daughter Zoe, from a previous litter, is helping her to raise her new babies.

Sparrow, Zoe, and six other

young pups, came to SRG as part of our new **rescue program**. Due to a death in the family, a breeder in New York state had to rapidly disestablish her clan. With the help of American Gerbil Society members, about 50 gerbils came by "gerbil train" to New Hamp-

shire and then on to us.

Zoe and several of her younger siblings will be available for adoption in mid-May. SRG hopes to continue to provide our gerbil-loving friends with well-socialized rescues in need of homes.

A PUP GROWS UP

How did your cute gerbil friend start out? Pups go through a lot of stages in the 5 weeks that they are with their mothers and fathers.

When pups are first born, they weigh about as much as a penny. They are blind, deaf, and helpless. They have no fur. All they have to decipher their surroundings is their noses. When they are



Milk is visible in belly.

about 5 days old, the pups begin to develop fuzz. You can start to see their colors and their ears open.

You can determine their sex at around 10 days old by



looking for nipples: only females have them. But keep careful track, because soon after, fuzz completely covers the nipples, and you cannot determine the gerbil's gender again until the males begin to develop at around five weeks.

In their second week of life, the pups begin to find the use of their legs to stagger around the tank like mad. Since they are still blind, a parent (often, the father)



retrieves them and carries them in his mouth back to the nest. As soon as the pup is safely tucked away, another scrambles out and the chase begins again!

When they are about 18 days old, the pups' eyes open at last. The newly-ready eyes must feel itchy, because pups scratch and scratch at them, until one finally pops open. They pop open one at a time. For a few days after opening their

eyes, the pups are kind of skittery. Little did they know before that the gentle hand was attached to a giant body!

In the next two weeks, the miniature gerbils learn everything that they need to know



about being a gerbil, from drinking from a water bottle to eating sunflower seeds. One of the most entertaining things that they learn to do is a pup jump—jumping straight up in the air! In the wild, this is an evasive maneuver which lets gerbils get away from ground predators like snakes. By the time they leave their parents, they know how to survive.

In the wild, the pups would soon leave their parents to find a mate. At about 4 months, they would become parents themselves. Instead, you can look forward to years of fun with your gerbil pups.

“As soon as the pup is safely tucked away, another scrambles out and the chase begins again!”

DEAR CHARLIE AND SAM

Dear Charlie and Sam,

I have a red nose. Am I sick? What should I do?

Red Nose

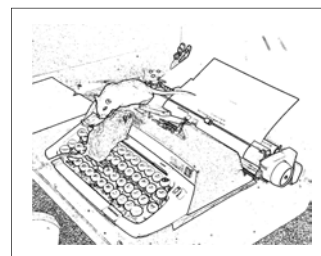
Dear Red Nose,

A red nose can mean a lot of things. First, it could mean that you have allergies. Try asking your people to change your bedding

to Corncob, if you don't have it already. Carefresh and Aspen sometimes cause allergies.

Another thing a red nose could be is mucus. Gerbil mucus is red, so if you

have a cold and a drippy nose, that could be it.



Ask your people to try to solve your problem, because a red nose is uncomfortable!

Good Luck,
Charlie and Sam

GERBIL AUTOBIOGRAPHIES

TODAY'S FEATURE: MOONDA

Hello, my name is Moonda. I was born on June 4, 2003 at Purple Kat Kritters gerbilry in New York State. Then I moved to ABC Gerbils in Nashua, NH. At 5 months old, I was introduced to two males, Trophy and Furry, and moved to Shawsheen River Gerbils.

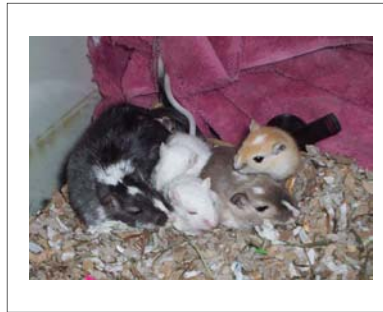
Soon, Trophy decided that it should be just me and him and he beat Furry up. Furry went off to get married to another girl, and I had my first of six litters in December.

Trophy was a very good husband and he helped me care for the pups. He would chase them when they ran out of the nest and bring them back.

