

# Taylhis' Most Wanted

During visits to the zoo, most kids will fantasize about which animal they would like to take home and have as a pet. There are many reasons why exotic and wild animals should not be kept as pets, but being an animal lover, I guess I never grew out of the mindset of a kid at the zoo – I still think about which ones I would like as pets. Well, actually, I'd like **all** of them as pets, but here are the top 10. Since this is purely fantasy, of course I did not take rational things into consideration like cost or cleaning up after or housing the animals, where's the fun in that? While you're at it, try putting your top few fantasy pets in the comments box below...

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## Taylhis Most Wanted:

**African Grey parrot** – Ugh, another large bird? Do I really want more bird screaming to rile up the kids? But this is a fantasy list, so I'm going to build a huge tropical aviary with a little river for my birds, no problem. Members of this particular breed of parrot are incredibly smart, and their ability for exact mimicry is hilarious! I once posted a video of a little African Grey character named Silvia who did an awesome impression of Desi Arnaz (*Lucy, you got some 'splainin to do!*) as well as sarcastically (and hilariously) delivering the line, *"Well loddy-frickin'-dah!"*

**Manatee** – My favorite animal; manatees are gentle and intelligent. I find the manatee's graceful movements relaxing and therapeutic. Watching my manatee swim would be a great way to unwind after a stressful day!

**Gorilla** – Humans have much in common with these intelligent primates. It'd be incredible to get to know one on a personal basis.

**Sea Horse** – Well, these guys mate for life, so I'd like a pair

of seahorses, which would then turn into hundreds ☐ But many of their behaviors are truly fascinating to watch!



Sea Lion – Like an aquatic dog, sea lions are intelligent, trainable, and beautiful swimmers. And so cute!

Goat – I’ve always loved goats; now that we live nearby many farms, this might be a possibility some day!

**Huge Dog** – Dogs are the greatest, and sometimes it seems like the larger the dog, the friendlier. So for a dog-lover without limitations on house size, wouldn’t it be great to have a beautiful 150lb+ lap dog? I was thinking St. Bernard, Great Dane or Mastiff type dogs.

**Octopus** – A somewhat mysterious animal, though to be intelligent based in part upon its ability to manipulate items like jars and toys for food rewards.

**Alligator** – Huge reptiles with a bad rap; I would love the time to hand-raise and train a gator.

**Tortoise** – I really like tortoises, and it’d be really neat to create an exhibit to house one of those super-huge tortoises.

*Honorable mention:*

Marmoset – a cute furry little primate. Cute as he is, smaller primates are known for being temperamental, so this guy is a runner-up.



So there you have it. My husband commented on my list's lack of felines. True, I always blog about how much I would like a cat, but in the real world, all that's stopping me from getting a cat or two or ten is my cat allergy, so that's not really the point of the list – it's more about forbidden animals. Big cats would be too scary to play with – I had a little cat who passed away, but after watching how suddenly and completely her moods could change, I gained a whole new respect for big cats, so no thanks!

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## Food Chain Gang

I should probably explain where the title of my blog comes from. It's actually a title I picked out years ago as I was musing while doing housework one day. I thought, a story about our household should be called, "The Food Chain Gang". At the time, we had a few more pets than we have now, completing the chain. Back then, we were the happy owners of 2 dogs, a cat, a parrot, and a little marsupial (animal with a

pouch, like a kangaroo) called a sugar glider. The sugar glider and the cat have since crossed the "Rainbow Bridge" which some people call pet heaven. And, if you're a regular reader, you've read that we've added a new dog to our family in the last month. But the new dog doesn't exactly complete a food chain, so I just felt the need to explain why my blog is called "My Food Chain Gang" even though we are down to 3 dogs and a parrot.

As an animal lover, I would love to add even more pets to our menagerie, however, it's just not practical right now. We have 1 dog with some terrier (terror!) in her, Jack Russell to be exact, and she will "hunt" any kind of small animal we bring into the house. So, my dreams of owning a rat or 2 or 3 will have to wait at least a few years, hopefully more, since the "Jerk" Russell mix is only called that in jest – she is our baby. My husband and I adopted her before we were married and before the kids were born. And before you judge me, do the research – rats actually make very good pets! Unlike many of their rodent cousins; hamsters, gerbils and the like, rats are actually pretty clean, very smart, and they are even friendly and cuddly!

