

## Movies involving certain pets end in impulse pet purchases

BY CORRY ANDERSON-FENNELL  
SPECIAL TO THE PROVINCE

Lisa Hutcheon wishes Disney would stick to movies about lonely robots and talking toys.

"Films that feature certain types of pets increase the popularity of that pet, resulting in impulse purchases at the nearest pet store," says Hutcheon, spokeswoman for the Small Animal Rescue Society of B.C.

SARS rescues and re-homes about 250 animals every year, including rabbits, hamsters, gerbils and Guinea pigs. With the July 24 release of the Disney blockbuster *G-Force*, about a group of Guinea pig secret agents, Hutcheon anticipates a universal surge in the number of Guinea pigs surrendered to animal shelters and rescue organizations.

"They're not a child's pet, but a family pet," says Hutcheon. "Parents should be prepared to be the ultimate caregivers."

BC SPCA shelters are also anticipating a Guinea pig surplus akin to the chihuahua surplus that occurred in the months that followed the release of Disney's *Beverly Hills Chihuahua* last October. In the first six months of 2008, long before the movie came out, SPCA shelters took in 39 chihuahuas, just three of whom were puppies.

But in the first six months of 2009, a couple of months after the movie run, that figure almost doubled with 75 chihuahuas in care, a full third of them puppies.

"Unfortunately, pets can be trendy just like handbags and shoes," says the BC SPCA's Paula Neuman. "But handbags and shoes don't suffer when you get rid of them."

The society's humane education supervisor, Neuman urges anyone who is thinking about acquiring a Guinea pig to do their homework first.

"Guinea pigs do make wonderful pets, however, they have specific welfare needs and a fairly significant lifespan. They're not for everyone."

Hutcheon agrees.

"They're not starter pets, and they're not disposable pets."



Guinea pigs are originally from Peru. Their teeth grow continuously throughout their lives. When they are happy and relaxed, they leap in the air, squeal and shake. — BC SPCA HANDOUT

### Pet of the Week

**Our popular Pet of the Week feature is on hiatus until Sunday, Sept. 27, while we conduct our Funniest Petcast Contest (details at left).**

Guinea pigs can live up to eight years. They are social, they seldom bite and they are exceptionally clean. Prey animals, they will tolerate being held if they trust their caregiver, but they also need a habitat that provides safe cover when they are startled.

Their diet should include plenty of fresh fruits and vegetables rich in

vitamin C, in addition to fortified pet-store pellets.

Guinea pigs prefer to live in pairs for company, but unless your vet specializes in small animals and can spay or neuter them safely, it's best to keep only same-sex pairs to avoid adding to the problem of pet overpopulation.

"Having a Guinea pig, like having any pet, will enrich your life, as long as you're prepared for all that it brings," says Neuman. "And if you are, definitely make a shelter or rescue group your first adoption option."

Find out more at [spca.bc.ca](http://spca.bc.ca), [smallanimalrescue.org](http://smallanimalrescue.org) or [guinealynx.info](http://guinealynx.info).

Anderson-Fennell is communications officer for the BC SPCA.

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