



Care For Us

Meerkat (Suricata suricatta)

Animal Welfare

Animal welfare refers to an animal's state or feelings. An animal's welfare state can be positive, neutral or negative.

An animal's welfare has the potential to differ on a daily basis. When an animal's needs - nutritional, behavioural, health and environmental - are met, they will have a good standard of welfare.

A good life in captivity might be one where animals can consistently experience good welfare throughout their entire life.





Understanding that animals have both sentient and cognitive abilities as well as pain perception, reinforces the need to provide appropriate husbandry provisions for all captive animals, to ensure positive welfare.

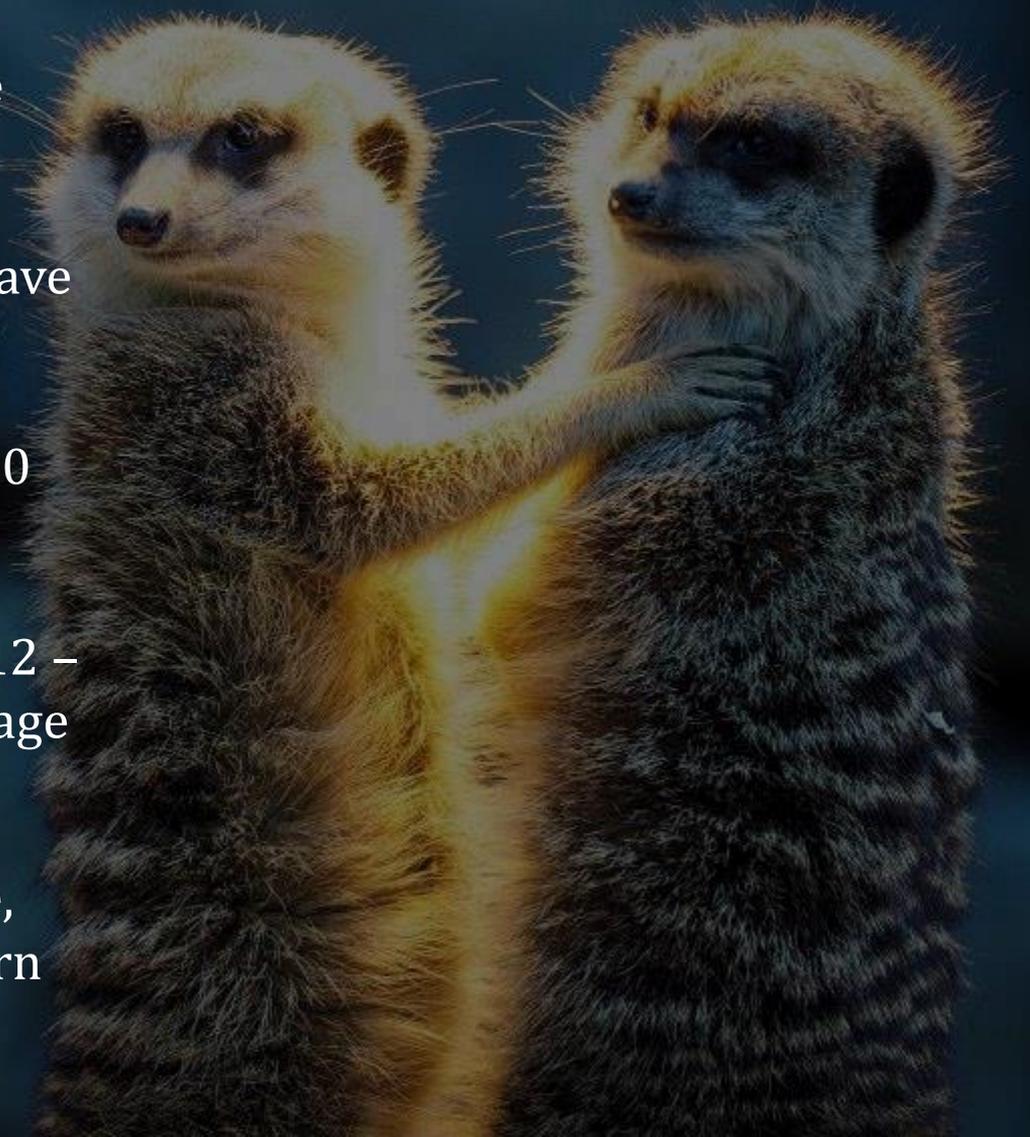
In captivity, the welfare of an animal is dependent on the environment provided for them and the daily care and veterinary treatment they receive.

