



CALGARY BOARD OF EDUCATION

KEEPING ANIMALS IN THE CLASSROOM

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DISCLAIMER

Information contained in this publication is subject to periodic review and revision in light of the evolving social ethic affecting responsible, humane animal care and use practices, legal requirements and regulations and new scientific information. Readers may wish to consult provincial laws, local by-laws and school district policies.

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INTRODUCTION

CBE Administrative Regulation 6004 - Animals in Schools was developed to address safety of students/staff, welfare of animals and to recognize that animals serve a valuable purpose in education. Educators are expected to familiarize themselves with AR 6004 early in their consideration of bringing an animal into their classroom.

'Keeping Animals in the Classroom' has been prepared as a support document to CBE Administrative Regulation 6004 - Animals in Schools. The content is intended as a tool to assist educators. This booklet will guide you in deciding and then planning, **if you are considering keeping animals in your classroom**, for short visits (for the day) or longer stays (months or the school year), **for educational purposes**. The content has been developed by a team of experienced educators and with an advisor representing the SPCA.

'Keeping Animals in the Classroom' was developed based on these beliefs:

- Responsibility for the humane and proper care of animals is the legal obligation and moral responsibility of those who have assumed stewardship of the animals.
- Our progressive society continues to demonstrate an evolving concern about the humane and ethical care and use of animals. This concern necessitates that educators respond proactively to issues of animal welfare.
- Guidelines serve the teaching profession by setting standards and expectations. Guidelines also inform students and the general public about humane, responsible care and use of animals in the classroom.

'Keeping Animals in the Classroom' is intended to be used as an educational tool to promote:

- responsible, humane care and use of animals in the classroom
- respect for animals as live, feeling beings
- a reverence for the interconnectedness of all life
- responsible pet ownership
- proper behaviour toward all animals
- an understanding that there are laws to protect animals, and
- concern for keeping the environment safe for all life.

The keeping of animals is governed by various pieces of legislation including:

- Alberta Wildlife Act
- Alberta Animal Protection Act
- The Criminal Code of Canada.

The legislation is supported and extended by documents from organizations including:

- Alberta SPCA
- American Humane Association
- Canadian Council on Animal Care
- National Association of Biology Teachers (American)
- National Association of Science Teachers (American).

GENERAL CONSIDERATIONS

1. Animals should only be in schools for specific educational purposes.
2. The purpose for keeping the animal needs to include, but not be limited to, the Alberta Program of Studies.
3. It is against the law to hold indigenous wild animals captive. Some species such as some amphibians, may be threatened. It is not possible to provide natural environmental conditions for indigenous species. It is illegal and inappropriate to capture and keep wild local species.
4. Non-native species ('exotic' species) may be of concern when accidentally released into new environments. Zebra mussels in the Great Lakes and rabbits in Australia are two examples. Non-native species should not be kept in classrooms. It is not possible to guarantee no accidental release. Many non-native species are not legally permitted to be kept captive without provincial permits. Walking stick insects are an example of an insect that cannot be kept without a permit.
5. Captive-bred animals have been purposely bred to be captive pets. They are the only appropriate choice for a classroom animal.
6. The interconnectedness of all life, death and illness are inherent aspects of having an animal in the classroom. Educators should capitalize on the opportunity to present concepts of the life cycle and inter-relatedness of living things in their environments.
7. The teacher accepts full responsibility for and must closely supervise and monitor care and use of animals in the classroom. Student caregivers must be supervised and should be taught proper methods of animals' care and handling.
8. Animals may be in the classroom for observation only, not for experimentation.

OBSERVING SMALL ANIMALS IN THE EARLY GRADES

The Alberta Program of Studies for Science in the early grades allows for opportunities for students to actively observe small animals.

Teachers can work with small creatures from the schoolyard or from science suppliers. Creatures commonly ordered include butterflies, praying mantids and mealworms or pill bugs. Butterflies should be observed in the classroom in spring only, and released by early summer to allow them time to complete their life cycle in our climate.

One possible investigation with small animals is to determine their response to certain conditions. It is important that the animals are not exposed to painful or life-threatening conditions. Appropriate investigations could be: do the animals choose light or dark environments; do the animals choose ketchup, sugar syrup or hot sauce?

