

That's Degu Sense

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This month we're finding out about the senses of a degu- their ability to smell, hear, see, feel and taste the environment around them!



Smell

Like many other rodents, degus have a good sense of smell, which is much better than a human's. Degus rely on scent for social behaviours, because they produce special scents in their urine for other degus to detect- just like messages! These are released when a degu scent marks a surface or object with a small amount of urine, containing these scents. From smelling another degu's scent mark, the degu can tell how long ago the other degu was there, whether they were male or female, how old they were- and even which degu it was! Because degus also store food by burying it, they can use their nose and memory to find it again- yummy!

Hearing

Degus have a very good hearing range, which is similar to our own- which is why we can hear degus as they talk to each other, and also why our pet degu can learn to recognise and respond to their owner's voice. Degus rely on their hearing to detect danger before they can even see it, and if they're scared, degus will emit a loud squeak called a 'wheep', which tells any degus in hearing range to run and hide! That is a very useful behaviour for wild degus, as they can hide in their burrows to escape predators that are chasing them.

Sight

Did you know that degus don't see the world the same way us humans do? Degus can only see in two colours, one of them is green, but the other colour degus can see is Ultraviolet (UV). Humans can't see that at all without a special light, so the world must look really different to a degu! Degus take advantage of this by having belly fur that reflects UV light, so that they can signal to each other over long distances without **NEEDING TO SHOUT!**

Touch

Although humans have sensitive skin for feeling objects with our hands, degus have a different way of investigating objects by touch. Their whiskers! Rather than handle a new object, a degu will approach it and 'whisk' it with the whiskers around their nose. Just like mice and rats, degus can get a very good idea about the object's size and construction this way, without having to even touch it- remarkable. Degus also use their whisker touch sense to work out if they can fit through a small space, which is very handy when you live in a burrow.

Taste

The ability to taste different chemicals and nutrients is very important for degus as they are natural foragers in the wild. By taste and smell the degu needs to work out if a certain plant they find is going to harm them, and if it tastes funny to them they are much less likely to eat it- although it isn't guaranteed! Much less is known about degus' ability to taste than the other senses.

Find out more about degu senses and appearance on the following page of Degutopia's website:

www.degutopia.co.uk/deguapps.htm

Find out more about degus by visiting Degutopia's website:

<http://www.degutopia.co.uk>



~Dedicated to the health and well-being of degus everywhere~