Meerkats can be found across several countries in southern Africa. They live in savannah, grassland and desert habitats and are well adapted to life in hot and semi-arid climates. They are diurnal, being most active during the day.

Meerkats are omnivores, therefore have a very varied diet and devote a lot of time to finding food. Being a social species, they live in groups of up to 30 individuals, known as mobs.

In captivity, meerkats can live up to 12 – 14 years but in the wild the average age is around 6 – 8 years old.

Their population numbers are stable, and they are classed as a least concern species according to the IUCN.



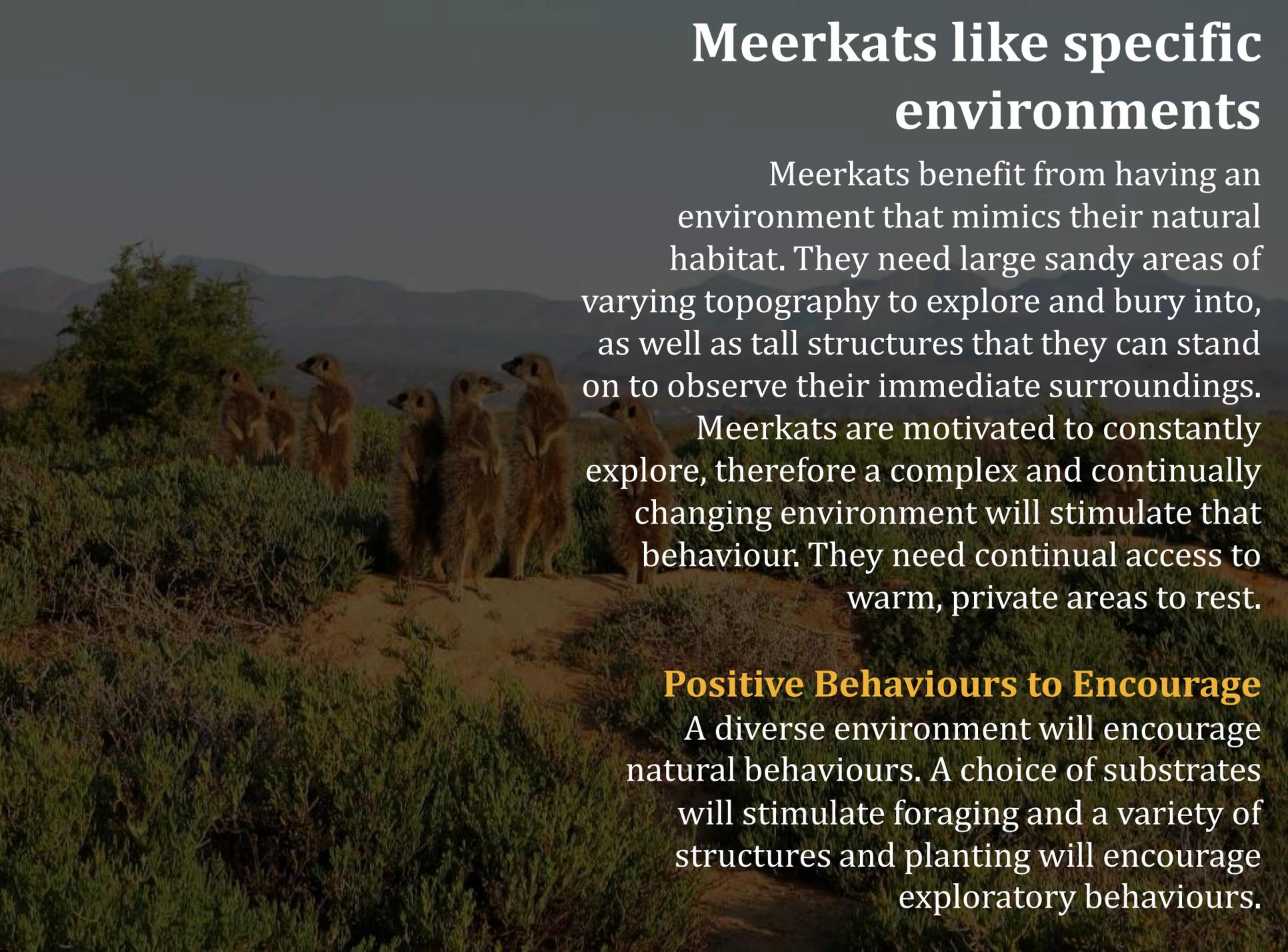
Meerkats like specific environments

Meerkats benefit from having an environment that mimics their natural habitat. They need large sandy areas of varying topography to explore and bury into, as well as tall structures that they can stand on to observe their immediate surroundings.

Meerkats are motivated to constantly explore, therefore a complex and continually changing environment will stimulate that behaviour. They need continual access to warm, private areas to rest.

Positive Behaviours to Encourage

A diverse environment will encourage natural behaviours. A choice of substrates will stimulate foraging and a variety of structures and planting will encourage exploratory behaviours.