NON-NATIVE SPECIES – THE STICK INSECT

Stick insects, or walking sticks, are wonderful classroom pets - easy to feed, easy to clean, easy to reproduce and easy to observe. So why does the CBE recommend against keeping these little creatures in our classrooms? Read on.

Virtually all stick insects kept in captivity in schools and in homes are of the species *Carausius morosus*, or common Indian stick. This species is **not native to Canada, which means it is regulated** under the Canadian Food Inspection Agency, Plant Protection Act. The website link is listed here: <http://laws.justice.gc.ca/en/showtdm/cs/P-14.8///en>. In brief, in order to import non-native insects, a permit would be required. Permits are most likely to be issued to universities or museums. It is questionable practice for schools to keep organisms that are unlawful to import without a permit.

There is environmental concern attached to the presence of the Indian Stick insect in Canada. There is anecdotal (non-published) evidence that the Indian Stick can survive our winters. If either Indian Stick insects or viable eggs are released outdoors there is the potential that this species could establish itself here. The species has no natural predators in Canada. This insect eats many different types of green leaves and could have the potential to threaten native plant species (that is why it is controlled under the Plant Protection Act). As that occurs, habitat and food sources for our native species could be reduced. Although this is not a documented occurrence locally, colonies of this species have established themselves in some states. General documentation exists regarding issues associated with the introduction of non-indigenous species generally.

The common Indian Stick is well described in the website listed here, the site of the Provincial Museum of Alberta Bug Room.

<http://www.pma.edmonton.ab.ca/natural/insects/projects/stickins.htm>

The Bug Room strongly advises disposing of Indian Stick colonies and gives instructions on its website. The reader may wish to check the website for updates.

Live organisms in classrooms can provide valuable learning and teaching opportunities. Alternative invertebrates to Indian Stick colonies include ladybugs and mantids. Both can be purchased through science suppliers and perhaps greenhouses. These insects are native to some parts of Canada and therefore are not regulated. They also provide good lesson plan material, as both insects are used as biological control organisms as an alternative to pesticides.

ZOONOSIS

Salmonellosis and other zoonotic diseases (i.e., infections secondarily transmitted from animals to humans) can be contracted by handling infected animals, e.g., reptiles (lizards, snakes and turtles), baby chicks, ducklings, dogs, cats and birds. It is important to refrain from hand-to-mouth activities while handling animals; and particularly important to wash hands thoroughly with soap under running water immediately after handling or interaction with animals. Persons potentially at higher risk are those who suffer from defective immune systems and those who are under severe stress or who have non-overt clinical disease. Food and beverages should be prepared, served and consumed away from animal housing/handling areas.

EUTHANASIA

An animal that is determined to be suffering unrelievable distress must be humanely euthanized. A humane death occurs when an animal is rendered instantly unconscious without pain or panic, followed by inevitable subsidence into death without regaining consciousness.

A trained professional, e.g., a veterinarian or trained technician, using the method most appropriate for the species involved, must perform euthanasia.

CLASSROOM HATCHING ACTIVITIES AND AVIAN FLU

Teachers are advised that there are real concerns about human strains of avian flu being introduced to North America. Teachers **should not participate in hatching activities** until they have researched current information and are confident that recognized international sources such as the Centre for Disease Control and the World Health Organization, as well as CBE sources, have not alerted parties to increased potential risk.

This information will be helpful for hatching activities in CBE schools. The information in Brief Key Facts and Recommendations was collected in Spring, 2006. Teachers are asked to inform themselves of current information each year, before proceeding with classroom hatching.

Brief Key Facts:

- the key organizations in information and protocol recommendations for communicable diseases are the Centre for Disease Control (CDC) and the World Health Organization (WHO).
- the strain of note is H5N1. Other strains have crossed from bird to human but this one has resulted in the largest number of detected cases of severe disease and death in humans.
- The viruses that do transfer to humans are considered most likely to transfer by direct contact with saliva, secretions or feces or contact with surfaces like cage material, water or feed.
- H5N1 has not yet been detected in domestic or wild birds in North America. It's common to read or hear that it can be expected in North America by next year.
- Some local suppliers of eggs are actively monitoring this situation.
- Domestic ducks can excrete large quantities of virus without showing signs of illness.

