Sugar gliders and other Pets

Hi, my name is Dr. David Brust, and I’ve been a practicing exotic veterinarian for the last 25 years. I’m the author of “Sugar Gliders: A Complete Veterinary Care Guide” – and I’m also the president of the Association of Sugar Glider Veterinarians.

The purpose of this video series is to cut through all the internet misinformation out there, and teach owners like you the best - veterinary-approved - ways to raise and care for sugar gliders.

Now, just to make sure we’re all on the same page here, sugar gliders are also commonly known as “sugar bears” and “honey gliders” – and with that in mind, the goal of this video is to give you some tips and tricks about how to get your sugar gliders and other house pets to become buddies.

Taking a couple steps back, when sugar gliders were first brought into the United States back in 1993, it was originally thought they were some strange, “exotic” animal that did not possess the relational intellect to become a mainstream house pet. Because of this, it was just assumed that they would not be able to get along with other common house pets like cats and dogs.

Well although a few crazy internet websites still like to claim that sugar gliders and other pets can’t ever get along – this simply isn’t true. Over the last decade and a half, sugar gliders have become extremely popular companion animals – and owners who take the time to do it properly typically have a lot of success in getting their sugar gliders to become “best friends” with their other pets.

One of the main reasons this is believed to work so well is because sugar gliders are naturally a “colony” animal - which basically means they instinctively want to bond to a “group” or an entire family. This is especially true when they are introduced into a family unit at the ideal bonding age – which is between 7 and 12 weeks out of the pouch.

Now, no two animals are the same, so you should always use a lot of caution – and go slowly when introducing any new pets to each other. Like we discuss in another video on “bonding”, many pets bond largely by smell, so the first step is usually to take a couple pieces of cloth like this – rub it all over each animal – and then give it to the other one. This “scent-transfer” technique is used with a lot of pets – and it safely allows them to start to get used to each others smell – without risking a face-to-face encounter.

Now, after a few days of doing this, the next step is usually to try and introduce them to each other indirectly while the sugar glider is still safe inside its cage. Again, always use
your best judgment on this – and go slowly – but before you let the other animal in the room, you may want to go get a video camera. The whole process can be pretty entertaining! 😃

You see, most sugar gliders have what’s affectionately called a “Napolean Complex”, and even though they are tiny, they will almost always try to “act tough” and dominate any other animal they encounter. This included us humans too – and we talk about that more in the video about “bonding”. 😊

Now, when it comes to introducing them for the first time, usually the best way to do this is just to place the glider’s cage on the floor, and then allow the other animal – preferably on some sort of leash – to come up and sniff the cage. Now, like I said, when this happens don’t be a bit surprised if – rather than run – your little sugar glider stands up on its back legs and actually “charges” at your other pet making a big fuss. If this happens, don’t worry, it’s all just a natural part of them establishing dominance, and sometimes it can actually be pretty funny to watch a big tough dog or cat suddenly get bossed around by a tiny little glider. 😊

Again, from this point forward, the whole introduction process is really no different than introducing any two other pets. After a few days of getting along fine through the cage, you can let them smell each other directly through your hands or a bonding pouch, and then take it from there.

Now, as far as bonding with most “traditional” pets goes, sugar gliders will typically get along just fine with most cats or dogs – and often end up just “hitching a ride” around on them for hours at a time. Some birds though, can take quite a bit more time to bond, simply because large birds naturally tend to prey on gliders – and gliders will eat bird eggs and baby birds in the wild as a food source. Bonding with rodents – like hamsters, mice, or guinea pigs can also take a little more time – because sugar gliders instinctively tend to prey on small rodents in the wild.

Now, about the only common house pets that will almost never bond with sugar gliders are things like snakes, reptiles, and insects like spiders, etc.. – so if you have any of those in your home, it’s best to just keep them separated. The most important thing to always remember when introducing any two pets to each other is just to go slowly - and use your own best judgment. There’s no need to take any chances and rush it. 😊

Just like bonding with them personally – watching sugar gliders develop lasting friendships with your other pets can be a tremendously rewarding experience – so go slow, use your own best judgment, and have fun. 😊

For more information, go to: www.ASGV.org

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