



HOW GUINEA PIGS LIVE IN THE WILD



Despite having been domesticated around 500 years ago, guinea pigs have not lost their primal instincts. In the wild, they live in the harsh climate of the high plains of South America, and this has made them highly adaptable. Guinea pigs live in small family units of three to ten animals. They spend most of the day foraging together and cover great distances, always using the same trails. Because they have no defence against their predators, they avoid exposed spaces, moving constantly from one bolthole to the next.

Family animals

To a guinea pig, there is nothing worse than a solitary life. Even if its owner devotes an exceptional amount of care and attention to it, this can never replace the company of other guinea pigs – nor can the company of an animal of a different species (e.g. a rabbit). Physical and social contact with others of its kind is vital to its well-being.

To meet a guinea pig's need for social contact, it must live with at least one other guinea pig – and if there

are three or more together, their activity levels rise significantly. The animals stimulate each other and are better able to engage in social behaviour, and what emerges is a lively community. Male guinea pigs establish social hierarchies. The alpha male of the group will dominate the other males. When there is competition over potential mates or territories, male guinea pigs can become very aggressive.

Flight animals who need to move

Guinea pigs must be provided with enough space to meet their innate urge to move, gnaw things and hide. In the wild, they busy themselves digging caves and holes, which serve as hiding places. Some varieties are excellent rock climbers.

Guinea pigs are flight animals, as they have a multitude of natural enemies, including wild cats, coyotes, wolves, snakes, hawks and owls. Humans can also be a threat, because in some countries people eat guinea pigs and/or use them in traditional medicines.

Vegetarian

Guinea pigs are herbivores (i.e. their diet is vegetarian). Their “menu” in the wild mainly consists of grass, hay, plants, various herbs, seeds, twigs and barks – depending on the habitat. Their diet is rich in fibre and includes plenty of vitamin C. This natural diet should serve as the basis for the food that is given to domesticated guinea pigs, although it can be enhanced with other components.



Above: Guinea pigs like vegetables.

Middle: Guinea pigs are family animals.

Loneliness is bad for them.

Below: Guinea pigs are flight animals by nature.

Mehr Menschlichkeit für Tiere

