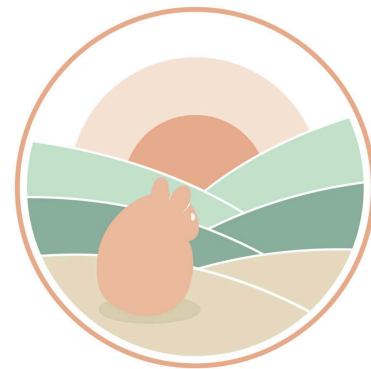


BRIGHT HORIZON HAMSTER RESCUE

CARE GUIDE



Russian/Campbells Dwarf Hamster

Phodopus sungorus/ phodopus campbelli

ABOUT US

Russian Dwarfs (Djungarian/Winter White), and Campbells Dwarfs are two separate species, so closely genetically related that they can interbreed. In captivity in the UK, there are few, if any, “purebreds” of either species remaining: they have been interbred for decades, mainly for colour variations. We’ll talk about the two species first, and then about the characters of these much-misunderstood hybrids.

<https://animalia.bio/campbells-dwarf-hamster?letter=h>; <https://animalia.bio/djungarian-hamster>

CAMPBELLS DWARF

Average size:	80mm
Average weight:	23g
Waking cycle:	Nocturnal
Lifespan:	2-2.5 years
Diet:	Omnivore
Homes:	Deep burrows, up to 3m in the wild, with multiple chambers & exits
Habitat:	Plains, steppes & semi-desert across Siberia, Mongolia and Central Asia

Campbells are a little larger than Russians, and have proportionately smaller ears. They have the same dark dorsal stripe, but no dark fur on their crown, and their belly fur is grey. They do not change colour with the season. They have a slightly more pointed snout. They are the more aggressive towards perceived threats of the two species, more likely to fight than run.

RUSSIAN DWARF

Average size:	70-90mm
Average weight:	20 - 45g
Waking cycle:	Nocturnal
Lifespan:	1 - 3 years
Diet:	Omnivore
Homes:	Burrows up to 1m deep, with multiple exits, in the wild lined with moss or found fur
Habitat:	Plains, steppes & semi-desert across Central Asia & China

Russians are the smaller of the two species, and have larger black-trimmed ears. They have the same dark dorsal stripe, a white belly with three arches along their flanks. In winter, captive Russians and hybrids partially change colour, towards a fully white coat. They have stubbier snouts. They are the friendlier and more sociable species with humans.

