



Care sheet—Spinifex Hopping Mouse

Spinifex Hopping Mice (*Notomys alexis*) are highly social - grooming, huddling and nesting together. They live in small groups of one or more adult females with one or more adult males, with larger group sizes of different ages and sex, having been found in nests in the wild.



In captivity, Spinifex Hopping Mice can be held in pairs of one male and one female or in groups. Introductions should be made carefully, to prevent agonistic behaviours towards unfamiliar individuals. Fighting does occur between males but it is not as serious as that between females, which often results in wounds. However, once established, groups are usually compatible with little concern.

Spinifex Hopping Mice are placental mammals. Gestation is 38-40 days. Litter size is one to five. The young are weaned at 30-35 days and reach sexual maturity around 90 days of age. Group members are usually tolerant of newborns and juveniles, with some helping to rear the young.

Spinifex Hopping Mice are nocturnal. The animals will generally scatter and hide when spooked by lights turning on. To best enjoy them house them in a dark room and use a small torch or bluelight to watch them forage, etc.

Housing

Spinifex Hopping Mice are not to be held with other species.

In the wild, Spinifex Hopping Mice shelter during the day in deep burrows. Groups utilise several burrows, all of which are interconnected.

Enclosures for captive Spinifex Hopping Mice should be constructed of non-chewable material such as glass or metal, to prevent escape. The roof should be removable and made of mesh to ensure adequate ventilation. A glass front on the enclosure will allow easy viewing.

Different substrates can be used including soil, recycled paper, cat litter, sawdust, sand, leaf litter, straw, or eucalyptus mulch. If sand is used, it should be fine, as coarse sand (such as bricklayers sand) is abrasive to the mammals' feet. Fine sand can be sieved for easy cleaning.

Provide, for a pair of Spinifex Hopping Mice, an enclosure of at least 50 cm x 50 cm x 40 cm (length x breadth x height), and for each additional Spinifex hopping-mouse in that enclosure, an additional 20 cm x 20 cm floor space. The height quoted is the height above the substrate.

Furnishings that provide opportunities for activity must be included in enclosures. Rocks for the Hopping Mice to climb over should be included, and other items such as fresh branches (leafy native cuttings) millet sprays, wood shavings and small plastic or cardboard pipes, will assist in creating a variable environment within the enclosure. Running wheels could also be provided, ensuring you purchase the appropriate size wheel to prevent inflicting back or foot injuries.



Changing the position of furnishings might also assist in stimulating activity.

Nesting areas and structures must be provided for Hopping Mice to allow them somewhere to retreat, to sleep raise young and feed. Nest boxes of a size appropriate to the number of Hopping Mice kept should be provided. Enclosures should be held indoors, but not in direct sunlight, as they can get very hot during summer.

The recommended temperature range is 15-25°C. If heating is not available, then the provision of ample bedding material and keeping several mammals together will allow huddling and a greater chance to keep warm.

Hygiene and cleaning

All enclosures should be spot cleaned every couple of days, to remove faecal matter and uneaten food. The regularity with which an enclosure should be thoroughly cleaned (i.e. scrubbed) will depend on the size of the enclosure and the number of mammals it contains.

Food and water

In the wild, Spinifex Hopping Mice eat seeds, arthropods, fungi, grass, roots and flowers. A seed mix (finch or small parrot mix) and mixed vegetables will be easy to provide. A vegetable mix comprised of carrot, sweet potato, broccoli, cauliflower, apple, and spinach or endive leaf in roughly equal proportions, dusted with calcium and vitamin E powder to prevent deficiencies from occurring in captive animals.

Adequate quantities of food and nutrients must be provided to ensure that each Spinifex hopping mouse can maintain good health, and meet its physiological demands for states such as pregnancy, lactation, growth, exercise and cold exposure, and to avoid metabolic and nutritional diseases. Food should be provided in small dishes.

Water can be provided in small dishes or water sipper bottles. The nozzles of sipper bottles should be checked daily to make sure the nozzle is working properly.

Rodent teeth grow continuously, so Spinifex Hopping Mice must be provided with suitable material for gnawing, such as non-toxic branches and nuts.

Health

Special care needs to be taken in isolating individuals, as they are a highly social species. Separation should be used only when animals are not compatible, or fighting, or when breeding needs to be managed. Extra effort will need to be made to maintain an individual hopping-mouse's enclosure within a comfortable temperature range (i.e. 15-25°C), i.e. by heating, as they will be unable to use group mates for extra warmth. Note that it is possible that isolation could lead to psychological stress, due to the social nature of the species.

Handling and transport

Spinifex Hopping Mice are best caught while they are asleep in their nest boxes. However, due to the size of their enclosures, they are not difficult to catch, so any time is suitable.

They can either be tipped from the nest box into a calico catching bag, or caught by placing a cupped hand over them. Once in the catching bag, the mammal can be handled by holding its head down with one hand and using the other hand to grab it over the shoulders so that the head is held securely between the index and middle fingers.

Hopping Mice must never be caught by the tail, as the tail sheath is likely to slide off; which causes that section of the tail to dry out and drop off.

