

# How I became a Mousewife

WHEN I found out that Eric bred mice I was surprised - what a hobby to have! I was even more surprised that instead of perhaps ten mice (as I thought) he had eighty to a hundred! Where did he keep them I wondered? In the house? Under the bed? When he said he kept them in a shed I expected him to open the door and find them all jumping out. Instead they were all in wooden boxes safe, tidy and clean, and all of different varieties. I thought you could only have white mice. What a lot I had to learn!

Then he said about mouse shows. Thinking it was a joke I laughed. But it was no laughing matter and he was quite serious.

Like cat and dog shows I asked, 'Yes', said Eric, 'would you like to come to one?' I said I would and ended up at Richmond Community Centre on a cold January afternoon to meet the breeders. We collected special numbered stickers and stuck them on bright green cages ready for judging to start. Everyone was so dedicated to mice. Everyone was talking mouse talk. It was like a foreign language to me!

All the mice were different ages, colours and varieties I did not realise there were so many different ones. The show ended with the annual general meeting with strong arguments about the mice. I did not know people could get so worked up over these small animals with a tail.

After a few more mouse shows Eric asked whether I would like to marry him (and his mice). I knew I wanted to marry him, but what about the mice? Could I put with them? He said that the mice were part of him and so in the end, I said yes.

I will always remember at our wedding last July giving a toast to the **Mouse Club**. I am sure of all the toasts made on wedding days this was the funniest.

When we first moved into our house in

Enfield I was pleased that the mousehouse was down the end of the garden as far away from the house as possible. I liked mice but to have eighty to a hundred next to the house horrified me.

This year we managed to get Eric's old shed transported from his parents house and now we have it backing on to the house and I do not mind. In fact I have ten Dutch mice of my own now which are doing very nicely at all the Richmond mouse shows. In fact this month I am one mouse point behind Eric who has been keeping mice for eighteen years!

We receive a lot of mousey telephone calls from prospective London and Southern Counties Mouse Club members (Eric being the secretary). Some callers have mice already and want better ones. Some are just starting. People who telephone us range from the ten-year-old wanting his first mouse to the granny wanting a mouse for her grandson/granddaughter. Few of the callers end up as active members of the club which I think is due to the fact that people think we are a mouse advice bureau. One person wanted to know the address of a mouse bookshop!

There is never a dull moment with the mice. Once I told them at the bank where I work that Eric and I kept mice. We had a write-up in the bank newspaper and so everyone knew and now they say 'How are the mice!'

The pet shop owner has got to know about the mice and asks after them. Neighbours and friends and relatives are always asking after the mice and it makes a good talking point. If ever I am talking to someone I have never seen before I talk about the mice and I am never forgotten again!

At work I have a personnel report to fill in once a year. In the last one I mentioned the mice. I am sure whoever files my report must have a laugh when they see that I am a



member of the London and Southern Counties Mouse Club.

About six years ago I had my palm read and the palmist said I would do a lot of travelling. I thought I would marry someone who would take me round the world on various trips, to Spain, France or America. Instead here I am, travelling to various mouse shows at Southsea, Dagenham, Shipley and Richmond. The gipsy never told me that I would be travelling around Great Britain with the mice!

With Eric and his mice there is never a dull moment. I would never have thought I would be a mousewife but, now that I am I really enjoy myself. I can't think of life without the mice. They mean so much to Eric and I. I never want to be without them. I love Eric and our mice too much to ever part with them.

ANGELA JUKES

## Club secretaries

**National Mouse Club:** Mr S Smith, 26 Grasmere Road, Bolton, Bradford.

**Airedale Mouse Club:** John Kellett, 56 Claremont Grove, Wrose, Shipley, West Yorkshire. telephone Bradford (0274) 585621.

**Calder Valley Mouse club:** E Longbottom, 109 Hopwood Lane, Halifax. Yorkshire. telephone Halifax 54124.

**Faywood Hamster, Mouse, Gerbil and Fancy Rat Club:** Mrs F Johnson, 79 Burdett Avenue, Westcliff-on-Sea, Essex.

**Greater Manchester Mouse Club:** D Taylor, 252 Stockport Road, Marple, near Stockport, Cheshire SK6 6EX. Telephone 061-427 2762.