Recommendations:

- hatching is an acceptable activity for spring 2006, **with caution** and practices as suggested here.
- eggs should come from a supplier known to be taking precautions.
- Students should not handle cage material, water or feed dishes. Teachers should take appropriate precautions when handling.
- Students and teachers must wash their hands thoroughly following any activities with chicks and ducklings.
- Before and during the hatching activities, teachers should remain informed and up to date by monitoring the CDC or WHO websites. Teachers should make themselves familiar with signs and symptoms of disease in chicks and ducklings.
- Information should be provided to parents outlining precautions being taken in the classroom.

Some resources for further information:

- <http://www.cdc.gov/flu/avian/> - Centre for Disease Control
- http://www.who.int/csr/disease/avian_influenza/en/ - World Health Organization
- <http://www.minkhollow.ca/HatchingProgram/Ducks-Incubation/avian-flu.html> - A Calgary-area farm specializing in uncommon and heritage species of ducks and geese. They have prepared a comprehensive list to keep students, teachers, hatchling fowl and their farm safe.
- CBE Onsite Safety & Security
- CBE Curriculum Support, Science

CHOOSING AN ANIMAL FOR THE CLASSROOM

The primary consideration is the educational rationale for having an animal in the classroom. That rationale can help guide the selection of which animal is the best choice. When choosing an animal, consider the match between the animal, the classroom and the teacher's ability to look after it. Some teachers find that one little creature is plenty for a classroom; other classrooms may benefit from more than one creature.

Not all animals are appropriate or acceptable in a classroom

Animals that do best in the classroom are those that are content to be in small places and do not require a lot of exercise. As classroom conditions change, teachers must re-evaluate their choice of animal. At minimum, there should be an annual re-evaluation of the purpose of keeping an animal in the classroom.

It is recommended that captive-bred animals of a known health status (that is, known to be healthy) be obtained from a reputable breeder. Reputable breeders exist outside of pet stores. They can be located by asking local associations, veterinarians and other animal professionals. The Calgary area has associations of herpetologists, caviars and others.

Use the Care Sheet Template to help guide your choice

It is important to select the animal that will be a good match for the environment in the classroom. The teacher is advised to do careful research and planning regarding a potential classroom animal. Use the Care Sheet Template on the following pages to help determine the care needs of the animal. Sample Care Sheets for gerbils, hamsters, captive-bred snakes and tarantulas have been included.

Some classrooms are home to more than one animal. The teacher should be aware of which animals can co-exist without discomfort to any. A gerbil would be in constant distress if a snake were in a nearby cage. Be aware of instinctive predator/prey relationships.

Arrangements must be made in advance for placement of animals in permanent, suitable homes with responsible owners at completion of the study. If such permanent arrangements for an animal's care following the study cannot be made, the animal must not be brought into the classroom.

Under no circumstances may domestic animals of any kind be released into the wild.

SAMPLE ANIMAL CARE SHEET: GERBIL

- ❖ **Before you bring an animal into the classroom for educational purposes, you are responsible to research the animal's needs. The following information may be used as a guide.**

Animal Name: Gerbil

Common Name: Gerbil. Several varieties are available.

Educational Rationale for keeping this animal in the classroom:

Background Information:

- Gerbils are desert animals, native to North Africa, the Middle East and South Asia.
- Gerbils are nocturnal (night time) animals but can adapt to become diurnal (daytime) animals.

Mature Animal Size: 50-60 grams, approximately twice the size of a mouse.

Housing:

- Plastic storage boxes or aquariums with mesh tops work well.
- Gerbils like to burrow so a deep layer of bedding, up to 10 cm deep, is needed.
- Gerbils will dig. If a metal cage is used, place it in a tray or shallow box so the bedding that is spilled out can be contained.

Environmental Enrichment/Behavioural Needs:

- An exercise wheel is required. Select a solid wheel, not an open wire wheel, as gerbil tails or feet could get caught.
- Acceptable toys may include clean milk cartons, toilet/paper towel tubes, commercial plastic tunnels. Gerbils chew constantly so any plastics should be made specifically for that purpose.

Food/Water/Supplements:

- Small animal pellets, seeds and grains available at pet stores or grocery stores.
- Gerbils like snacks of plain popped corn, raw rolled oats, and fresh fruit or vegetables.
- Clean, fresh water is necessary at all times. A water bottle with a drinking spout, attached to the side of the enclosure, is recommended to prevent the water from becoming contaminated by cage debris.

