

THE FANCY MOUSE

(Sixth of a Series)

By A. C. Jude

(Editor's Note: The last previous article in this series appeared in the December, 1950 issue.)

Having gained experience through the breeding of his first few litters of mice, the fancier will now be anxious to realize his ambition to place on the show bench some specimens which are likely to score in good company. The ambition can only be reached if the two parts of preparation are properly carried out. First the right kind of animal has to be carefully bred for, and secondly, this must be thoroughly prepared for show in the ways accepted as legitimate.

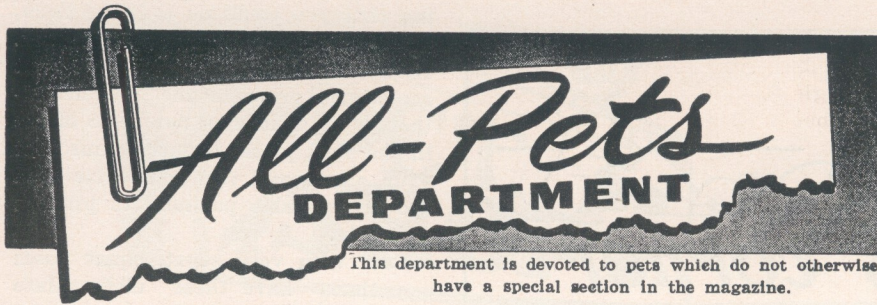
We will leave the breeding preparation for a while, and consider the actual show preparation of the animal produced.

To score on the show bench condition of the mouse is of vital importance, for without "condition" no animal can possibly show off either its type or color to best advantage. For healthy condition the first thought must be for feeding. The soft food should be reduced, and if possible, replaced by green food. A pinch of white millet and a few seeds of hemp two or three times during the week before the show are very helpful, and, of course, washed and air dried meadow hay given fresh every day is essential. Slightly under-feed for a few days rather than over-feed. The exhibit must be kept slim and racy looking.

If feeding is right more than half the show preparation is done, for the good feeding will result in the animal's alertness and in its coat condition. A mouse that sits about in its cage looking sorry for itself will never catch the judge's eye.

It is always well to keep a special box or two into which intended exhibits can be placed for a week or two prior to a show. These boxes should be much deeper than the ordinary breeding boxes, but must be well ventilated. The boxes should be lightly filled with very clean sweet hay, with a small proportion of straw mixed in. This, if cut into six-inch lengths, will keep the hay open and assist the ventilation. Overheating must definitely be avoided even though reasonable warmth is needed. The larger boxes allow more exercise for the exhibits, and if the oats and

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Skink Lizards

BY IAN HARMAN

The Skink Lizards are a very large family, containing about 400 species, of which about a dozen or so are quite commonly kept as pets. Some of these rather strange-looking lizards are legless, and others have small legs which seem quite inadequate in proportion to their large bodies.

But Skinks are lazy creatures, and like best to just lie idly in the hot sunshine, protesting feebly when disturbed by opening their mouths and hissing, or just waddling or gliding slowly to another spot.

Their characteristics are that the body is covered with rounded scales, beneath which there is a kind of bony armor. Their eyes all have round pupils and well-developed lids. Their heads are covered with symmetrical shields. None of them appear to climb trees or enter the water, but live in dry, almost desert places. They feed on insects, grubs and, in some cases, fruits and berries.

As pets they are among the easiest of reptiles to keep. They have a phlegmatic disposition and accept a life in captivity readily enough, and though not particularly brainy they are not as stupid as they look.

The Common Skink, *SCINCUS SCINCUS*, is about 8 inches long, with no claims to beauty at all. It is an odd-looking thick-set lizard with a wedge-shaped head which seems to be attached to the body without any connecting neck. It has a tail which is thick at the base, short in proportion to the body, conical and pointed. It has smooth scales and short limbs, and lives in north Africa.

This is perhaps the most active of the Skinks, and when wild it burrows into the sand if frightened. They

will do this in captivity, if given a chance, so it is best to lodge them in a case with an inch or so layer of sand and no other shelter. They love the sunshine and will come out and bask when their home is stood in the sun. They drink, but do not bathe, so only a small water container need be provided. Food should consist of flies, cockroaches and similar insects, maggots, and perhaps tiny pieces of raw meat.

The Eyed Skink, *CHALCIDES OCELLATUS*, is a rather more attractive reptile, with smooth glossy scales. The color varies from brown to olive, with a bronzy hue, and is marked with small black spots with a white dot in the center from which the lizard gets its popular name. In its habits this skink is very similar to the common species, and requires a sunny vivarium, with a sanded floor. It feeds on insect fare, and must not be put in with any smaller lizards, otherwise it may eat them.

Aldrovandi's Skink, *EUMECES SCHNEIDERI*, is an attractive member of the family, which comes from Palestine, Egypt and Persia. It is brown, spotted and striped on the back with red or golden brown. The lower parts are golden orange.

