

Accommodation Small Mammals

Teacher's Notes

Aim

To demonstrate the options for small mammal accommodation.

Objectives

The student will be able to:

- Identify advantages and disadvantages of different types of housing.
- Establish which would be most suitable for various species.
- Establish which would best meet the needs of various animals.
- Give a recommendation as to which accommodation would best meet the animal's needs.
- Justify these opinions.

Content

This unit provides the basis for an understanding of what the housing requirements of most common small mammals are.

The general principles of the animal's accommodation needs are introduced, in terms of both physiology and psychology, and this is linked to the animal's natural behaviour and environment.

It is intended that students can apply these to individual species of interest. This principle lends itself well to classroom discussion, independent research, or practical tasks, as applied within the suggested lesson plan. An interactive 'discussion tool' is included for use in collating conclusions drawn.



Introduction – Suggested lesson plan

Timing mm:ss	Activity	Indicative Content	Suggested Tasks
	Watch the film clip: Animal Physiology	Why must we consider an animal’s physiology? What groups of Pathogens and Vermin pose a threat? What range of equipment can be used to thoroughly clean an enclosure? What cleaning agent(s) are commonly used?	Discuss what disease causing agents are most relevant to different species. As part of a group - form a plan that will ensure vermin is kept to a minimum, and decide how infection from external sources can be reduced. Inspect an existing establishment, and identify any risk areas/factors.
	Watch the film clip: Animal Psychology_1	Why is mental health an important consideration? What psychological state will an inappropriate environment lead to? What sorts of behaviour will excessive stress cause? What is the link between stress and an animal’s natural environment and natural behaviour?	Students to give a presentation entitled ‘Environmental Enrichment.’ Research and present some symptoms of stress, and identify specific behaviour patterns that indicate an animal is suffering from stress.
	Watch the film clip: Animal Psychology_2	What is the legal responsibility placed upon anyone keeping animals? How does this relate to the Animal Welfare Act 2006? How does this relate to the RSPCA’s 5 animal freedoms? In particular the ‘freedom to express normal or natural behaviour’?	Explain why providing a natural environment allows an animal to display natural behaviour, and how this reduces stress. Apply findings to an existing establishment, in the form of an audit.



	<p>Watch the film clip:</p> <p>Normal / Natural Behaviour</p>	<p>Why do many small mammals have a nocturnal lifestyle?</p> <p>Would it be 'normal' or 'natural' for most animals to encounter some stress during their lifetime?</p> <p>Do you feel that it is acceptable for us to intentionally introduce an element of stress to captive animals?</p>	<p>Students to debate whether it is acceptable for stress such as images of a predator, or the calls or odour of a predator to be intentionally introduced, in order to allow the small mammals to behave normally or naturally.</p>
	<p>Watch the film clip:</p> <p>Enrichment</p>	<p>How would we create an environment that is healthy?</p> <p>What might happen as a result of over cleaning?</p> <p>A well prepared and suitable environment is said to be Enriched. An environment can be enriched by making sure that all the correct equipment and bedding is present – what effect would this have on animal behaviour?</p> <p>This may also involve adding tasks or puzzles for animals to interact with.</p> <p>Social animals must have companions to interact with.</p>	<p>Discussion or group task - Why would you not over clean?</p> <p>Design, build and implement a puzzle or task that would enrich an animal's environment, and observe how the animal subsequently interacts with this novel object.</p>

Enclosure alternative options (pro's & con's) – Suggested lesson plan

Timing mm:ss	Activity	Indicative Content	Suggested Tasks
	Watch the film clip: Cage	<p>What makes this enclosure suitable for small mammals? Consider space, ventilation and behaviour.</p> <p>What are the main disadvantages? Consider escaping and cleaning.</p>	<p>Interactive task included in this package – linked to the 'Enclosure options' and 'Natural Environment' lessons within this module.</p> <p>Students are required to relate conditions within the natural environment to the enclosure provided.</p>
	Watch the film clip: Tank	<p>What makes this more appropriate? Consider escaping and cleaning.</p> <p>What substrates can be used? What behaviour does this allow?</p> <p>What is the main disadvantage of this enclosure design?</p>	
	Watch the film clip: Tower	<p>What is the one big advantage of using this enclosure?</p> <p>What natural behaviour does this enable a small mammal to carry out?</p> <p>Does this enclosure have good ventilation?</p>	

Natural Environment – Suggested lesson plan

Timing mm:ss	Activity	Indicative Content	Suggested Tasks
	Watch the film clip: Rat	How is the rat an opportunist in relation to food? What is the key aspects relating to normal rat behaviour?	<p>Interactive task included in this package – linked to the ‘Enclosure options’ and ‘Natural Environment’ lessons within this module.</p> <p>Students are required to relate conditions within the natural environment to the enclosure provided.</p>
	Watch the film clip: Mouse	What do mice like to hide from in the wild?	
	Watch the film clip: Hamster	<p>What do hamsters have a particularly poor perception of?</p> <p>Hamsters tend to produce more of an odour.</p> <p>What type of lifestyle do hamsters have as regards social encounters?</p>	
	Watch the film clip: Gerbil	<p>What type of lifestyle do gerbils have as regards social encounters?</p> <p>Where do gerbils live? What natural behaviour does this encourage them to carry out in order to create a space for living in?</p> <p>What type of landscape & substrate do gerbils live in?</p>	