Maintenance/Cleaning:

- Provide bedding of straw, wood shavings, shredded unbleached paper without print, or a commercial bedding product. Avoid cedar or pine bedding which have irritating fumes, in favour of aspen.
- Remove any left over fruit or vegetables daily.
- Regularly remove soiled bedding and replace with clean bedding.
- Empty the enclosure of all contents and thoroughly wash the enclosure at least twice a month.

Lifestyle/Social Structure:

- Gerbils are nocturnal (night time) animals. They can easily be trained to become diurnal (daytime) animals.
- Gerbils can be kept in groups, however, like all rodents, they breed quickly and often! Sex the animals carefully before you put them together.
- Allowing animals in the classroom to breed is strongly discouraged. Every precaution should be taken to prevent females from becoming pregnant.
- In the event of an unplanned pregnancy, you must begin immediately to arrange for homes for the babies; babies can have babies in 2-3 months!
- It is not necessary to separate the pregnant female from the male; the male will help to tend the young.

Special Requirements:

- None

Life Expectancy:

- 3-4 years.

Health Management:

- In all cases of illness or injury, immediately isolate the affected animal(s) and thoroughly clean the enclosure(s).
- Diarrhea: Usually caused by something the Gerbil ate. Remove fruits and vegetables from the enclosure and reintroduce slowly only after the symptoms disappear.
- Colds: Symptoms include sneezing, runny nose and eyes. Isolate the affected animal(s) and keep it warm.
- Dental problems: May occur if a Gerbil does not have something to gnaw on. Provide a piece of untreated wood or commercial products made for that purpose for the animal to chew.
- Injuries: May be caused by fighting. Minor wounds may be treated with a mild antiseptic solution. Major wounds need to be treated by a veterinarian.
- Sore nose: may be caused by constant burrowing. Can be treated with an ointment provided by a veterinarian.

Handling Instructions:

- Gerbils become calm with regular handling. Cup them gently in your palm. Very active gerbils could be gathered up in a cup or toilet paper roll, rather than being caught roughly.

Costs Involved:**Planning Ahead – Consider:**

- if the animal becomes ill and requires veterinary care
- plans for care over weekends and holiday periods
- contingency plans in case of power or heating failure in the school
- potential for student or staff allergies

SAMPLE ANIMAL CARE SHEET: HAMSTER

- ❖ **Before you bring an animal into the classroom for educational purposes, you are responsible to research the animal's needs. The following information may be used as a guide.**

Animal Name: Hamster

Common Name: Varieties include "Teddy Bear" and "Albino".

Educational Rationale for keeping this animal in the classroom:

Background Information:

- Wild Hamsters that live in Europe and the Middle East are the relatives of pet Hamsters.
- Hamsters are nocturnal animals.

Mature Animal Size:

- 50-100 grams. Approximately twice the size of a mouse.

Housing:

- Plastic cages or aquariums with mesh top work well. Hamsters can flatten themselves out and squeeze through small openings so the enclosure must be secure.

Environmental Enrichment/Behavioural Needs:

- Hamsters must have an exercise wheel.
- Acceptable toys may include clean milk cartons, toilet/paper towel tubes, and commercial plastic tunnels.
- It is necessary to provide a piece of untreated wood or twig for the hamster to chew. Commercial chew products are also a good choice. Their teeth grow continually and they must have a way to wear them down.

Food/Water/Supplements:

- Small animal pellets, seeds and grains available at pet or grocery stores. Hamsters also enjoy snacks of fresh fruit and vegetables. If diarrhea develops, withhold fresh fruit and vegetables until the symptoms disappear.
- Clean, fresh water is necessary at all times. A water bottle with a drinking spout, attached to the side of the enclosure, is recommended to prevent the water from becoming contaminated by cage debris.

Maintenance/Cleaning:

- Provide bedding of straw, wood shavings, shredded unbleached paper without print, or a commercial bedding product.
- Remove any left over fruit or vegetables daily. Regularly remove urine soaked bedding and replace with clean bedding.
- Empty the enclosure of contents and thoroughly wash the enclosure at least weekly.