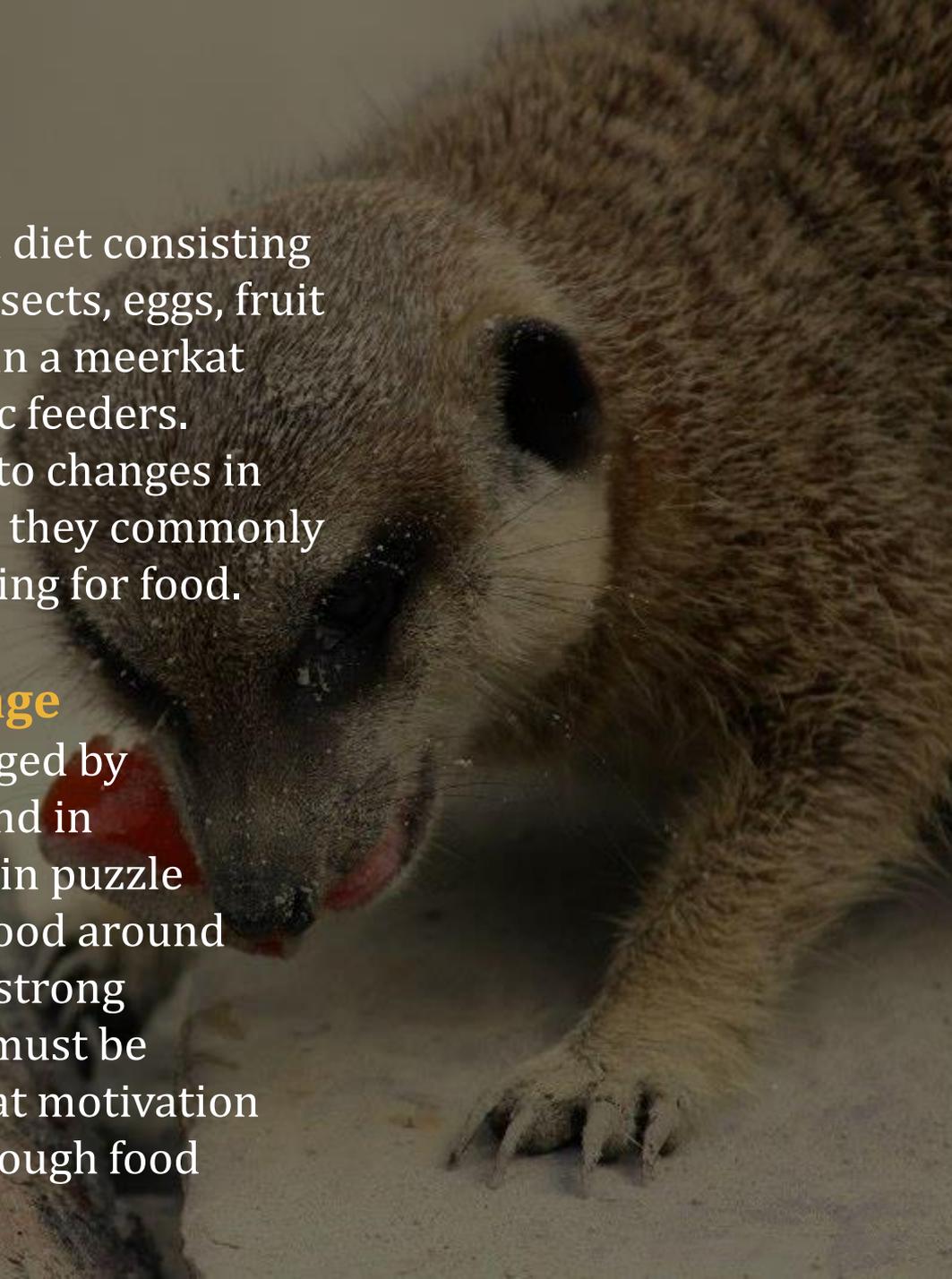


Meerkats have a varied diet

Meerkats are omnivores so will eat a diet consisting of plants as well as meat. Reptiles, insects, eggs, fruit and vegetables are all included within a meerkat diet, and they are often opportunistic feeders. Foraging activities alter in response to changes in daylength and thermoregulation but they commonly spend about 40% of their time foraging for food.

Positive Behaviours to Encourage

Foraging behaviours can be encouraged by providing food several times a day and in stimulating ways. These can include in puzzle feeders, scattered feeds and hiding food around enclosures. The desire to forage is a strong motivational factor for meerkats so must be encouraged to continue to satisfy that motivation and provide cognitive challenges through food presentation.



Meerkats like to dig and burrow

Providing several different types of substrates such as sand, soil and bark chip can all encourage digging and burrowing.

Flooring substrates must be deep but burrows can collapse which might present a safety risk to the meerkats. Preventing escape through burrowing must also be considered in enclosure designs, such as the use of a mesh floor below the substrate. Digging also encourages natural wearing down of claws.

Positive Behaviours to Encourage

Digging and burrowing is an essential element of a meerkat's natural behavioural repertoire. A burrow will provide them with a safe area to rest and sleep, as well as a bolt hole for when they feel threatened.