**London and Southern Counties Mouse Club:** Eric Jukes, 26 Downs Road, Enfield, Middx EN1 1PB, telephone 01-366 6162.

**Midland Mouse Club:** C Harlow, 11 Holly Bank Estate, Austrey, Atherstone, Warwickshire.

**North Yorkshire Mouse Club:** Mrs N Horne, Edoifiss, Echo Hill, Sleights, near Whitby, North Yorkshire YO22 5AE. Telephone: Whitby (0947) 810272.

**National Fancy Rat Society:** Joan Pearce, 57 Myrtledeane Road, Abbey Wood, SE2.

**National Mongolian Gerbil Society:** Mrs M Brookes, 3 Tracks Lane, Wigan WN5 7BL.

**Northern Counties Fancy Rat Society:** Mrs H Dagg, 44 Bower Street, Mill Hill, Blackburn, Lancashire.

**Yorkshire Hamster Club:** Mrs E Baxby, 8 Rawlins Court, Coal Aston, Sheffield.

**Midland Hamster Club:** R Hegarty, 36 Welbeck Street, Mansfield, Nottinghamshire. Telephone: Mansfield 36580.

**Southern Hamster Club:** W Drake, Rosewood, 29 Bardenville Road, Canvey Island, Essex.

## Obituary

### Ellis Fletcher

IT WAS with profound regret I heard of the sudden death in hospital of Ellis Fletcher on Monday May 21.

Ellis was one of the old school of fanciers and was a good judge of a mouse. In latter years he did not show but his services as a judge were in demand at Airedale, Calder and Manchester. He will be sadly missed and the Fancy will be the poorer for his passing.

On behalf of the National Mouse Club I send our deepest sympathy to his family and friends. GEORGE LUPTON

IT WAS with deep regret that I learned of the death, suddenly of Ellis Fletcher. Ellis was one of the quiet members of the Fancy, always preferred to remain in the background but always ready to give assistance in whatever way he could. A great friend and helper to the Calder Valley Mouse Club since it was formed, his passing will be a sad loss to the Fancy.

On behalf of the Calder Valley Mouse Club, we offer to those dearest to him, our deepest sympathy on their sad loss. E LONGBOTTOM

# Ailments in hamsters (Part 3)

Dennis Homes

## Overgrown teeth and claws

This is more common among old animals, who spend far less time exercising and gnawing. Teeth and claws can be cut quite effectively with a sharp pair of nail clippers. When trimming the teeth you should hold the animal by the scruff of the neck and trim off a very small portion at a time. When clipping the claws the paws should be held up to the light so as to show the blood vessel inside. Never cut up as far as the vessel. If by accident this vessel is cut then the paw should be dipped in cornflour to halt the bleeding.

In younger animals overgrown teeth may be the result of not eating enough hard food. If the hamster is kept in an aquarium and has no bars on which to gnaw then a piece of seasoned deciduous hard wood or a pumice stone should be provided.

Occasionally a hamster is born with a misaligned jaw. This may prevent the upper and lower incisors from rubbing against each other, which is very important for keeping the teeth at a suitable length. If the animal is to survive the teeth must be trimmed regularly or else the lower incisors could pierce the roof of the mouth. Hamsters suffering from this should never be used for breeding in case the affliction is hereditary.

## Paralysis

Paralysis can be caused from living in too small a cage or, in the case of old animals, through lack of exercise. In most cases it affects the hind legs, and the creature will try to drag itself around the cage while persistently toppling over. Spinal injuries resulting from a fall is another possible cause. If in this condition the hamster should be seen by a veterinary surgeon. In most cases, however, the only option is to put the animal down.

## Parasites

Parasites are very uncommon among hamsters, but if any of your stock does become infected then swift action is required. There are four main types of external parasite: fleas, lice, ticks and mites. Each of these have very many species.

Fleas are small wingless insects with powerful hind legs that enable them to leap several feet at a time. They live off their host by biting the flesh and sucking the blood. The bites become quite irritating to the animal who makes things

worse by scratching. Fleas lay their eggs in the fur and they can take up to six weeks to hatch.

Lice are also insects and are often mistaken for fleas. Unlike fleas, however, they spend their whole life cycle on one host. Lice also live by sucking the blood of the host.

Mites are arthropods. They are about the size of a pinhead and usually red in colour. They live in the follicles of the hair and, unlike fleas and lice, are difficult to spot. The first sign of a mite infection is a number of small sores and scabs, usually around the neck.