Lifestyle/Social Structure:

- Hamsters are nocturnal; they don't like to be wakened suddenly. Coax them awake with a treat such as a seed. If they are disturbed too quickly, they will bite!
- Hamsters are solitary animals. If you want to keep two hamsters together, they must be kept together from a very young age.
- One pair of hamsters can produce a litter of 8 - 10 every 15 days! Babies can produce babies at approximately 2 months of age. Sex the animals carefully before you put them together.
- Allowing animals in the classroom to breed is strongly discouraged. Every precaution should be taken to prevent females from becoming pregnant.
- In the event of an unplanned pregnancy, you must immediately begin to arrange for homes for the babies.
- You must also remove the male before the babies are born. Females have been known to kill the male.

Special Requirements:

- None

Life Expectancy:

- 2 - 3 years.

Health Management:

- Diarrhea: Usually caused by something the hamster ate. Remove fruits and vegetables from the enclosure. Reintroduce fruits and vegetables slowly only after symptoms disappear.
- Lacerations: Caused by fighting. They usually heal on their own; however, a veterinarian should treat serious wounds. If hamsters fight, separate them.
- Wet tail: Bacterial in cause and once first symptoms are seen, affects the animal very quickly. The animal should see a vet quickly. This condition is usually fatal. Separate the affected animal from other animals. Throw away all contents of the animal's enclosure and thoroughly clean the enclosure.
- Bald patches: May appear, related to moulting, or on the hindquarters, as the animal ages. If the hamster is exhibiting any signs of illness along with fur loss the hamster should be isolated from any others and a vet should be consulted.

Handling Instructions:

- Hamsters are nocturnal. Awaken a Hamster gently with a treat.
- Hold a Hamster carefully in cupped hands over a table. They have no fear of heights and will fall easily from a table or shoulder and may be seriously injured.

Costs Involved:**Planning Ahead – Consider:**

- if the animal becomes ill and requires veterinary care
- plans for care over weekends and holiday periods
- contingency plans in case of power or heating failure in the school
- potential for student or staff allergies

SAMPLE ANIMAL CARE SHEET: CAPTIVE-BRED SNAKES

- ❖ **Before you bring an animal into the classroom for educational purposes, you are responsible to research the animal's needs. The following information may be used as a guide.**

Animal Name: Snake

Common Name: Corn Snake, Ball Python, and Boa Constrictor

Educational Rationale for keeping this animal in the classroom:

- Students generally enjoy having a snake in the classroom.
- The presence of snakes often helps maintain the presence of snakes in Alberta.
- Students grow to respect and enjoy snakes instead of fearing them.

Background Information:

- Snakes do not require a great deal of daily care.
- It is recommended to check recent publications and websites for additional information.

Mature Animal Size:

- Corn Snakes grow to 70-90 cm. in length
- Boa Constrictors can grow to more than 1-2 metres in length
- Ball Pythons are approximately 60-90 cm. in length

Housing:

- A 20-40 gallon aquarium is needed; the larger the snake, the larger the aquarium must be.
- The aquarium must be equipped with a tight fitting screen lid; screens can be purchased or you can make them. If the screen does not fit tightly, it must be secured on the edges with rocks, or books, etc. so the snake cannot escape.
- Fine, clean sand is a good substrate for the enclosure. Some experts suggest artificial grass; in which case, 2 pieces of grass are recommended so that a clean one is available to replace a dirty one being cleaned.
- A plastic box or similar equipment must be provided for the snake to hide under.
- A source of heat and ultraviolet light must be provided.

Environmental Enrichment/Behavioural Needs:

- Snakes enjoy swimming in a small tub occasionally.
- Snakes enjoy having a rock or other rough surface to help them shed their skin.

Food/Water/Supplements:

- Snakes eat mice that can be raised in the classroom or purchased frozen from a pet supply store.
- Snakes should be fed twice a month in the summer and every three weeks in the winter. The size of the mouse depends on the size of the snake: a small snake (less than 20 cm in length) would require one small mouse twice a month; larger snakes require two large mice twice a month.
- Mice should be rolled in "Reptovit" before being fed to the snake.
- Snakes require a constant source of clean, fresh water

Maintenance/Cleaning:

