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Know Your Exotic

by Ralph R. Snodgrass, Jr.*

1. This exotic household pet is a ............
2. Another popular name is the ............
3. Which of the following is not true in regard to these animals?
   a. They are nocturnal creatures.
   b. They may inflict severe bites.
   c. Their natural habitat is the jungles of tropical America.
   d. They tolerate cold climates well.
   e. They may live for more than 20 years.
4. Recommend a satisfactory diet for maintenance of this animal in captivity.
5. What vaccination program is recommended for these creatures?
6. The normal body temperature is:
   a. 100° to 102° F

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1. Photograph courtesy of Doctor David Graham, Department of Pathology, Iowa State University.
2. Mr. Snodgrass is a fourth year student in the College of Veterinary Medicine, Iowa State University.

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Three common North American wild animals that are related to this creature and which may also be seen by the veterinarian are the.................. , .................. , and .................. .

8. What types of general anesthetics would you use on this animal?

The kinkajou (Potos flavus), also commonly called the “honey bear,” is a native of the tropical jungles of Central and South America. The kinkajou belongs to the family Procyonidae, which also includes the olingos, the lesser and greater pandas, the ring-tailed cat (cacomistle), the coatimundi, and the raccoon. The last three of these animals are also frequently kept as pets.

The kinkajou will weigh from three to six pounds. It usually measures 16.5 to 23 inches from the head to the base of the tail. The prehensile tail is nearly as long as the body and is rounded and tapering.

Kinkajous are nocturnal creatures, living most of the time in trees. Their diet in nature consists primarily of fruits plus some insects and small animals. In the wild, one and rarely two young are born in the spring or summer. The eyes of the young open at ten days and they are capable of hanging by their tails by seven weeks. Kinkajous seldom reproduce in captivity. The longest recorded age in captivity is 23 years and 7 months but 19 years is more likely the usual life span.

Kinkajous make excellent pets when captured at an early age and treated kindly. Although they seldom bite when kept as pets since early life, kinkajous may be very vicious biters in the wild and when abused or frightened as pets.

In captivity, the kinkajou should be provided with branches for climbing. A sleeping box is not required as they are content to sleep in the open, if the light is not too strong. Kinkajous react well to red lighting. Unlike the raccoon and ring-tailed cat, the kinkajou does not tolerate cold climates well and must be housed indoors in winter.

A suitable diet in captivity consists of 75% commercial dog food or a commercial monkey chow with the remaining 25% made up of fruits, vegetables, milk, eggs, meat and bread. Excellent fruits are apples, oranges, bananas, and grapes. It is reported that ice cream is a favored item but should be given sparingly.

Examination and treatment of the kinkajou is similar to the domestic dog and cat. The normal body temperature is 98 F. The most important aspect of veterinary care is immunization. The raccoon is the only member of the family Procyonidae that has been proven to be susceptible to both feline and canine distemper. Some zoo veterinarians recommend that all members of this family, including the kinkajou, be vaccinated for both conditions. Immunization against feline distemper (panleukopenia) is achieved in the same manner as in the domestic cat. A modified live virus (tissue culture origin) canine distemper vaccine has been reported safe in the kinkajou. A killed vaccine must be used in the immunization against rabies.

Surgery may be safely performed under either intravenous barbiturates or inhalation anesthetics. Dosages are reported to be the same as for dogs. Kinkajous are hypersensitive to procaine. Therefore this local anesthetic must be used cautiously to avoid intravenous injection.

All skin incisions should be closed using either stainless steel or a subcuticular suture to discourage removal of the sutures by the animal.

REFERENCES

2. Graham, David L., Assistant Professor, Department of Veterinary Pathology, Iowa State University, Ames Iowa: Personal communications.

Iowa State University Veterinarian