

movers & makers

ANIMALS

No such thing as a 'beginner pet'

All animals require knowledge of their needs, a financial commitment and a commitment to care for them throughout their lives

Connor Richardson

Animal
Talk



Currently, practices regarding pet stores and the sale of cats and dogs are undergoing welcome changes. The cats and dogs you see in stores in various parts of Canada are no longer from puppy mills or unknown sources; they are adoptable animals from local shelters. Unfortunately, other animals are being left behind.

Reptiles, small mammals and birds are still sold at pet stores, which begs the question, why are the animals that are often the hardest to care for still being sold as products?

The problem lies, in part, with the idea of marketing animals as "beginner pets." What does this mean, and how does an animal qualify as a beginner pet?

Do beginner pets require less care? Not at all. Bearded dragons, for example, are often classified as beginner pets, and at any given time there are several for sale in most pet stores. They are inexpensive, which makes them appealing to customers who want an exotic animal, but they also require a very specific temperature gradient, a very large tank and UVB lights that aren't sold in most pet stores.

Are beginner pets more resilient? No. Some birds are considered beginner pets, yet toxins released from Teflon or other non-stick pans over high heat can cause respiratory failure and sudden death.

Do beginner pets have a shorter lifespan and hence require a shorter-term commitment from owners? Again, no. Parakeets and water dragons can live up to 15 years, and leopard geckos can live up to 20 years. Even a goldfish, sometimes considered the ultimate no-commitment pet, should live for five to 10 years under the right conditions. However, all these animals are often classified as beginner pets.

Is a beginner pet less expensive? Although most of the animals I have mentioned are sold for under \$100, they require an initial set-up to ensure a healthy existence that can cost well over \$1,000. And that is without trips to the vet, special food and upgrades to tanks and lighting that most of these animals require as they grow.

The term beginner pet may



A young bearded dragon is shown in an enriched environment, with appropriate foodstuffs, environmental choices and a UVB light/heat source. A much bigger tank will be needed when the animal reaches its full length of nearly two feet, by about one year of age.

CONNOR RICHARDSON/SPECIAL TO THE GUARDIAN



These are before and after photos of a malnourished bearded dragon. A proper diet must include a variety of live insects, as well as fruits and vegetables.

CONNOR RICHARDSON/SPECIAL TO THE GUARDIAN

THINGS TO KNOW

Are you considering getting an exotic animal?

First, thoroughly research the species, including special dietary and environmental needs, eventual size, health concerns and any relevant laws or regulations in your area.

Check with a veterinarian or humane society for advice on reliable information sources.

lead consumers to think that these animals are less work, less expensive and require less commitment than other animals. Perhaps it also implies that, in some way, these animals are disposable or don't feel pain or form attachments.

CONTINUED ON C4

Happy endings



Cooper, a five-year-old golden lab mix, was adopted in January 2019. Ellie says: "Cooper is the sweetest, cuddliest and happiest dog ever. He loves playing fetch and snuggling. We are all so glad to have found our 'forever' best friend!"

ELLIE LANGSTON/SPECIAL TO THE GUARDIAN

PRINCE EDWARD ISLAND

SELF-HELP groups

This list of self-help groups is from Individual and Family Support, a program of the Canadian Mental Health Association, P.E.I. division. Listing a group does not necessarily signify endorsement of that group by the CMHA. Check with the specific group regarding weather or holiday cancellations. Contact 902-628-1648 or toll free at 1-800-682-1648 or find a complete listing of groups at www.pei.cmha.com/find-help/self-help-groups/.

For information

Alcoholics Anonymous 24-hour meeting information is at 902-892-2103.

AA 24-hour meeting information for Kings County is at 902-962-2305 or 1-866-961-2660.

AI Anon meets every day. Contact 902-892-9974 or www.freewebs.com/alanonmaritimes.

Narcotics Anonymous (NA) 24-hour meeting information is at 1-800-205-8402 or carna.ca.

