

Glider Primer: 24 Questions and Answers

Also on Gliderpedia:

<http://www.sugarglider.com/gliderpedia/index.asp?MostCommonQuestionsAskedByNewSuggieOwners>

One of our members sent me this massive list of questions this week and Gail and I figured it would be better to answer them in public so it could help more than one person.

Also, we welcome other comments from the rest of you we can save in our archives.

1. How can you tell the difference between play fighting and real fighting?

Play fighting is characterized by gentle slaps, playful lunges, hiss and chit sounds and wrestling. Real fighting is punctuated by low-pitched growls, high-pitched screaming, long, blood-letting bites and rolling in a ball for prolonged periods. If they are "real" fighting the sound of it is very frightening. Of course, you need to separate them immediately if they are doing this. You may be bitten at "blindly" during this, but you have to take them apart.

2. How often should they be let out of their cage to play and for how long?

The longer the better. If you have the ability to let them out "all the time" and use a glider-proof room as an indoor "aviary" by all means do it. Even better is a real aviary although that is not practical for most of us. I look at the cage as a safe harbor, eating place and nesting spot. If you do not have the ability to let them out for long periods at a time - then try for an hour to two hours. The more interaction with your gliders the better - otherwise they kind of regress into progressively "wilder" behavior.

3. What are household dangers that should be avoided?

See the file on Ed & Gail's Free Range Glider Guidelines:
http://files.meetup.com/768852/FREE_RANGE_GLIDER_RULES.pdf

4. What are behaviors peculiar to males? Females?

With some notable exceptions, males and females are about the same. They are both

inquisitive, playful, affectionate and communal.

Males are the ones doing the mounting when they mate and they bite down on the back of females' necks when they do that. Females will often lunge at and fight with males who are trying to mate with them. His advances are often initially spurned by the female.

Males also masturbate by "flossing" their penis' between their teeth. There is no evidence that females have a similar behavior.

Males are also aggressive scent markers. A male will grab the ears/head of any colony member and vigorously run the top of his head on their bellies. He will also rub his chest all over them in the same manner. This is scent marking with their scent glands. Like females, they also scent mark by urinating on their territory (including on you).

Although both males and females will defend a territory against invaders, it is more likely the alpha male will be doing most of the attacking of outsiders. Males are also especially territorial and protective of their younger joeys and will often attack if you or another creature approaches the nesting area unannounced or unwelcome.

Females lick a path from their cloaca to their pouch when joeys are about to be born. This slickness makes it easier for the joeys to climb up to the pouch. Sometimes, the male will help her to lick that path. They will also do this just after mating sometimes I guess in anticipation of the event 16 days later.

Females will "sing" to their in pouch joeys.

Both males and females will groom the babies and come scoop them up onto their backs to take them back to the nest if you play with them too long when they are young. Males also teach joeys how to eat solids by sharing food straight out of their mouths with Joeys. This is a behavior seen close to weaning time.

5. How do I know if she is pregnant?

Without pulling the pouch apart and peering in, it is sometimes hard to tell. But it is not safe for you to forcibly pull the pouch apart and look in because if you dislodge the Joey from the teat, it's jaw is not well-formed enough to reattach and may die as a result.

The first sign of a female being pregnant is quiet, somber and solitary behavior for several days after mating. This is not always the case, but if she is acting strange for a few days after mating, she probably has conceived.

The second sign of pregnancy is the licking of the slick path we talked about above and the joeys crawling from the birth canal up to the pouch. It is not likely you will see this. This usually happens between 6 AM and Noon on the 16th day from conception.

The third sign will be some "floofiness" around the pouch area. It's hard to describe it exactly, but the pouch slit will slightly separate and the tummy around the pouch will look a little puffy.

The fourth sign, about a month after the joeys drop into the pouch will be little pea-sized bumps on either side of the pouch. IF there are two joeys, there will be one on each side. It is rare there are three or four. Usually it is two.