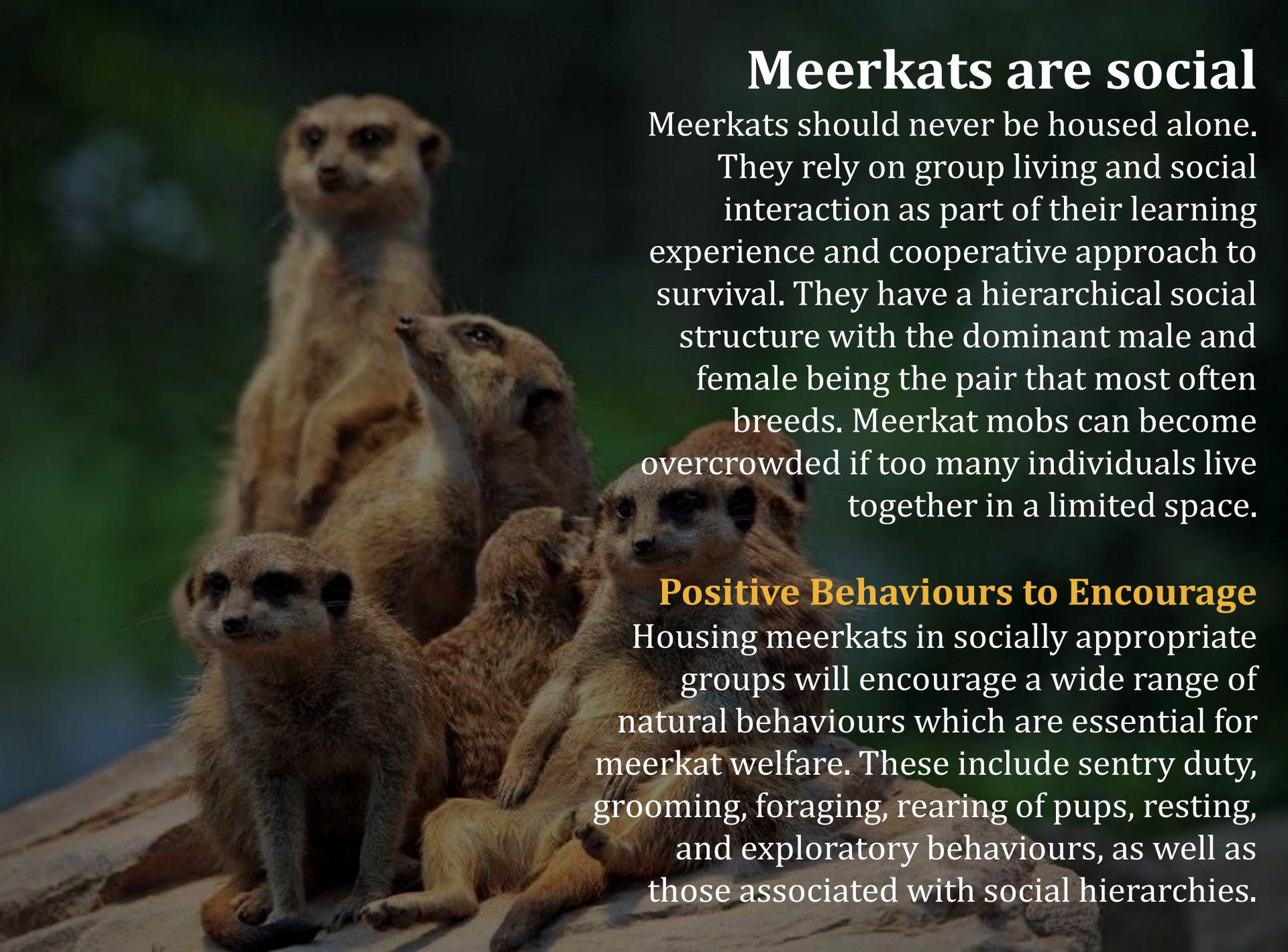
Meerkats like to conduct sentry duty

Sentry duty is where one or more meerkats will stand guard to enable the rest of the mob to forage and rest, safe in the knowledge that they will be alerted if a threat appears.

Positive Behaviours to Encourage

Vigilance behaviours can be encouraged through providing multiple high platforms such as branches and rocks which will ensure the sentry meerkats can observe all of their immediate surroundings. This will also encourage consistent resting and foraging behaviours from the rest of the mob.



A group of meerkats is shown sitting on a light-colored rock. One meerkat is standing upright in the background, looking towards the left. In the foreground, several meerkats are sitting or lying down, some looking towards the camera and others looking away. The background is a soft, out-of-focus green, suggesting an outdoor environment.

Meerkats are social

Meerkats should never be housed alone.

They rely on group living and social interaction as part of their learning experience and cooperative approach to survival. They have a hierarchical social structure with the dominant male and female being the pair that most often breeds. Meerkat mobs can become overcrowded if too many individuals live together in a limited space.

Positive Behaviours to Encourage

Housing meerkats in socially appropriate groups will encourage a wide range of natural behaviours which are essential for meerkat welfare. These include sentry duty, grooming, foraging, rearing of pups, resting, and exploratory behaviours, as well as those associated with social hierarchies.

Meerkats enjoy enrichment

Meerkats are an active and curious species, often investigating anything new and interacting with elements of their environment. They can easily become frustrated or bored if not given the opportunity to express behaviours through a stimulating enrichment provision programme.

Positive Behaviours to Encourage

Foraging behaviours can be encouraged through the use of scatter feeding and puzzle feeders. These and other non-edible items might also encourage manipulatory behaviours as individuals will interact with and investigate devices. Play behaviours can be the result of enrichment provision and appropriate social groupings.