Monday, June 3

Caring for the caregiver group meets at Hope Centre Clubhouse, 419 Main St. (Dufferin Street entrance), 7-8:30 p.m. Call 902-806-0286.

Smart Recovery group meets at Notre Dame Place, 67 Duke St., Summerside, 7 p.m. Contact smartrecoveryqueenspei@gmail.com or call 902-330-4357.

Still Here, a group for anyone with a mental illness, meets at the Canadian Mental Health Association, 178 Fitzroy St., Charlottetown, 1 p.m. Call Ashley, 902-628-3666, or email a.belanger-birt@cmha.pe.ca.

Winds of Change (Adult Children of Alcoholics) meets at St. Pius X church (side door), 106 St. Peters Rd., Charlottetown, 6:30 p.m. Call Wade, 902-292-5905, or Gary, 902-388-1284, or email acoapei@gmail.com.

Tuesday, June 4

Breast Cancer group is planning a dinner. For information on the dinner and the group, call Judy 902-569-3496 or email charlottetown-breastcancer@gmail.com.

Emotions Anonymous meets at the Access P.E.I. Building through the side door entrance, 48 Mill Rd., Wellington, 8 p.m. Call Angela, 902-854-2974.

F.L.Y. (First Love Yourself) meets at Credit Union Place, Boardroom 3, 511 Notre Dame St., Summerside, 6:30 p.m. Email Jamie at j_me321@live.ca.

Mental Health Check-In group meets at Community Mental Health and Addiction, 126 Douse Rd., Montague, 3 p.m. Call 902-838-0960.

Mental Health Check-In group meets at Community Mental Health and Addiction, 17 Knight Lane, Souris, 3 p.m. Call 902-687-7110.

Overcomers Outreach 12-step spiritual group for those with addiction meets at the Calvary Church, 9 Capital Dr., Charlottetown, 6:30 p.m. Call Rose-Marie, 902-367-2907.

CONTINUED ON C4

art exhibition and sale is today, 7-9 p.m., at the gallery, 111 Queen St.

ANIMALS

NO SUCH THING AS A 'BEGINNER PET' FROM C1

The reality is there is no such thing as a beginner animal. All animals require knowledge of their needs, a financial commitment and a commitment to care for them throughout their lives. Classifying an animal, any animal, as a "beginner pet" simply increases the likelihood that those animals will be neglected and disposed of when they become more

work than anticipated. Each has her own distinctive styles to convey her

work than anticipated.

Next in Animal Talk: Avoiding puppy mills

Connor Richardson is entering her final year at the Atlantic Veterinary College and has helped rescue several so-called beginner pets. Animal Talk is a bi-monthly column in The Guardian produced by the Companion Animal Welfare Initiative (CAWI), the goal of which is to improve the

been completed in the last three years, and the artists' goal in life is to inspire others.

welfare of owned and unowned companion animals on P.E.I. Members of CAWI are the P.E.I. Cat Action Team, P.E.I. Department of Agriculture and Forestry, P.E.I. 4-H, P.E.I. VMA, the Sir James Dunn Animal Welfare Centre at AVC, SpayAid P.E.I. and the P.E.I. Humane Society. For more information, see gov.pe.ca/agriculture/CAWI. Readers may send questions related to the well-being of owned and unowned companion animals to askcawi@gmail.com.

Trinity United Church, 9 Summerside, 8 p.m. Motion is at gambleranon

Mental Health group at the McGill Centre, 55 McGill Street, Charlottetown, 1:30 p.m. 368-4911.

Multiple Sclerosis group at the Atlantic Superstore Room, 465 University Avenue, Charlottetown. Call Jeanne, 902-675-2222. jeannemac@hotmail.com

SAnon (Reflections of anyone affected by a sexual behaviour meets town, 6 p.m. Call 902-368-4911.

Smart Recovery meets at Central Christian Church, 223 Kent St., Charlottetown, 7 p.m. Contact smartrecovery@gmail.com or 902-368-4911.