The final sign, at about 8 weeks from dropping in to the pouch is tails, arms and legs sticking out of the pouch. That is a sign that the joeys are very close - within days - of coming out of pouch.

6. How do I prepare for suggies to be born?

The most important thing you can do is to ensure the most stress-free environment as possible.

Also, you must make sure mom is getting enough protein. Moms need more protein when they are nursing. It's OK to give her more mealies for the next few months. You can also feed fresh food at night and replace it in the morning with more fresh food in case she wants

to get up in the middle of her "night" to eat. If she feels like she is getting plenty of nourishment, that lowers stress.

Also, see the post on Rejection Preparedness
http://www.sugarglider.com/glidergossip/topic.asp?TOPIC_ID=9004

7. Should I use a hot rock?

No. These are popular with mill breeders who sell their joeys way too young. So they sell you a hot rock because the joeys need to stay warm and they've been yanked off of their moms too quickly. The hot rock, in this instance is just a crutch that allows those breeders to sell the joeys at a young age. Once joeys are weaned, they are old enough to regulate their own body heat. There are circumstances where supplemental heating is needed as in sick or rejected joeys (See rejection preparedness above).

8. Should I use a leash?

No. Leashes have been known to both strangle and kill gliders as well as cause damage to the platagium (flying membrane). If your glider is not tame enough to carry around without him or her running away - then don't take them outside.

9. Why do they smell?

Well, there are two kinds of smell. One is just from being dirty. But this smell does not last long for mature gliders who were raised well because they groom themselves clean. In some cases, if your glider was taken away from mom and dad too quickly, he or she will not have learned how to groom - so they will smell from bits of food or waste that they have not learned how to clean. Eventually they will learn on their own.

The other smell is the "musk" or "funk" of the male gliders when they are in bloom scent-wise. Their scent glands (head, chest, cloaca) are charged-up by the testosterone created by their male parts. This is normal and this scent is used to scent mark their colony members and also used to rub on the females in a precursor to mating. This smell goes

away when you neuter males because the neutering stops the manufacture of testosterone.

10. Why do they pee on me?

They pee on you for two reasons. First, because they have to pee like any other animal and need to relieve themselves. So if they happen to be on you when they "have to go" then you get wet. Second, they pee (just drops at a time in intervals) to mark you as their territory. It is normal and a sign that they consider you to be theirs when they do this.

11. Can they be housebroken?

Not really. But they do have a tendency to pee and poo within minutes of emerging from their nesting area so you can anticipate this by holding a tissue under them or putting them in a designated "poo spot" when you first let them out...

12. Does it hurt the males to be neutered?

Of course it hurts. I mean their flesh is being cut by a knife or a laser. But they are typically anesthetized so the pain is not as apparent. Some vets will send you home with pain killers for them. It usually only takes them a day or two to recover and be back to normal. The exception would be if they start to tear at the wound and start to self-mutilate - so you have to keep a close eye on them after any kind of surgery.

13. Why should I neuter?

There are both moral and practical reasons to neuter.

A favorite answer is you should neuter so your suggies don't bring any potentially unwanted lives into the world. There are a lot of unwanted gliders out there and a lot of them are rescued from would-be hobby breeders who find themselves neck-deep in gliders and then feel the need to "bail out" after about a year. Just take a look at the classifieds for evidence of that.

Another answer is the males are generally easier to deal with and less territorial after

neutering. But this is not always true, especially if they have already mated, raised young and established a territory before they were neutered. If your motivation is to make them less territorial, that's a shaky premise.

Another answer is the males' scent is dramatically decreased after neutering.

Keep in mind that males, especially once who have already mated, will continue to mount and attempt to mate with colony members after neutering. That urge never really goes away.

14. When should I neuter?

Somewhere between 3 and 4 months. This is because males can actually be sexually mature at as little as 4 months. But you don't want to do it too soon because it's a good idea to have meat on their bones and out of the baby stage before they are operated on.

