



# JR ANIMAL SCIENTIST

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# SOLVING PET PROBLEMS!



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# What do pets need?

Pets can be fun! They can be good companions and a great way to start learning about animal nutrition, housing and behavior! Keeping a pet is also a big responsibility. Just like livestock animals, pets need four main things to live good lives:

Pets need:

1. Nutritious food
2. Clean water
3. Shelter
4. Space for exercise and other natural behaviors

Research led by animal scientists shows that when animals have these four things, they tend to stay healthier and live longer. When an animal is well cared for, it also feels less fear and stress. This is good news for pet owners too, because a happy, relaxed pet is also a pet that tends to want to socialize and play more with people.

Along with these basic needs, pet owners should also take steps to keep their pets healthy. That means getting pets medications and vaccines when they need them!


**PET TIP!** Know which species are **prey** animals! Prey animals are animals that would be hunted by predators in the wild. Pets like hamsters, rabbits, guinea pigs and quail are prey animals. Prey animals are naturally fearful and can be harder to hold or pet. Make sure not to startle your pet if it is a prey animal. Move slowly and give the animal special rewards, like gentle pets and treats to help it get comfortable around you.



## Case study: Cats!

As an example of these four needs, let's look at the kind of environment a pet cat needs.

1. Nutritious food. Cats are naturally **carnivores**, which means they eat meat. Pet cats can be given wet or dry commercial cat food to meet their dietary requirements. Scientists and pet food companies work together to make sure commercial cat foods have the nutrients that cats need. Some cats may have health problems that require them to eat special foods. For example, older cats can do well when given food designed with nutrients for “senior” cats.
2. Clean water. Cat owners should make sure their pets have a bowl that gets filled with fresh water often.
3. Shelter. Cats can live indoors or outdoors—or both. The important thing is to make sure the cat isn't roaming close to cars or vulnerable to predators, such as coyotes. Cats need access to shade in the summer and a warm place to sleep in the winter.
4. Space. Cats will stay healthier and less stressed if they are given space to practice natural behaviors such as climbing, sharpening their claws, laying in the sun and watching other animals—like birds. We call these opportunities to practice natural behaviors **enrichment!**



Cats need to scratch their claws against a rough surface as the claws get longer. Providing a scratching post often helps cats practice this behavior without scratching the furniture!

**PET TIP!** Keep your cat's water in a ceramic or glass dish! Plastic dishes can have very tiny scratches on them. Bacteria in the water can multiply in these tiny scratches and cause skin irritation and acne on a cat's chin.



# Spot the pet problem!

Even though every pet has four specific needs, meeting these needs looks different for every species of animal! For example, cats get enrichment by climbing and dogs get enrichment by digging! Here are four scenarios where we can learn about a pet's needs and fix a pet problem.

## Hamster housing

Syrian hamsters are the biggest kind of hamster kept as pets. These rodents are very common in pet stores, but not a lot of people know their secret! Even though Syrian hamsters are small, they need big cages!

In the wild, Syrian hamsters live in **burrows** underground during the day, and they come above ground to forage for food at night. These little guys can actually run several miles every night! Taking good care of a Syrian hamster means giving it space to roam, places to hide and feel safe, and deep bedding they can dig and burrow in.

### Can you spot the problem with this Syrian hamster habitat?

Answer: There's not enough bedding to burrow in! We can see that there's barely enough wood shavings to cover the bottom of the cage. A hamster actually needs about six inches of bedding! As a bonus, deeper bedding will also help absorb the hamster's urine and make the cage a lot less stinky!



Photo: iStock / Alex Milan

## Growing goldfish

Goldfish can seem like easy pets. At least at first! Goldfish sold at pet stores tend to be small because they are baby goldfish. People get these small goldfish and imagine them living happily in a small bowl.

The trouble comes when the goldfish get older. Goldfish can grow to up to two feet long! These means they can quickly outgrow their bowls, and many people are not prepared to get them a bigger tank. Instead, some people release their goldfish in lakes and ponds, thinking they will thrive in a natural habitat. This trend has led to unnatural, **invasive** goldfish populations living in the United States. These former pets eat the food and pollute the water that wild animals rely on.

### Can you spot the problem with this goldfish bowl?

Answer: This goldfish is clearly too large for its bowl. It doesn't even have room to turn around properly. Ideally, a goldfish should live in a 20 gallon tank.



Photo: iStock / fantail

## Bad for bunnies

Rabbits are herbivores, meaning they eat plant materials. Pet rabbits can get the nutrients they need by eating the rabbit pellets sold at pet stores. However, only eating pellets is a recipe for an unhealthy rabbit. Rabbits given pellets tend to overeat, leading to weight gain that can make it hard for them to move comfortably. Overfed rabbits might not live as long either.



Instead, rabbit owners should give their pets a mix of pellets, hay and fresh greens! Munching on fresh lettuce and other green vegetables will help a rabbit get the **nutrients** it needs while also controlling its appetite. Treats like carrots and apple slices should only be given in small amounts.