- Never touch the fecal matter of snakes because it has been known to carry Salmonella bacteria.
- Snake feces must be removed either with gloves or plastic bags; as soon as you notice the feces, put on plastic gloves or put your hands in plastic bags to protect them while you remove the feces.
- Once a week, the following procedure should be carried out to clean the snake's enclosure:
 - Remove snake to an ice cream pail or snake bag (empty pillow case).
 - Remove any fecal matter while wearing gloves or with hands covered by plastic bags. Tie off bag of fecal matter and discard safely.
 - Remove urine soaked sand. Replace sand entirely, every few cleanings.
 - Remove artificial grass and soak it for 3 hours in a weak solution of a disinfecting cleanser. Rinse thoroughly to remove any cleanser residue and allow to air dry.
 - Clean aquarium with a weak solution of a disinfecting cleanser. Rinse thoroughly to remove any cleanser residue and dry.
 - Place spare piece of artificial grass in aquarium.
 - Replace water in tub with clean water. If there has been a lime build-up from the water, scrub the tub with vinegar, then rinse thoroughly. Fill water tub and put back in the aquarium.
 - Return snake to cleaned aquarium.

Lifestyle (Social Structure):

- More than one snake of the same species can be kept together in the same enclosure; e.g., you can keep 3 Corn Snakes in the same enclosure.
- Snakes must be separated for feeding. You can put a snake in a cardboard box for feeding and then return it to the aquarium after feeding.
- Caution: If you put one mouse in a snake enclosure with two snakes, both snakes will try to eat the same mouse; consequently, the fastest snake may also devour the other snake in addition to eating the mouse.

Special Requirements:

- Snakes need a source of heat for 12 hours of the day and a source of full spectrum lighting for 12 hours a day.
- The heat source can be a regular 60-watt incandescent bulb.
- The full spectrum bulb must be a full spectrum bulb purchased at a pet supply store or hardware store. They are expensive but last a long time. It takes special care not to burn out the expensive full spectrum bulb: never move a full spectrum bulb while it is lit; always allow the bulb to cool down to room temperature (10 minutes cooling time) before the bulb is moved.
- A timer is recommended to maintain the correct amount of light for the required time.

Life Expectancy:

- The literature differs on the average life span of snakes.
- Most small snakes have a life span of at least 10 years.
- Snakes kept in zoos have been known to live 20-40 years, depending on the species.

Health Management:

- When purchasing a mature snake, check for mouth rot and Salmonella.
- Snakes need vitamins to prevent mineral deficiency.

- If a snake is well fed, given vitamins, watered and provided with a source of warmth and full spectrum light, diseases are rare.
- When a snake becomes sick and loses weight, it is usually too late to do anything to treat the snake.

Handling Instructions:

- Snakes are easy to handle.
- Snakes do not usually bite - unless you smell like something they would like to eat.
- If snakes do bite, the bite should be minor, because the type of snake recommended for the classroom is a constrictor with small teeth. Disinfect the person's wound, if the skin is broken.
- The striking action of the snake is more frightful than the bite.

Costs Involved:

Planning Ahead - Consider:

- if the animal becomes ill and requires veterinary care
- plans for care over weekends and holiday periods
- contingency plans in case of power or heating failure in the school
- potential for student or staff allergies

Resources:

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3. Bauer, Aaron and Russel, Anthony. *The Amphibians and Reptiles of Alberta*. University of Alberta Press, 1993. ISBN: 1-895176-20-4
4. McEachern, Michael. *Keeping and Breeding Corn Snakes*. Lakeside California: Advanced Vivarium Systems, 1991 The Herpetocultural Library series (available through most pet stores)
5. Oberon, Jake. *Snakes as a New Pet*. Neptune New Jersey: T.F.H. Publications, 1990
6. Stebbins, Robert. *A Field Guide to Western Reptiles and Amphibians*. Houghton Mifflin Company, 1985
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SAMPLE ANIMAL CARE SHEET: TARANTULA

- ❖ **Before you bring an animal into the classroom for educational purposes, you are responsible to research the animal's needs. The following information may be used as a guide.**

Animal Name: Tarantula

Common Name: Tarantula

Educational Rationale for keeping this animal in the classroom:

Background Information:

- Spiders have been kept as pets only since the latter part of the 20th century (approximately 20-30 years). As a result, there is still much we do not know about them, but, many people have dedicated their lives to studying them so quite a lot of information is becoming available.
- Males tend to be smaller than females and more skittish.
- Females are generally more docile.
- The likelihood of Tarantulas biting is rare. If they do bite, they seldom inject any venom. If venom is injected, the handler may not suffer any serious consequences, except in the case of an anaphylactic reaction. In that case, the person would likely be allergic to any spider bite, including a garden spider.
- The Tarantula's hairs are of more concern than the bite. Many Tarantulas have irritating, barbed hairs that may cause an allergic reaction or get into the handler's eyes where they could cause some damage. People who have had many Tarantulas have not had problems caused by the hairs when proper precautions were followed.