15. What is the best place to buy gliders?

If you really care about the gliders and not your own convenience, a rescue is where to buy them from. There is also an informative post on this:
http://www.sugarglider.com/glidergossip/topic.asp?TOPIC_ID=7412

16. Any plants they should stay away from?

Yes, there are many plants that are not safe: Here is a good URL for that which is basically a safe and toxic plant listing:
http://www.moondance-sugargliders.com/sugar_glider_plant-tree_information.htm

Besides eucalyptus there are some other plants you can feed them. For example, *Plumbago europaea* has a nice blue flower and the gliders love it. Bottlebrush (*Callistemon phoeniceus*, or *C. linearis*, or *C. rugulosus*) is also treat for them. They like to battle with the leaves and stems and crunch on the blossoms. These are easy to get at a local nursery. *Acacia aneura* is the Acacia tree we use and we ordered that from a local nursery here in Las Vegas. In Australia, the type of Acacia that is popular is the "Golden Wattle" (*Acacia longifolia*). Also popular there is the *Grevillea* "Honey Gem" (hybrid of *G. pteridifolia* and

G.banksii) which has lots of nectar (our AU friends say gliders go nuts for it). They also like Rose blossoms. With any plant be sure it has not been sprayed with insecticide.

17. How big a cage do they need?

That depends on how much time they spend outside of the cage. For example, if they roam free outside of the cage all night, it does not matter much how big it is... But for most people, a cage size that is a minimum 30 " wide, 17" Deep, 34" tall with 1/2" spacing is sufficient.

18. What is the optimal number to keep together?

Three or four.

19. What type of bonding pouch is the safest?

Any pouch with hidden stitches and a "screen door" so they can breathe.

20. Why do I have to cut their nails?

You need to cut their nails because if you don't their nails get caught on things - especially material. The reason this is bad is because if they get their nails stuck, they will bite off their finger or foot to get loose. That leads to death from blood loss, infection, self mutilation, etc. So as much as a pain as it is to do it - you have to. It does not matter if they don't like it.

They'll get over it. It's better than death any day.

21. How do I cut their nails?

There are several ways. First, you can pay to have a vet or animal care professional do it for you. It's usually \$5 per animal. Second, you can do it yourself with the help of another person. The one person wraps the suggie up in a fleece like a "suggie burrito." You then pull out each hand/foot one by one and do the deed while the other person holds the suggie. If you have an especially cooperative suggie, you can do it yourself. It is a good idea to give them treats during and after the procedure to keep their mind off of it. You only clip the very

tippy-tip of the nail - not down to where it changes color. If you cut too much off they will bleed and you can stop that bleeding with a styptic pencil or flour or corn starch. But you should not cut them that deep if you pay attention and only cut the tippy tip off.

You can also try putting sandpaper inserts in their wheels. That works for individuals that use the wheel a lot.

You can also try a nail file to smooth down the tippy-tip of the nail. That means you'll have to do it more often, but it might be easier to do this for you.

22. How much exercise do they need?

A lot. And if they don't get it they can become stiff, fat, depressed and unhealthy. The more exercise they get, the better. Give them all kinds of toys to play with and things to climb on and of course a wheel. Let them out to play and exercise as much as possible.

23. Why do they lick me?

Two reasons. First, to get moisture and sweat off of you if you sweat a lot. They like the smell of you and want to eat it. Second to groom you. That is a sign of affection.

24. Why do they nibble on me and scrape my skin with their teeth?

Because they are wild animals and they can't help themselves. This is a behavior that is similar to them scraping the bark off of trees and then sucking the sap off when the tree "bleeds." They will do the same to you. They will scrape a wound into you and lick your blood if you let them. They will peel off a scab, eat it and open the wound and lick your blood. They can't help it. You can distract them with a treat or a toy when they do this or put them in the cage to get them to calm down, or you can wear long sleeves or a shooting sleeve to curb the behavior. They are not doing it to hurt you - they are just wild crazy animals and they can't help themselves. That's one of the reasons they are called exotic and not pets for everyone....