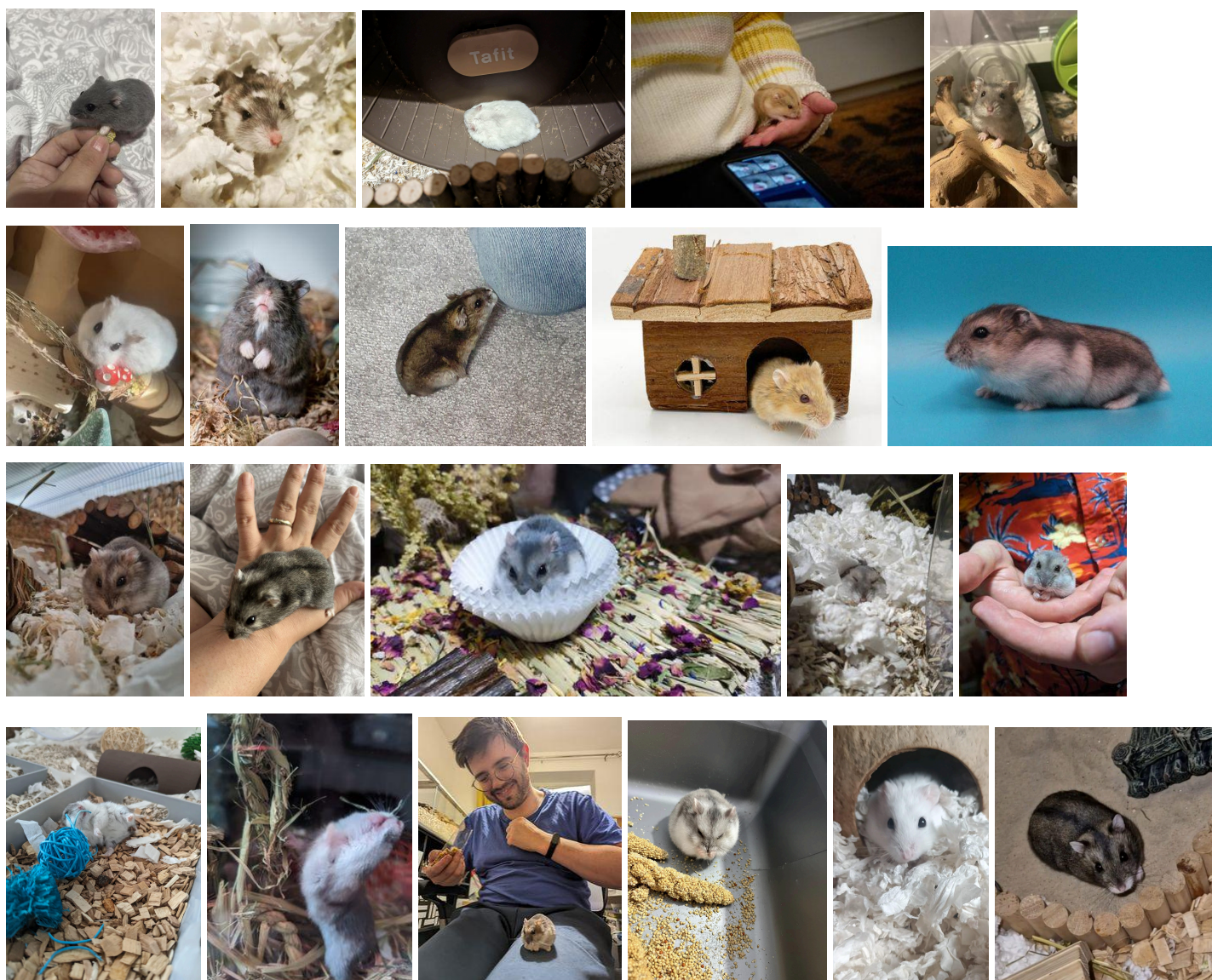
DWARFIES AS COMPANIONS

Dwarfies are very characterful and amusing hamsters to watch, and interact with. The range of personalities is endless. They're the most vocal species, known for their "buzzing" sounds when they're alarmed or grumpy, and their trilling "purr" when they are content. This makes it easier to recognise their mood, and choose the best times to interact with them. They can become very attached to their human, and love to ask for attention and treats. Despite being classified as nocturnal, they're often awake for periods of the day.

A lot of the dwarfies that find their way into rescues arrive with trauma: tiny, unsuitable cages, rough handling/chased, nowhere near enough burrowing substrate, bullied or injured by a cagemate, and either over or underfed - most commonly, critically obese. A few will always be "look-don't-touch", but of all the captive species, they're the easiest to rehabilitate and befriend (except in the most traumatised cases, who tend to stay in specialist foster care).

To be friends with your dwarfie, you need to first create them a living space in which they feel safe, secure, able to fulfil their natural instincts and thrive. Once they feel safe enough that they don't need to defend their territory, and can become very interactive, attached and cuddly.

We'll help you make your dwarfie's home completely suited to their needs, but first, let's bust some myths.



DWARFIES MUST NOT LIVE TOGETHER IN CAPTIVITY

This is an inarguable fact, often ignored by breeders, pet shop sellers and owners, with tragic results.

In the wild, dwarfies are solitary animals. They come together to mate, but don't stay together beyond the female's heat cycle: when she is no longer in season, she will chase him away. He may remain close by, within his own territory, and return to mate when she comes into heat again. If he returns when she is not receptive, or has pups, she will fight him; dwarfies will fight to the death, and females are often more aggressive. Pups can start fighting from 6 weeks old.