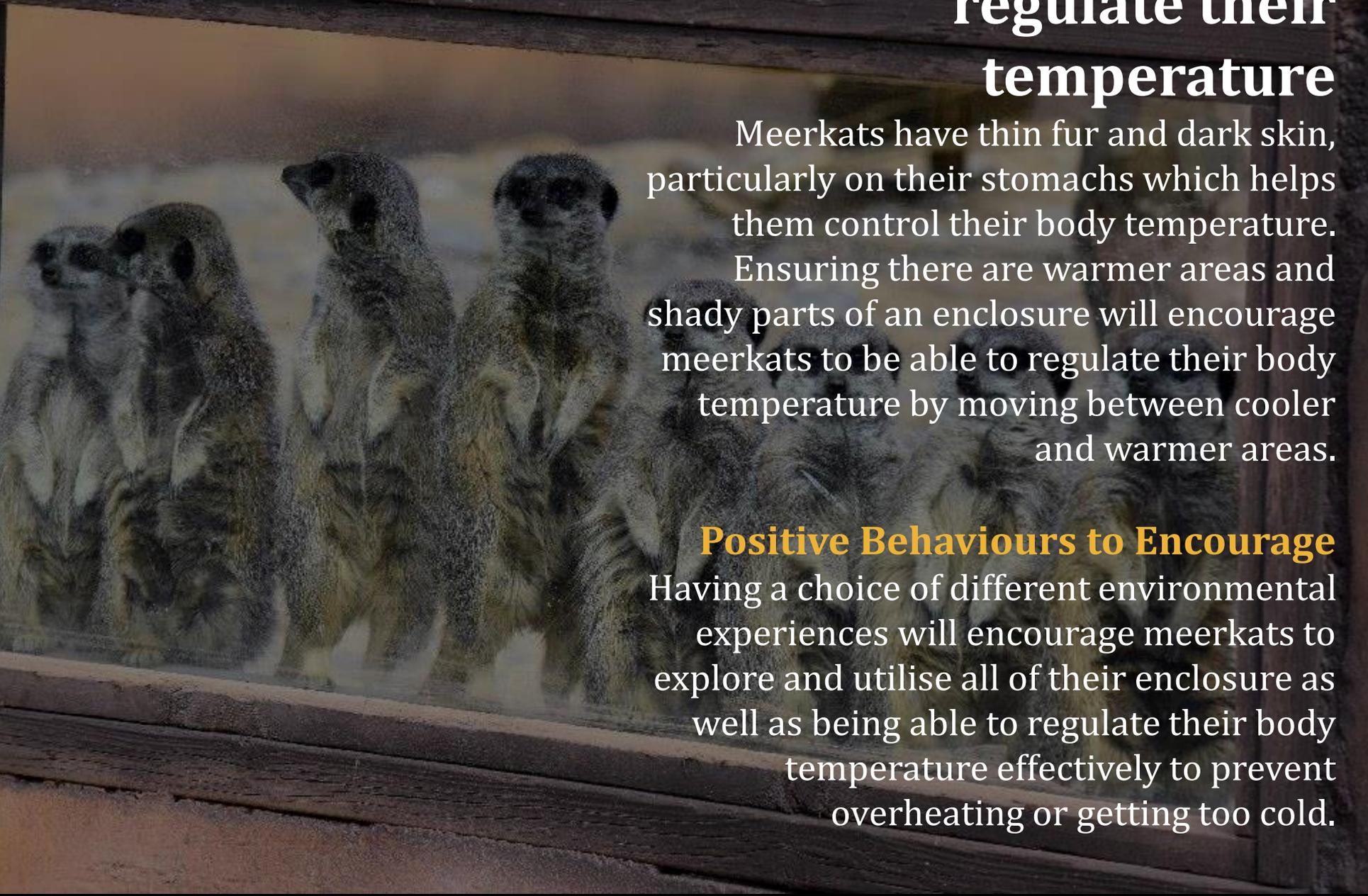
Meerkats like to regulate their temperature

Meerkats have thin fur and dark skin, particularly on their stomachs which helps them control their body temperature.

Ensuring there are warmer areas and shady parts of an enclosure will encourage meerkats to be able to regulate their body temperature by moving between cooler and warmer areas.

Positive Behaviours to Encourage

Having a choice of different environmental experiences will encourage meerkats to explore and utilise all of their enclosure as well as being able to regulate their body temperature effectively to prevent overheating or getting too cold.



Meerkats enjoy

A suitable environment that promotes all their natural behaviours including opportunities to dig and forage, and an appropriate social structure. A stimulating and enriching environment is essential for meerkat welfare.

In captivity we should always try and replicate their natural and normal behaviours, so they are happy and healthy throughout their lives.