Mature Animal Size:

- Approximately the size of an adult hand palm.

Housing:

- A Tarantula needs to be kept alone in a cage that is one-and-a-half times the width of its body and twice as long as its body.
- Tarantulas do not need places to hide, especially if they need to be seen.
- Tarantulas do quite well on a substrate of a couple of inches of packed, sterile potting soil.
- The enclosure must be kept dry to reduce the likelihood of mites, but if you are keeping a tropical species the humidity should be higher.
- There is no need for a fancy heating apparatus; Tarantulas generally do well at room temperature. An optimal temperature is approximately 24 degrees Celsius.
- Do not keep enclosures in direct sunlight. The heat generated by the sun will kill a Tarantula! They do not have a way to cool off their bodies.

Food/Water/Supplements:

- Most Tarantulas do quite well on 6-8 crickets a month. Some may eat more if allowed to.
- Garden insects (except ants and ladybugs) may also be fed to Tarantulas provided that the insects are free of all pesticides.

- Some advocates recommend periodically dusting the crickets with vitamins that can be purchased at a pet supply store.
- A dish of fresh, clean water is necessary at all times.
- A common mistake is to put a sponge in the dish so that the crickets do not drown. This opens up the risk of a host of parasites and disease. A rock or a piece of slate in the dish works well.
- If a Tarantula is not eating, its food should be removed. It will stop eating a few weeks to months before periodically shedding its skin (moulting); it may be bothered during a moult by uneaten food in the enclosure.

Maintenance/Cleaning:

- Generally, the enclosure does not need to be cleaned often.
- Food leftovers and other debris should be removed from the enclosure when seen.
- If the enclosure looks messy, you may clean it more often. If it smells dirty, you should change the substrate. Some experts believe this puts some stress on your Tarantula.

Lifestyle/Social Structure:

- Tarantulas are solitary creatures.
- Tarantulas will fight if housed together!

Special Requirements:

- None

Life Expectancy:

- Males generally live 5-7 years.
- Females can live more than 20 years.

Health Management:

- Tarantulas are not susceptible to many illnesses.
- Consult a Tarantula keeper's guide for common illnesses and remedies.

Handling Instructions:

- Tarantulas must be handled with care.
- Tarantulas must never be dropped. They may die as a result.
- A moulting Tarantula will lie on its back. (If your Tarantula is on its back, it is not dead) It should not be handled during this time or when an upcoming moult is indicated. If your Tarantula stops eating, it is a sign of an upcoming moult.
- Many groups, including the America Tarantula Society, do not recommend handling Tarantulas, but, do outline ways to hold them safely if people desire to do so.
- Some experts regularly hold their Tarantulas with no ill effects when the Tarantulas are properly held.
- After handling a Tarantula or cleaning its enclosure, hands should immediately be rinsed with water to remove any stray hairs.

Costs Involved:

Planning Ahead – Consider:

- if the animal becomes ill and requires veterinary care
- plans for care over weekends and holiday periods
- contingency plans in case of power or heating failure in the school
- potential for student or staff allergies

RESOURCES

1. Burnett, Robin. *The Pillbug Project: A guide to investigation*. National Science Teachers' Association, 1992.
2. Canadian Council on Animal Care. *Guide to the Care and Use of Experimental Animals*, Volume 1, 2nd ed., 1993.
3. Hairston, Rosalina V. *The responsible use of animals in biology in classrooms. including alternatives to dissection*. National Association of Biology Teachers, 1990.