Since I already mentioned wanting a rat, which many people think is a crazy pet, it should be no surprise when I say with sincerity that if I didn't have small children, I would have a pet alligator. Again, a little bit of research will tell you that alligators are almost nothing like (in behavior) their fellow crocodilians. They are actually quite docile and easier to handle than you would think ***if you know what you're doing of course*** – stress that point. I know some about handling alligators, though I've only held small to medium sized ones, and I have never even owned a reptile, so needless to say, this is not an option for me right now... but maybe someday!

I would also like a tortoise, but with 4 kids, 3 of which will be under the age of 5, I do enough cleaning up around the

house as it is – don't need a tank to clean! Plus, we are very lucky to be able to afford some mini-vacations now and then, and any more responsibilities for the pet sitter might put her over the edge ☐

I have always wanted a goat, and now that we live in the country, I can see how easy it is to get one – you can just open up the paper, call a number and buy a goat. But I don't think the neighbors would appreciate what our lawn would look like. Something tells me our quiet residential neighborhood near the heart of the downtown of the city would not be a good place to house a goat.

I would love another cat someday, but I'm allergic. And it all but broke my heart when I lost my beloved cat earlier this year... I felt very guilty that I couldn't really pet her or spend time with her as much as I (and she) wanted because of my allergies.

And talking about cheap farm animals reminds me of another realization I had after moving to the country – baby chicks and ducks are really cute AND very cheep, err inexpensive! But again, our Jerk Russell would just try to eat any kind of animal like that. She STILL likes to hunt the parrot when he flies in the house, even though he's taken a nip at her more than once with his huge beak!

And I would LOVE my own parrot – I've always wanted an African Grey, ever since I was really little and read a wonderful book by the same guy who wrote the movie, "The Water Horse". The author is Dick King-Smith, and his book, "Harry's Mad" is just a wonderful story for kids about a boy and his pet parrot. But while I'm on the subject of parrots, let me talk for a minute about pets NOT suitable for families. Parrots sure are beautiful animals, and they're lots of fun when they talk, laugh, and imitate, but they are also very moody and unpredictable. Most are not cuddly, and if they are, it's usually only with one person in the household, and they will

resent every other person who gets in their way. Which is what happened with our parrot – he has bonded to Daddy, that's his "mate", and the rest of us cannot touch him, OR ELSE we have to deal with the rath of a beak that is strong enough to snap a broomstick in HALF! Parrots are VERY loud – and there is no relief from their noise. Their scream can rattle your eardrum, and is almost always guaranteed to make a small child cry. And, they scream to have fun! It's not just when they are upset or want something, so if you think you'll be able to quiet a screaming parrot, guess again! Luckily, ours is about to celebrate his 7th year with us, so through lots of growing pains, we've learned how to make it work in our house. Parrots can also be very dangerous, so just like any other animal, kids need to have constant supervision around parrots. Overall, as the owner of a parrot, I would HIGHLY recommend another pet choice to anyone with kids in the house.

I wouldn't recommend a sugar glider as a pet either. Ours was "used" – we actually found her at a garage sale – and that is a testament to how often people think it'd be cool to have one of these only to decide later they're too much work. They are intelligent, social animals, so they require lots of attention. However, they are also nocturnal, so you have to be available at night to take them out of their cage to play. Light will actually damage their eyes, so taking them out at night in a specially under-lit room is required. They can be nippy, smelly (they excrete an odor to mark their territory), and can even make loud noises all night that keep you awake. And they require a special diet of fresh fruits and vegetables also, which can be inconvenient and expensive.

So anyway, now that I've recommended all the pets that AREN'T good for families, I would say that the standard dog or cat IS great for families. Obviously, there is a lot to take into consideration when shopping for one of these, and I won't go into that this time... if you really need some good advice about why humane societies are a better choice than pet stores

and what to look for while choosing a pet, see my previous post called, "3's a Crowd?".

So, now you know where the title "My Food Chain Gang" came from. Maybe someday, I will add to the chain and have a real zoo to call my own. But for now, I will stick with the gang we have – everybody knows their place in the chain and gets along great!