Pets

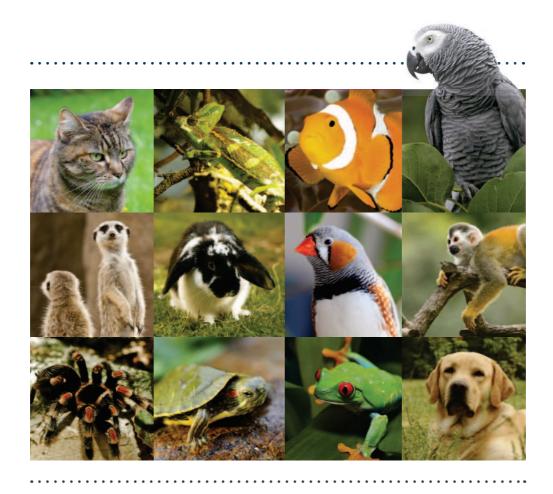## easy or difficult to keep?

When assessing whether an animal may make a suitable or unsuitable pet, important questions need to be asked - and carefully answered.

Key areas to address are the biological needs of any animal, public health and safety issues, and the general responsibilities of keeping animals in the home.

Some animals are clearly 'easier' (or less demanding) to keep than others but many are far more difficult to care for than people might believe.

A new 'tool', designed by scientists and vets, is now available to determine whether - or to what degree - certain animals may make suitable or unsuitable pets. This tool is called **EMODE** and classifies animals as *'easy', 'moderate', 'difficult'* or *'extreme'* in terms of how challenging they are to keep.

> **EMODE**
> **E**asy
> **Mo**derate
> **D**ifficult
> **E**xtreme

The **EMODE** system has been developed both for use by anyone who may be thinking of acquiring an animal and also by official personnel when considering assigning species to restrictive lists of 'suitable' animals (e.g. for 'positive lists' as used by governments to control animals in trade and keeping).

How does EMODE work?

EMODE considers how challenging an animal is to care for with respect to its biological needs and also has regard for human health and safety issues. Therefore, the **EMODE** system takes into account:

- the biology and behaviour of animal species and types
- the welfare needs of the animals according to the 'five freedoms' principles
- the degree to which impartial and qualified husbandry guidance is available
- the potential public health and safety risks that animals may present to their keepers and others

Using EMODE in three easy steps!

Step One ⬇

First, find the 'Class' or 'Group' that an animal belongs to
(if you're not sure, check the following box)

Invertebrates	(e.g. crabs, crayfish, snails, insects, spiders, millipedes)
Fishes	(e.g. fishes, eels, rays)
Amphibians	(e.g. frogs, toads, newts, salamanders)
Reptiles	(e.g. crocodiles, turtles, tortoises, lizards, snakes)
Birds	(e.g. parrots, cockatiels, cockatoos)
Unusual Mammals	(e.g. bats, foxes, meerkats, kinkajous, sloths)
Primates	(e.g. monkeys, apes, prosimians)
Domesticated Animals	(e.g. rats, mice, guinea pigs, rabbits, ferrets, chickens, ducks, geese, pot-bellied pigs, goats, donkeys, horses)

When you know the class or group an animal belongs to (e.g. a reptile), simply look for 'Reptiles' in Table 1. This will give you an immediate quick general guide (i.e. any reptile will immediately 'score' 'Moderate' to 'Extreme', thus none are 'Easy' to keep).

Table 1.

EMODE: indication of degree of ease or difficulty to keep animals by class or group.

'Easy'	*'Moderate'*	*'Difficult'*	*'Extreme'*
Invertebrates			
Fishes			
Amphibians			
Reptiles			
Birds			
Mammals (unusual)			
Mammal-primates			
Domesticated animals			
Dogs and cats			

Step Two

To refine this result, you will need to find information about the specific animal in order to answer the 6 questions in Table 2. Do not rely on online forums, many 'pet care' books, and other sources that may not be independent and objective.

Instead, find the answers to questions 1-6 from online or library searches for academic sources such as scientific publications, professional encyclopaedias, and university websites.

Table 2.

EMODE: indication of degree of ease or difficulty to keep animals by species or breed. Questionnaire and categorisation.		
Foundation question		
Which class or group of animal does the species or breed belong to? *Assign the animal the number of points (pts) indicated.*		**Points**
Invertebrate		5pts
Fish		5pts
Amphibian		18pts
Reptile		18pts
Bird		18pts
Mammal (unusual)		18pts
Mammal-primate		20pts
Domesticated animal		10pts
Dog or cat		5pts
Specific questions		
a. *If answer is 'yes', assign 5 points.* **b.** *If answer is 'no', move to next question.*	**Answer**	**Points**
1. Is the animal an especially sensitive species (e.g. marine tropical fish, chameleon, human-imprinted bird, bat); or an especially small and/or delicate animal (e.g. stick insect, neon tetra fish, newt, baby crested gecko); or an especially sensitive breed (e.g. bulldog, great Dane, Bengal cat)?	Yes/No	
2. Does the animal have a long potential lifespan (e.g. >10 years)?	Yes/No	
3. Does the animal have specialised feeding habits that can make its dietary requirements subject to restricted supply (e.g. unusual live food or unusual plants)?	Yes/No	
4. Does the animal require a specialised habitat/microhabitat (e.g. is the animal dependent on sharing its life with a particular plant)?	Yes/No	
5. Is the animal poisonous, venomous, capable of growing large or inflicting appreciable injury at any point in its life?	Yes/No	
6. Is anyone in the household/extended circle immunocompromised (e.g. under 5 years, elderly, pregnant, diagnosed with HIV or other immune disease, drug user, receiving chemotherapy such as cancer and anti-rejection drugs)?	Yes/No	
Total points (check total points in row below to find EMODE score)		
'Easy'	**'Moderate'**	**'Difficult'**	**'Extreme'**

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20 21 22 23 24 25 26 27 28 29 30 31 32 33 34 35 36 37 38 39 40

Step Three

Take the pre-set points from the **Foundation question** in Table 2 (e.g. the minimum score of 18 for Reptiles) and add these to all the accrued points from answering the 6 **Specific questions** in Table 2. From this you will get your **Total points**.

Go to the bottom of Table 2 and you will see there is a numbered line from 1–40. If, for example, the animal you researched scores 33, then it falls into the 'Extreme' category in terms of how difficult it is to keep. Obviously, other animals will score higher or lower!

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For more background information, explanation and worked examples please refer to the full article:

Warwick, C., Steedman, C., Jessop, M., Toland, E. and Lindley, S. (2013) Assigning Degrees of Ease or Difficulty for Pet Animal Maintenance: The **EMODE** System Concept, J Agric Environ Ethics, DOI 10.1007/s10806-013-9455-x.

Or **link to the full article here** →