

OVERVIEW

The Russian or Campbell's dwarf hamster (*Phodopus campbelli*) is the original pet trade dwarf hamster and has been selectively bred to produce the most fancy color varieties. It is often confused with the "winter white" dwarf hamster *Phodopus sungorus* because both have been referred to as the Djungarian or Dzungarian hamster and they are very similar in appearance. In the US we tend to call *P. campbelli* the Russian or, better still, Campbell's dwarf (as that is its species name), and refer to *P. sungorus* as the Djungarian or "winter white" dwarf hamster. However, many people consider Djungarian to only refer to the Campbell's dwarf and distinguish the "winter white" *P. sungorus* as the Siberian dwarf hamster. Confused? Me too, so I choose to use "Campbell's" and "winter white" and avoid "Djungarian" or country references like Russian and Siberian. The recognizable differences between the two species are that *P. campbelli* has smaller ears, a narrower dorsal stripe, a woolier coat, and greyish fur on its underside. From a pet keeper's perspective, Campbell's dwarf is also often less docile and more likely to bite than the other dwarf hamsters. As mentioned, the Campbell's dwarf also is bred in many more coat colors than its "winter white" cousin.

HOUSING

An aquarium outfitted with a secure metal-framed screen top may be the best housing for dwarf hamsters, but a wire cage with very narrow bar spacing may also be used except for breeding pairs since young will escape. New cages specifically designed for dwarf hamsters, basically miniature versions of the popular tube network Syrian hamster cages, are also available and very popular. They provide an interesting landscape that features wheels and tubes that are psychologically beneficial. Even though these are small hamsters, purchase the largest size you can accommodate. Any housing filled with a couple inches of processed paper bedding (e.g. CareFRESH®) or aspen shavings. **DO NOT USE PINE OR CEDAR SHAVINGS.** These soft woods have toxic "aromatic" oils that are harmful to small rodents.

Dwarf hamsters should be provided with a "mini" or "small" size of the familiar hamster wheel or a similar exercise method. The new plastic saucer-style "wheels" are safer and quieter. There is an endless variety of hamster shelters, mazes and toys on the market to provide enrichment for the pet Russian dwarf. Even a simple paper towel or toilet paper tube makes a welcome diversion and can be shredded into nesting material.

FOOD & WATER

All hamsters should be fed a quality "lab block" rodent diet. These diets provide complete nutrition in every bite and wear down the teeth. Seed mixes are nutritionally poor as they allow a chosen favorite seed (often fatty sunflower seeds) to make up the bulk of the diet and should not be used. Dwarf hamsters are omnivorous and may also take some cereals, nuts, vegetables and animal matter such as mealworms or bits of cooked poultry for occasional variety. This dietary variety from a young age can result in a longer lifespan. **Do not switch from a lab diet to a seed mix!** Water should be provided via a ball-tip water bottle.

Consult an exotic animal veterinarian for treatment of any pet condition or illness.

HEALTH

Dwarf hamsters do not have many health problems when housed and fed correctly. The most likely problem to encounter is fur mites, which will cause itching, bald patches and skin problems. These may be treated with anti-mite sprays designed for small animals and/or caged birds in conjunction with a thorough cleaning and disinfection of the housing, shelters and toys, and frequent replacement of bedding. Consult your vet for more information.

MORE INFO

A website devoted to Campbell's dwarf hamsters may be found at <http://www.campbellsdwarfhamsters.com>.