In captivity, dwarfies can't escape each other: one will be dominant, and eventually bully the other away from resources until they suffer or starve, and/or seriously injure them. We have seen this countless times, and dealt with fatal injuries.

DWARFIES ARE AGGRESSIVE/ DON'T LIKE PEOPLE

Dwarfies are actually the naturally friendliest captive species, but those who have been forced to live together can often display aggression. They've lived their whole lives so far scared and defensive, sharing a small territory with a natural rival. Unlearning that fear and need to protect themselves can take time, but winning a dwarfie's heart is a simple and really rewarding experience for them and you.

INTERBREEDING & HEALTH

Unethical interbreeding of the two species has been a problem for decades. The first experiments by hobbyists and pet trade breeders were attempts to get and hold genetic lines where new coat colours would pass on to the pups. Within three generations, the young would always return to the natural grey variations with darker dorsal stripe. Campbells also have a naturally longer lifespan, and mixing the species was tried to see if the young's lifespan could be extended.

Intensive, unethical inbreeding created all sorts of new health and genetic issues, and "bred in" others. The dwarfies we love now still suffer from the effects of a limited gene pool and of putting looks before wellbeing. Though most dwarfies lead long and healthy lives, there are more things to look out for in dwarfies than in other captive species. Below are some of the most common.

NEUROLOGICAL ISSUES/"STARGAZING"

"Neuro" dwarfies are sadly increasingly common due to interbreeding and irresponsible rodent mills: brain development issues cause these hamsters to spin in circles, fall backwards, be off-balance or involuntarily turn their faces upwards, especially when excited. Neuro disorders are easily diagnosed and neuro-hams can live fulfilling lives with adapted care, though they are far more prone to strokes. If you think your hamster may have neuro issues, we can advise.

RED-EYED WHITE BLINDNESS

Attempts to intensively breed albino dwarfies also accidentally bred in a blindness gene. A high percentage of all-white, red-eyed dwarfies are also blind or severely vision-impaired: their main carer often notices this first.

BIRTHING

Campbells pups are born larger than Russian pups. Mixing the species has resulted in bigger pups, causing much higher newborn mortality, and injury or death to the mother during birth. This in turn caused breeders to retain and overbreed from "successful" mothers, causing even more genetic problems.

SMALL HAMSTER, SMALL SPACE?

The complete opposite.

In nature, dwarfies hold substantial territories which they defend from their own and rival species. They can travel over 3km in a night before returning to their burrow,, and forage for food over a wide and fairly barren, arid area. Resources are scarce, and they are evolved to challenge any threat to their territory.

Dwarfies need at least 100 x 50cm of unbroken floorspace, just like all other captive hamsters.

HOW DO I CREATE A PERFECT DWARFIE ENCLOSURE?

The minimum requirements, and a little more detail:

100 x 50cm+ enclosure: bigger is ALWAYS better.

Barless recommended, or under 7mm bar width, with screening so the bedding can be deep

21cm+ wheel with a good bearing - dwarfies love their wheel and often rest, groom and eat in it

Sand in at least 25% of the enclosure: this replicates their natural environment and they love bathing, digging and rolling in it

At least 30% deep burrowing substrate (30cm minimum): dwarfies build deep and complex underground burrows

Substrate that holds tunnels: a mix of soft (eg: Kaytee), Megazorb and hemp (eg: Aubiose) holds burrows perfectly

Multiple hides/clutter: dwarfies love a range of hides and sheltered spots for relaxing

A varied, optimal diet: we can help you to get this right



BONDING TIPS FROM THE BRIGHT HORIZON FOSTER TEAM

don't be afraid of nibbles, dwarfs are the huskies of the hamster world, vocal, up at all hours and they test everything with their mouths

Some lazier dwarfies, if allowed, will build a mighty stash and hardly ever get up! Make sure you clear their stash regularly - you can scatter it again for foraging enrichment

They love flax sprays! A little every now and then is best as they are prone to weight gain and diabetes

Once bonded, they are the most amazing companion!

Learning dwarfie sounds is fun - some buzzing is just grumpy chatting. Beryl would sit in your hand happily eating and simultaneously screaming at you