

Unusual Pets

WORKSHEET A

It seems some people really want to stand out from the crowd when it comes to choosing a pet. Not for them the obvious choices such as a dog or a cat – instead they prefer to share their homes with some very odd companions.

Take Alli Shedden from the village of Siquirres in Costa Rica. A few years ago he decided to adopt one of the local wild animals: a sixteen-foot, fifty-eight stone crocodile. He took pity on the animal when he saw it in a swamp with a serious bullet wound in its head, apparently the victim of a hunter. He took the animal home (exactly how is not clear), named it Poncho, and began to nurse it back to health. The process of physical and psychological recovery was slow, however: in Mr Shedden's opinion it would take four years for Poncho to be fully healed. That was enough time for Mr Shedden's wife to accept the new member of the household, even though its appetite for meat put a strain on the family budget. When Mr Shedden was asked why he wasn't scared by the presence of such a huge, aggressive predator in his back garden, he replied, 'He has never done anything to harm me, he knows who I am. It is as if it were a dog – it eats out of my hands'.

Though there have been no reports of anyone keeping a pet crocodile in Britain, there are plenty of other, smaller exotic pets in British homes. The list includes rodents (mice, guinea pigs, hamsters and rats), reptiles (tortoises, lizards and snakes), amphibians (frogs and salamanders), fish (especially tropical varieties), birds and insects.

Rodents, usually kept in a cage, are often recommended as the ideal small pet for children. Rats, despite their poor public image, are social and intelligent creatures that are easy to tame and only bite very rarely. Mice are also very social, needing to be kept in pairs or in groups, and the way they play together can be very entertaining for children. Guinea pigs, meanwhile, are capable of becoming very responsive to their owners, and are therefore probably the most 'interactive' species of pet rodent.

Perhaps the most bizarre-sounding exotic pet is the Madagascan Hissing Cockroach. It is much larger than the average cockroach, but also, fortunately, nicer to look at. These cockroaches also have the ability to emit a remarkable hissing sound, hence their name. They have been getting more popular in recent years, possibly because they are the definitely a 'low-maintenance' pet – they create very little work for their owners, never need to be taken for a walk, and don't demand any attention. They are unlikely, however, to become more popular than cats or dogs in the near future.

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WORKSHEET B

Filling in the nine missing words will reveal an exotic pet that some British people are very enthusiastic about – so much so that in 1985 they set up a national club, the first of its kind in the world, for owners of this kind of animal. The club still doesn't have a very large membership, however, ...

Write the first letter of each answer in the box with the corresponding number at the bottom of the page.

1. Like lizards and snakes, the _____ is a species of reptile that can be kept as an exotic pet.
2. Poncho's _____ caused some financial problems for Alli Shedden and his wife.
3. _____ are a social and intelligent species of rodent.
4. Mice tend not to be happy if they are _____.
5. Alli Shedden _____ Poncho so that the animal would recover from its injuries.
6. People who have fish as pets usually choose _____ varieties.
7. Fortunately, Madagascan Hissing Cockroaches are less _____ than other kinds of cockroach.
8. Madagascan Hissing Cockroaches are also much _____ than the average cockroach.
9. Madagascan Hissing Cockroaches are "low-maintenance" pets in the sense that they don't demand any _____.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9