

FEATURES

ROOM FOR ONE MORE?



A fish takes a bit of time to look itself in the mirror in Jon Rutten's coral reef fish tank.

Adam Jones Emerald

■ Popular pets are bettas, lizards, snakes and cats

By Marcus Hathcock
Oregon Daily Emerald

As caravans of students pile into the residence halls this fall, many may miss the friendship of a favorite pet from home.

Their remedy? Buy a low-maintenance pet for the school year. From the residence halls to off-campus housing, pets become a part of many college lives.

In the residence hall presentation "Who Moved My Toothbrush?" during the Week of Welcome, H. P. Barnhart Hall Complex Director Jessica Pettitt said when it came to having a pet in the residence halls, the pet "must be able to live its entire life underwater."

"It (the iguana) followed us around, almost like a dog, but a little different. It was always watching us."

Frank Gaddini
East Campus apartment director

That limits a lot of the choices for "dorm dwellers," so it's no surprise that fish are widely seen as the ideal college pet.

Petco Manager Adam Gold recognized the exotic betta as the leading college pet, mainly purchased by women ages 18 to 25.

"People are looking for a real basic setup ... really small stuff," Gold said.

He added that one-gallon or smaller tanks are bought frequently because they don't take up much space.

While fish are regarded as the most purchased pet by many local pet shops, reptiles are also considered popular among the college crowd. Gold ranked lizards as the third most-often bought pet by college students, behind betta and amphibians.

Willamette Scamp's pet store's A.J. Sproston said reptiles are bought more than fish.

In the reptile class, Australian spiky-chinned lizards called bearded dragons are replacing iguanas in college dwellings, said Pet Time's Gary Villanueva.

Fish and reptiles aren't too uncommon as pets, but sugar gliders, scorpions and tarantulas?

Pet shop workers notice that more and more unorthodox pets are being bought. Sugar gliders, or flying squirrels, used to be pretty rare, Villanueva said, but that's not the case anymore. He said he sells about five sugar gliders a year at Pet Time, but knows of people who breed the animals independently.

Insect creatures, such as tarantulas and scorpions, are also at the top of Sproston's most popular pet list.

Inhabitants of the residence halls usually buy fish, as far as Villanueva was aware, which fits with Pettitt's "underwater policy." Such a policy could keep students from getting the college pet of their dreams.

"We've had a few people say they couldn't keep the pet because of the (rules of the) dorms," Sproston said.

As another alternative that surfaced three years ago, residence hall inhabitants eased their furry-pet blues by participating in workshops put on by the Humane Society and local pet shops.

According to Barnhart Hall Desk Assistant Lauren Manes, cats and dogs have been brought into various residence halls for students to hold and pet by the Humane Society. Manes also said there were field trips and opportunities for students to volunteer at the local pound if one day of pets didn't suffice.

Having a pet in a fraternity is a pretty common occurrence, according to Delta Sigma Phi member Aaron White. He said Delta Sigma Phi is one of the few fraternities on campus that doesn't have any pets.

"We would like to," White said. "But our house manager says we can't get a dog."

White and his fraternity brothers aren't giving up hope, though. He said the guys are "in the process" of getting a potbellied pig or an alligator.

Taking care of pets can bring great satisfaction, said Frank Gaddini, director of the University's East Campus Apartments.

"Pets are just great friends," Gaddini said. "Some people take great pleasure and responsibility in taking care of animals."

East Campus is the only apartment complex in University Housing which, Gaddini said, is a big draw for people wanting to live there. Over the years, however, there have been some peculiar pet scenarios at East Campus.

Gaddini said one family a few years ago kept a 3-foot iguana in their closet. When maintenance workers entered the apartment to do repairs, they found the iguana.

"It followed us around, almost like a dog, but a little different," Gaddini said. "It was always watching us."

A 6-foot python also left a lasting impression on Gaddini. The large reptilian pet, which belonged to an East Campus resident, slithered its way out of the oven's bottom drawer, much to the surprise of the apartment's cleaning staff.

"We were stunned!" Gaddini said.

Believe it or not, all of these pets are legal by the apartment's standards.

Gaddini said any domestic animal that's allowed by city laws to be owned by local residents is allowed to be owned by the East Campus residents. Pets that are not permitted are animals of the barnyard variety.

Gaddini once had to inform some residents that their "three little pigs" had to find somewhere else to live.

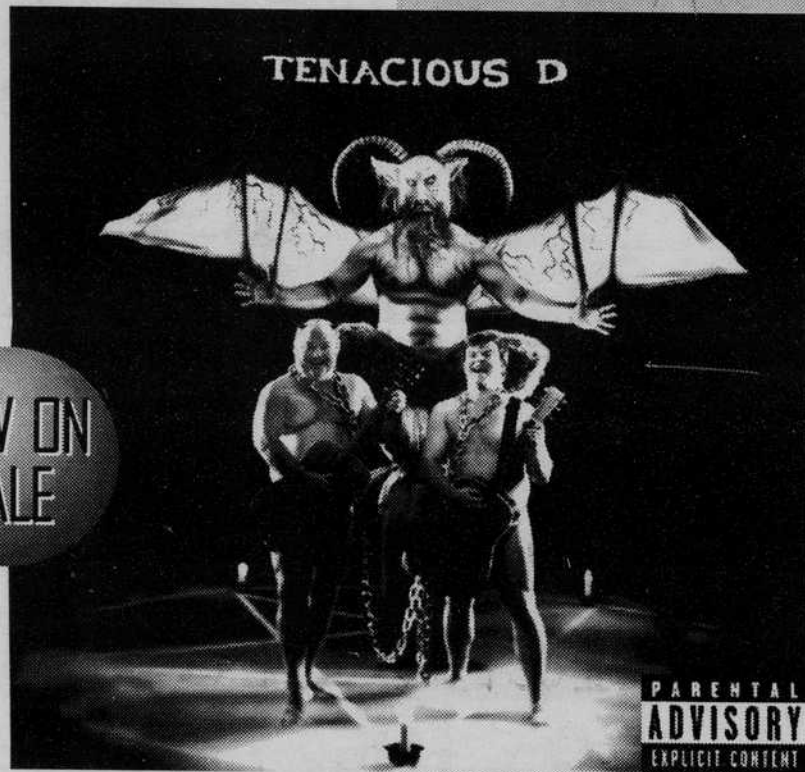
As the school year starts, many students will make the decision of whether to buy a pet. Check with your resident assistants, landlords, or other housing authorities to see if your favorite pet is legal before making a decision.

Then, keep in mind you will still have this pet in the spring. Gaddini said by June, Eugene becomes rampant with stray pets — particularly cats — because of owners who can't take them home after school ends.

If in doubt about owning pets, though, stuffed animals are usually pretty safe.

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