### Can you spot the problem with this rabbit's meal?

Answer: This rabbit has a few bites of fresh greens, but the rest of the meal is made up of treats! This rabbit needs more green, leafy vegetables and some pellets to have a balanced diet.

## Pushy pups

Barking is one of a dog's natural behaviors! But sometimes barking can get out of control. It can be hard to manage a dog that reacts to people or other dogs with aggressive barking.

Reactive dogs often lose control because they are fearful or **stressed**. If you have a loud or reactive dog, it can help to seek out professional behavioral training. Never shout at a dog to quiet down. Dogs think shouting means they have permission to make more loud noises! Instead, give a dog treats to reinforce good behaviors.



Photo: iStock / Ksenia Raykova

If you encounter a loud or aggressive dog in a park or the city, there are a few things you can do to help it feel comfortable. First, keep some distance from the dog. Second, don't make loud noises or sudden movements that could frighten the dog.

### Can you spot the problem in this dog's day?

Answer: The larger dog is off-leash in a public area. Reactive dogs should always be kept on a leash when around unfamiliar people or other dogs. This keeps them safely with their owners and stops them from causing stress to other dogs.



# When poultry are pets!

**Poultry** such as chickens, turkeys, ducks and quail are common livestock animals raised for meat, eggs and even feathers. However, more and more people these days are raising backyard poultry for eggs and companionship.

## So how can we best take care of these birds?

Well, even pet birds need the same care that poultry get on large farms. First, they need balanced diets suitable to their species. For example, quails are smaller birds, so they need smaller pellets to eat. Quails also require more **protein** in their feed than chickens.

Backyard poultry fans should also consider what works best for their neighborhoods! Ducks have a reputation for being messy. Owners should make sure they have the time to clean the ducks' habitat. Some cities and neighborhoods have rules against owning male chickens, called roosters, because they make loud calls in the morning. Owners should know the rules and consider what could be a quieter pet.

Finally, it's important to remember that chickens and other poultry can sometimes carry diseases such as **Salmonella**, so always wash your hands well after handling these animals or their bedding!

**PET TIP!** If you don't have your own pets, you can still help take care of animals! Many community animal shelters need volunteers to help make blankets and toys for their animals! Check in with your local shelter to see if you can help enrich a pet's life.

Coturnix quail are raised around the world for meat and eggs and as pets. They tend to be popular in backyard coops because they need less space than chickens and they are quieter.

