

## Scientists name top five animals that are suitable to be kept as pets

July 11 2016, by Samantha Bradey

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Credit: Frontiers

Looking for a new pet? If so, consider the Agile Wallaby or the Asian Palm Civet.

Responding to the growing trend in keeping exotic animals as pets a team, led by Dr. Paul Koene, has developed a methodology to assess the suitability of mammals to be kept domestically in a new study published in [\*Frontiers in Veterinary Science\*](#).

The top five animals were: the Sika Deer, Agile Wallaby, Tamar Wallaby, Llama, and Asian Palm Civet, which were all judged to be suitable pets by the scientists from the Wageningen University and Research Centre, in the Netherlands.

So, will the Sika Deer challenge the common canine for the title of man's best friend?

"The main influence of this work is methodological. In the Netherlands many [mammal species](#) are kept and for a long time the government wanted to guarantee the welfare of animals," said Dr. Koene; "Therefore the Dutch Animal Act was made stating that mammals should not be kept unless they are production animals, or are species that are suitable to be kept by anyone without special knowledge or skills."

In order to determine if this is the case for a given animal species a list of suitable candidates had to be created. Then a method was devised to place each mammal species in a rank order, ranging from suitable to unsuitable.

The team began by conducting a web-based survey to discover which animals were most frequently kept as pets in the Netherlands. Other mammals were then added to the list based on data from veterinarians and rescue centers.

In the first instance the 90 most common species were selected. Animals classed as 'production [animals](#)' such as rabbits, guinea pigs and hamsters are allowed to be kept by anyone and so were not analyzed.

A wide range of bibliographic data was sourced in order to create the one-line criteria statements that the mammals chosen for analysis were graded against. These one-liners were then assigned a score related to behavioral needs or welfare risks.

The risks were assessed on the reported one-liners of the species in both captivity and the wild. Animals with high scores had high behavioral needs and high health, welfare and human relationship risks.

Three teams worked together to produce the final pet suitability rank order. The first team selected one-line statements for each animal. The second team assessed the strength of one-line statements about behavior, health, welfare and human-animal relationship in both captivity and the wild. A third team assessed the suitability based on all assessed strengths for that animal to be a pet.

Dr. Koene explained: "A team is now completing the full list, analyzing the other 270 mammals. They are also looking at how to determine the suitability of birds and reptiles in future.

"So, the impact of the study is that there is a framework and shared database that could be further developed in a more widely used context, for instance across the EU, the US or even worldwide."

However, Dr. Koene does not envisage that Agile Wallabies will replace dogs and cats in man's affections anytime soon.

"Dogs and cats are a special kind of pets, because of their way of housing (free roaming), of variation in breeds, the vast amount of literature and of the delicacy of the subject and so were not analyzed, and wallabies will certainly not replace them."

**More information:** Paul Koene et al, Behavioral Ecology of Captive

Species: Using Bibliographic Information to Assess Pet Suitability of Mammal Species, *Frontiers in Veterinary Science* (2016). [DOI: 10.3389/fvets.2016.00035](https://doi.org/10.3389/fvets.2016.00035)

Provided by Frontiers

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