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1. Alderton, David. *The Exotic Pet Survival Manual*. New York: Barron's Educational Publishers, 1997.
2. Alderton, David. *Reptiles and Amphibians*. London: Salamander Books, 1986. ISBN: 3-923880-50-2
3. Bauer, Aaron and Russel, Anthony. *The Amphibians and Reptiles of Alberta*. University of Alberta Press, 1993. ISBN: 1-895176-20-4
4. Burnett, Robin. *The Pillbug Project: A guide to investigation*. National Science Teachers' Association, 1992.
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6. Hairston, Rosalina V. *The responsible use of animals in biology in classrooms. including alternatives to dissection*. National Association of Biology Teachers, 1990.
7. McEachern, Michael. *Keeping and Breeding Corn Snakes*. Lakeside California: Advanced Vivarium Systems, 1991 The Herpetocultural Library series (available through most pet stores)
8. Oberon, Jake. *Snakes as a New Pet*. Neptune New Jersey: T.F.H. Publications, 1990
9. Stebbins, Robert. *A Field Guide to Western Reptiles and Amphibians*. Houghton Mifflin Company, 1985
10. Zimmerman, Elke. *Breeding Terrarium Animals*. Stuttgart: T.F.H. Publications, ISBN: 0-86622-182-4

Websites:

- <http://laws.justice.gc.ca/en/showtdm/cs/P-14.8//en>
- <http://www.cdc.gov/flu/avian/> - Centre for Disease Control
- http://www.who.int/csr/disease/avian_influenza/en/ - World Health Organization
- <http://www.minkhollow.ca/HatchingProgram/Ducks-Incubation/avian-flu.html>

APPENDIX I

ANIMAL CARE SHEET: TEMPLATE

Before a teacher brings an animal into the classroom for educational purposes, the teacher is responsible to research the animal's needs using this template.

Animal Name:

Common Name:

Educational Rationale for keeping this animal in the classroom:

Background Information:

Mature Animal Size:

Housing:

Environmental Enrichment/Behavioural Needs:

Food/Water/Supplements:

Maintenance/Cleaning:

Lifestyle (Social Structure):

Special Requirements:

Life Expectancy:

Health Management:

Handling Instructions:

***Students must be supervised when handling animals or cleaning cages.**

Costs involved:

Planning Ahead - Consider:

- if the animal becomes ill and requires veterinary care
- plans for care over weekends and holiday periods
- contingency plans in case of power or heating failure in the school
- potential for student or staff allergies

APPENDIX II

SAMPLE LETTER OF CONSENT TO HANDLE



So you want to hold a tarantula!

Your child has expressed an interest in holding our class pet. There are some things you should be aware of.

1) While some tarantulas may bite, the tarantula your child wants to hold is really quite gentle. It is extremely rare for them to bite. If they do bite (which is very, very unlikely), their bite is often "dry" which means they do not inject any venom. If they do inject venom, most people will suffer no more than some numbness for a few hours. Again, to be bitten by this tarantula is so very unlikely.

Some people, however, are allergic to spider bites. In this case an anaphylactic reaction is possible. These people would also be allergic to a garden spider.

2) Of more concern than their bite, tarantulas have irritating bristles on their bodies. A number of people are allergic to them and may have itchy hands after handling the tarantula. **The bristles on the body are quite damaging if they find their way into your eyes.** Although this possibility exists, many people have had tarantulas for years and have never had hairs in their eyes. **As standard procedure, people who handle tarantulas should rinse their hands after handling them.**

3) Many students are particularly enthusiastic after handling a tarantula and may ask you to get one for a pet. This decision is yours, but **as with any pet proper education is essential.** Females may live as long as 30 years so a long-term commitment is probable. Talk to knowledgeable people (such as breeders and enthusiasts) and do some reading before purchasing a tarantula.

I give permission for _____ to hold the Curly Hair, Red Knee Mexican, Chilean Rose Hair, or Giant Chocoan Mustard Tarantula in (Teacher's name) class.

(Signature of parent or guardian)

(Date - good for current school year)



APPENDIX III

SAMPLE PARENT INFORMATION LETTER

Date

Dear Parent,

Re: animals in our classroom

I would like to provide you with some information about our classroom *animal*. I have chosen to include an animal member in our classroom, for educational purposes, to support a number of learning outcomes. Children will observe and learn about *this animal* under close supervision and careful guidance.

The science curriculum includes a number of topics related to living things, their needs and their environments. Students can learn about positive relationships through animals and their needs, and compassion and care for all living things.

Observing and caring for an animal can help students learn that all living things have basic survival needs, and must be treated with respect and care at all times.

I would be happy to answer any specific questions, or discuss this further with you.

We ask that you inform us of any animal related allergies or health conditions that your child may have regarding this matter.

Sincerely,

Mrs. A. Smith
Grade ___Teacher
CBE School