He'd also "hatch" them to keep them warm when I needed a break. Altogether, we had 40 babies! Many Bedford families have our babies now.

After my fifth litter, my humans noticed that I was looking a little worn out. Instead of my usual sleek black, I was getting gray and thin. They decided I had had enough babies.

Trophy and two of our sons went to live with another wonderful family in Bedford. I stayed with my daughter Dandy and had my last litter on June 8, 2004. (That is the birthday of my youngest hu-



Moonda (left) & Trophy snuggle pups.

man, too!) This human decided to keep another daughter from the last litter, Tammy. Now I live a relaxed life with Tammy and Dandy, running on my wheel and sleeping in our coconut.

FOCUS ON COLOR: THE "A" GENE

First in a Series of Six Articles on Genetics



The A gene controls the color of the belly. Gerbils with AA or Aa will have a white belly, like our friend Gemma (right). Gemma is an agouti; this is the color of gerbils in the wild. Gerbils with a double recessive aa will have a solid, or "self" colored belly, in other words, the same color as its upper body.

Gemma's black sister Tuna, pictured left, has aa.



"Agouti...is the color of gerbils in the wild."

WHEELS: THE REAL STORY

Are you trying to decide whether or not to get a wheel? What kind to get? There are so many choices. With a little information, you will be able to pick out the perfect wheel for your gerbils.

Wheels are helpful to keep your gerbils fit and slim. In a small tank, a wheel lets a gerbil run for hours as it might in the wild.

However, gerbils can't have metal wheels with bars. Gerbils

can get their tails stuck in between the bars and their tails will break off. These wheels are meant for hamsters, who have no tails.

Have you noticed that your gerbils' wheel is all chewed up? If you leave their wheels in too long, the gerbils lose interest and use the wheel as a chewing block. It is best to take out the



wheel for a while, and then put it back in so that the wheel won't lose its novelty.

When you go to a pet store, everyone tells you that gerbils don't like wheels. Some gerbils do, some don't. Your gerbils may love their wheels, but they may not, too. Even though you can't be sure, a wheel is a good thing to try. Perhaps it could be a special holiday or birthday gift for your gerbil friends.

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Friendly, Healthy, Tame Gerbils



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OBITUARY



Pumpkin

*June 17, 2003-
April 13, 2005*

Pumpkin was a friendly, cheerful gerbil, partner to Thunderbolt. He won 2nd place in the White Belly class at the American Gerbil Society NE Show 2004. Pumpkin was renowned for his prowess in digging deep holes. We will miss his gentle nature and happy personality.



Gerbil Shopping List

- ASPEN
- ATTENTION
- BATHSAND
- BEDDING
- BOTTLE
- BOXES
- CAREFRESH
- CLIPS
- EXERCISE
- FOOD
- HAY
- HOLDER
- LID
- LOVE
- TANK
- THERMOMETER

GERBIL SHOWS (CON'T)

prizes. You can buy tickets and put them in the various raffles.

The next morning, everyone comes to add final touches to their table and see their gerbils before the visitors come. Excitement is in the air as everyone eagerly awaits the judging.

There is a rush as everyone puts their gerbils in the critter keepers that gerbils must be in for the show. Then, all the gerbils entered in the show are taken into another room where the judging is done. The judges shut the doors and judge all the gerbils, separated by color.

During the judging, the pet class is judged. The pet class is a class where children can enter their gerbils. The prizes are rewarded for things like



The show hall is full of gerbils being judged.

receive show points. When gerbils have 8 show points they become champions.

Now, the judges tell the Best in Show winners. These are the best girl and boy gerbil in the show. The owner receives a plaque with their name engraved in it and a big purple and white ribbon.

After the gerbil show everyone is tired but happy. They have had a great time. They are disappointed that it is

over, though. They know they will have fun next year too!

If you can't manage to attend a live gerbil show, your gerbils can compete in an AGS Virtual Show online. All you need to do is take two good photos of your gerbil and send them in. See the AGS web site for details—deadline is April 19!

“Best Shoulder Sitter” and “Cutest Face”. Everyone gets a prize!

Finally, the judging is done! Everyone is anxious to see how their gerbils placed in the show. The judges announce the winners. Everyone who places 1st, 2nd, or 3rd receives a ribbon. Also, you