Ticks, which are quite rare in hamsters, are also arthropods. They have small heads attached to a large stomach. As they bite into the flesh of the host blood is sucked up into the stomach, which becomes black and enlarged. They attach themselves to the flesh by their teeth and must be removed very carefully with tweezers. When removing a tick it is important that no part remains attached to the host, as this could cause an abscess.

Infections of fleas, lice and mites can usually be effectively cured by dusting the animal with 'Lindane Dust' which is available from many chemists. The powder should be worked well into the fur with a toothbrush, and you should also ensure that the cage and bedding are treated too. Treatment should be repeated regularly for up to six weeks as the powder only kills the parasites and not the eggs. In a severe infestation a far stronger powder may be necessary. Pyrethrum or Malathion, which are obtainable from a veterinary surgeon, are both very effective. When using these powders they should be administered as per the manufacturers' recommendations.

By far the worst kind of parasite known is the itch mite. This is the creature responsible for causing mange. The previously mentioned powders are of no use in combating the itch mite, but Alugan or Tetrasol can be effective if the infection is caught in time. In all outbreaks a veterinary surgeon should be consulted who may, in rural farming areas, inform the local authority. If neglected, mange can be fatal. The first indication of trouble is a severe loss of fur and large sore patches on the body of the host. If an outbreak is discovered all hay and sawdust in your possession should be burnt, as this may have been the original source of the mite. Every animal that you own should be treated and all cages and equipment thoroughly scrubbed with

either Lysol or Domestos. The whole area where your stock is housed should also be scrubbed with a strong disinfectant. This mite can also cause scabies in humans, so great care should be taken not to infect yourself. In people it tends to affect the skin between the fingers, the nipples and genital regions. Special clothing should be used when handling your stock and hands should be thoroughly scrubbed, especially before going to the toilet.

Fortunately mange is very rare nowadays, but it is obviously wise to be aware of the condition.

## Wet Tail

'Wet Tail' is the name commonly given to a severe form of scours or diarrhoea. If immediate action isn't taken the disease will spread rapidly through the whole hamstery resulting in the death of the complete stock. For this reason it is regarded by breeders as the most dreaded ailment in hamsters.

It is caused by a bacterial infection, possibly of Escherichia Coli. A sudden loss of weight is often the first indication of the disease and the animal appears thin in the face and has a dull, open coat. The whole area around the anus becomes saturated with a yellowish fluid and an offensive odour may sometimes be present.

If caught in its early stages treatment with an antibiotic such as neomycin or terramycin may be effective. In most cases, however, the decline is so rapid that antibodies are never built up in time to save the animal.

## Euthanasia

If a hamster is very ill it is often the kindest thing to put it down. This can be done either by a vet or at a RSPCA or PDSA clinic. Sometimes there are occasions, such as late at night, when it is impossible to get to a vet. Rather than prolong the animal's misery you must kill it yourself. This can be done effectively by holding it still on a table top and administering a sharp blow to the back of the neck with a hard object such as the handle of a hammer. Many people are repulsed by this method and rather than cause unnecessary suffering by squeamishly fumbling they would be better off using a less violent method. Lidlet ether, which can be obtained from a chemist, is painless and effective. The creature should be placed in a biscuit tin together with a swab of cotton wool soaked in the ether. The lid, which

should contain a few punched holes, must be placed on the tin and as soon as the animals become unconscious the holes should be covered up.

When administering ether it should only be done in the open air, as it is highly inflammable. A breeder should always keep ether on hand in case of an emergency. Only small amounts should be kept at any given time and it should be stored in a cool place away from any naked flames and sunlight. NEVER smoke while using ether.

## General care

One of the biggest spreaders of disease are flies. They contaminate food and carry a whole range of bacteria. Flies in the hamstery can be quite a problem and endeavours to reduce their numbers must always be taken. The best method, by far, is the old fashioned fly paper. These should be placed at strategic points around the hamstery and changed whenever need be. Never use a fly spray in the presence of hamsters as it could cause them harm. If your stock is housed in an outside shed then during the months of September and October, as the weather gets colder, the warmth could attract flies inside. If the numbers become too high it may be necessary to move out all the cages and utensils and give the whole area a thoroughly good spray. For this operation you should close the door and all the windows and ensure that all crevices and corners are sprayed so as to kill any eggs. It is advisable that you wear a mask while spraying. After a couple of hours the windows and door should be opened and once the fumes have finally gone the cages can be returned.

Another point to bear in mind if you have an outside hamstery is that of wild rodents. Adequate precautions should always be taken to keep mice and rats out of the shed as they tend to carry a

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