

Bushy-Tailed Jirds

Bushy-Tailed Jirds (*Sekeetamys calurus*) come from those parts of Egypt and Arabia that are alongside the shores of the Red Sea. Although called Jirds Bushy-Tails are quite different in appearance to Jirds from the genus *Meriones* and indeed have a genus, *Sekeetamys*, all of their own. In the wild they live in barren deserts where all the topsoil has been blown away leaving nothing but bare rock. It is in the crevices between the rocks that Bushy-Tailed Jirds nest.



They are roughly the same size as a Mongolian Gerbil although longer and thinner in build. Their faces are long and pointed with very prominent whiskers. In colour they are a yellowish colour, but as their coat gets quite greasy a regular dust bath is needed to bring their appearance to its best. Their most striking feature is their tail. In a non-dominant animal this is quite thick along most of its length and is covered with hairs although the tip is sometimes bald. Only in a dominant male is this bush seen in all its glory. At its best the tail will be bushy all along its length and the tip will be white. In nature Bushy-Tailed Jirds live in loose colonies. They use their tail for balance when climbing and jumping but when frightened they will run with their tail raised high as a warning to other jirds.

Bushy-Tails are easy to care for. In general the advice for keeping Mongolian Gerbils is valid. A tank with various objects to clamber on is ideal. They are more nocturnal than Mongolian Gerbils but will wake up and explore if disturbed during the day. They are not frightened of people and are very intelligent. They like to have a hide away and will squeeze into a jar or other small item given to them to nest in. They like to gnaw and will demolish almost anything very quickly. Glass is the only substance that seems to stand up to them. Their coat seems to get greasy very easily but they enjoy using a sand bath.

They are social animals like most gerbils and are easier to introduce to one than with most other gerbil species. This is probably due to the loose nature of their colonies in the wild. You need to look out for overcrowding. They will barber one another if space is restricted and severe overcrowding will lead to cannibalism. As a guide, a pair of jirds needs at least a 60cm long tank.

A normal hamster food will provide a good diet. They like treats like sunflower seeds, millet or mealworms. They seem to need a lot of calcium. To keep them healthy it is a good idea to provide them with a small piece of chalk or cuttlefish. As with all gerbils they need water. In fact they drink more than many other gerbils.

Bushy-Tailed Jirds are sexually mature at 3 months of age although they are not yet fully grown at that age. The first litter normally appears at about 4 months of age although young mothers sometimes fail to raise them properly. The gestation period is about 21 days and although the litter size varies from 2 to 9 the average size is only 3 or 4 pups. They are quite long lived for gerbils with four or five years being not unusual.

In all, Bushy-Tailed Jirds make excellent easy to look after pets that are also very attractive to look at.

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