Aldrovandi's Skink is of a gentle disposition and makes quite an attractive pet, and does not appear to show the cannibalistic habits of some others of its family. It will eat, besides insects, mollusks, such as slugs and small snails. When eating snails, it cracks the shell all over with its teeth, then by vigorous shaking gets rid of the hard parts and swallows the soft portion.

These Skinks, coming from Africa,

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Skink Lizards

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Syria and similar hot places, cannot withstand our winters, and their vivarium must be kept warmed with a heater, thermostatically controlled, or an electric light bulb. In any case good bright lighting must be supplied as the lizards must be fed all the winter, and they only feed under the influence of warmth and sunlight—real or artificial.

Two very interesting members of the family are found in Australia, and have long been popular as pets, though they are never cheap to buy. They are the Stump-tailed Lizard and the Blue-tongued Lizard.

The Stump-tail, TRACHYSAURUS RUGOSUS, has been called the "two-headed lizard" because its tail is broad and flattened as is its head, and at a distance it does rather look as if the creature possessed two heads at opposite ends of the body. This lizard was discovered long before Australia was properly known, by the buccaneer William Dampier, who remarked, "I never did see such ugly creatures anywhere but here."

In spite of its unprepossessing appearance the Stump-tail makes a

good pet, being very gentle and tractable, and never attempts to wriggle from one's hand when picked up, but will lie quiet and feed from the fingers. Its range of diet is wide, and it will eat raw meat and fruit as well as grasshoppers, and other insects, snails and slugs, etc.

This lizard, and also the Blue-tongued, should be kept in a moderately heated vivarium during the colder months, the bottom of which should be covered with sand or gravel. It is about a foot in length, and covered with very rough scales on the upper surface, making it look like a pine cone. The color is brownish and yellowish.

The Blue-tongued Lizard, TILIQUA SCINCOIDES, is a large species, growing to about 20 inches in length, and lives very well in confinement. Like the Stump-tail, it has often bred in captivity, and is viviparous, giving birth to a number of young at a time. These may be reared on minced meat, insects, etc.

This lizard is a native of Australia and Tasmania, and is smooth-scaled, buff in ground color, marked with broad brown bands across the back. It loves to lie on a sunny path, and when approached opens its mouth

and shows its curious dark blue tongue. It looks somewhat forbidding in this attitude, but it is perfectly harmless. Australians call it the "Goanna." It is very fond of fruit, and sometimes raids strawberry beds.

The Fancy Mouse

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seeds are mixed into the hay, the mice will have to work through to reach their food, and in the process much useful natural grooming takes place.

In the case of white mice, a dusting with baby magnesia the day before dispatch will help to clean the coat. Allow the powder to work into the coat and then put the mice back into their preparation box. The powder will then work out in due course after having done its job.

When packing mice ready for dispatch to a show, make perfectly certain that everything is well aired—cage, hay and the sawdust which covers the floor of the cage. And here again, it is a great advantage to wash the hay, and under no circumstances should the hay be packed tightly into the cage, for if the mice sweat all the preparation given will have been wasted.

When sending to a show be very careful to place sufficient food in the cages to last the journey, but under no circumstances should soft food be given as coats are liable to be spoilt. Show managements in the British Isles are expected to feed all stock with moist food for the return journey, and where possible, to give fresh hay.

When exhibits reach home after a show these should be placed in a clean box, well fed, and after a few hours each mouse should be thoroughly dusted with an effective insect powder. This should be repeated the second day, and then all should be well. The precaution is advisable in case on the journeys, or at the show, some unwanted 'visitors' have been met. Normally mice are very clean animals, but if the possibility of fleas is not guarded against, some trouble can be caused.

All show mice must be perfectly tractable. They should be handled each day from quite an early age. A mouse that is timid will not show off to best advantage when handled by a judge. But it is not advisable to handle the show mouse for a day or two prior to a show. The natural 'bloom' should be left undisturbed.

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African Rats

By Science Service

WASHINGTON — Looking somewhat like undernourished porcupines, two strange, shy African rats have come to the National Zoological Park here. Their technical name is *Lophiomys*—meaning giant crested spiny-haired rat; their home, the British protectorate of Uganda in East Africa. Strictly vegetarians, and believed by Dr. William Mann, director of the national zoo, to be in a rodent family all to themselves, the animal newcomers may be the first of their breed ever to have reached the United States.

Questions and Answers

Q. What is the best antidote for mice?

A. A common female cat.

Q. How much credit is it advisable to allow in a store?

A. None. Time payments only by arrangement in the form of a written agreement.

Q. What is the best contraption for catching pigeons in the pen or when at large in the store room?

A. A crab net.

CORRECTION

In the April issue, in the article SO YOU WANT A PET SKUNK?, a misstatement occurred which should be corrected. The copy states that a skunk arriving at its new home should not be picked up the first few times by its tail. The opposite was intended; a skunk SHOULD be picked up by its tail in the beginning. This is to protect the owner.

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5c word; 12 times 4c word.
Details on page four.

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