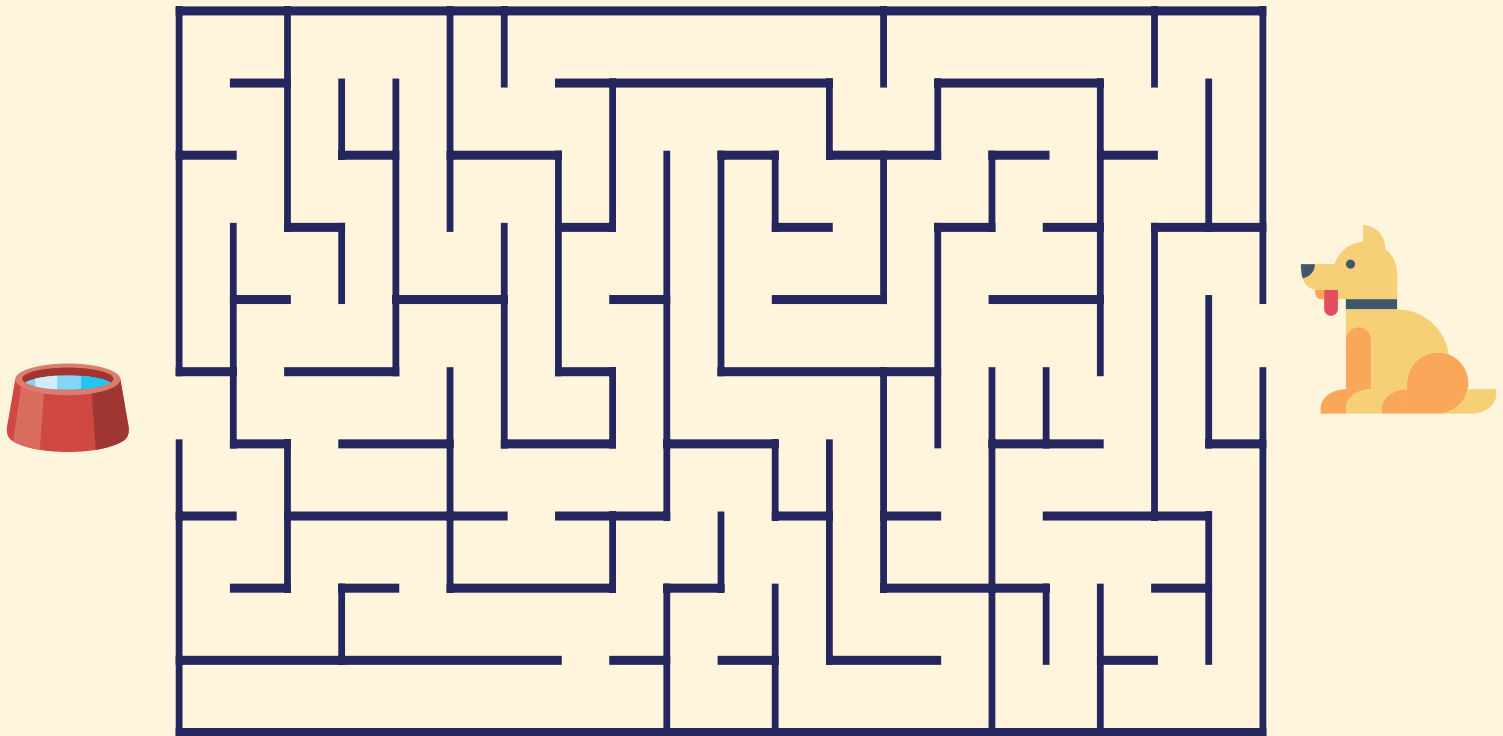


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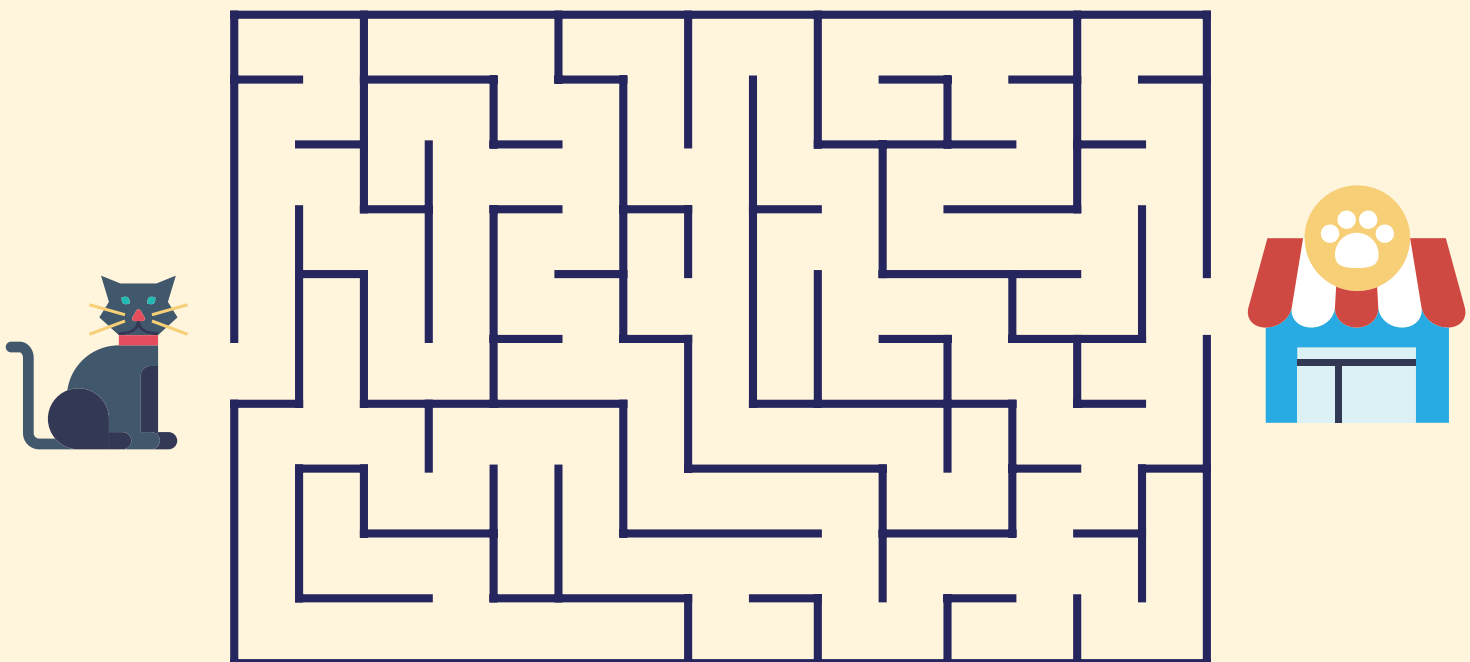
ACTIVITY

# Pet paths!

This dog has been out on a hot day. Help her get some water!



This cat has ear mites! Help him get to the vet.



American Society of Animal Science  
PO Box 7410, 201 W. Springfield,  
Champaign, IL 61826-7410



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**CONTRIBUTORS:** ASAS staff.

**DESIGN:** Jody A. Boles

**CONTACT:** [jranimalscientist@asas.org](mailto:jranimalscientist@asas.org)

**COVER PHOTOS:** iStock / mu\_mu\_ (large), iStock / feathercollector (small)