



Meet & Greet: Cheeks and Pearl

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<https://youtube.com/watch?v=ZoMuQaqnc2w>

<https://nerdfighteria.info/v/ZoMuQaqnc2w>

Jessi: Hi, welcome to Animal Wonders, I'm Jessi, I'm a wildlife educator that rescues displaced exotic animals and I currently care for over 80 of them. Today, I have two of our animals for you to meet and get to know.

(Animal Wonders Intro plays)

This is Cheeks. He's a Netherland Dwarf Rabbit, and he's pretty darn handsome and really well-formed. He probably came from good quality, show rabbit genetics. His breed was specifically bred to be small and cute, which he is, and humans really enjoy small and cute things, but because they're so cute, people often buy them on impulse without really understanding the responsibility of caring for one properly. Now, they can be well-cared for in captivity, however, you have to do the thorough research before you take one into your home.

Cheeks was fairly young when he came to be an ambassador, and it was apparent that he had been really well handled, probably by a young child, and he took to our interactions readily. But we still made sure that we did handle and play with him daily and expose him to many different experiences before he hit puberty. He became great friends with our Patagonian Cavy, Tango, until we realized our USDA permit didn't allow them to share a space. So after that, he got his own enclosure, but he did come out for daily visits with his friends.

Over the years, Cheeks met many of the animals that we have here at Animal Wonders. Chili Pepper, the Patagonian Cavy, several guinea pigs, Ash the Chinchilla, Sydney the bettong, those guys all make up this motley crew. As Cheeks grew older, he basically became a curmudgeon. He prefers to have his own space and watch all the shenanigans from a distance. We also discovered that Cheeks really likes to be up high, and he emphatically dislikes dogs or anything that resembles them.

That is how Cheeks came to live where he does now. Now, this enclosure is quite small compared to what I would usually recommend for a rabbit, but Cheeks has made it quite clear that this is what he prefers, so I oblige, because I understand that his living quarters are on the small side, I focus on enriching him in other ways. He gets out on many presentations, meeting new audiences, and I do get him out and about to hop around. Even if he's not thrilled with the experience, it is good for his physical health.

Inside his home, he loves getting massages, he likes to lick arms and fingers, he does this weird thing where he lays on his back with his front feet in the air. He also really likes playing with boxes and other chewy toys. He's never been neutered and we've never had any difficult behaviors arise because of his hormones taking over. He's always been really sweet and affectionate. He recently got a new toy and he really loves it. He does enjoy eating, but he'd actually prefer coming over and getting pets over eating, but there's one thing that tops everything else: bananas. He loves bananas. He can't get enough of them.

Cheeks is an incredible ambassador because he's so great at establishing a connection with the audience. During a presentation, I like to bring him out first before any of the other animals, because he does elicit that emotional response. Cheeks is amazing, and he's one of a kind.

This gal is not nearly as fluffy, but she's just as awesome. This is Pearl, the Columbian Black and White Tegu, also known as a Golden Tegu. We rescued Pearl in 2008, when we had just made the commitment to make Animal Wonders an actual thing. A local reptile rescue organization, they became overwhelmed with reptiles, so we asked how we could help, and they gave us a one-year-old Pearl. She was feisty and beautiful. We named her Pearl because

it looks like she has Pearls on her back.

Golden Tegus like Pearl are really common in the rescue world, because people don't do the proper research on this specific species. What happens is they see the larger species like the Red Tegu online just hanging out with their humans, kinda acting like a puppy, and they want that relationship. When they do the research to try and buy one, they realize they're quite expensive. So they get the cheaper version, which is not the same. This species is not like the calmer species. They're quick and aggressive and generally, they don't tame down with age. They've caused many injuries in humans, and their bite is intense.

Pearl is the victim of this exact situation, she bit her owner, and she was sent to the rescue. They were happy to take her in, but they were already overwhelmed with many other reptiles. So we were happy to give her a lifelong home, so that we could educate about this issue. Pearl quickly outgrew her first enclosure, so we purchased her a new one, which she outgrew that one as well, so we built her a custom enclosure and we're currently working on another upgrade. Her favorite thing to eat is scrambled eggs, but she can't live on that alone, because it's not nutritionally sound, so she also eats mice and rats, chicks, and ground turkey. And like so many animals at Animal Wonders, she likes bananas, too.

It hasn't been all smooth sailing with Pearl. About four years ago, her mouth swelled up. Our veterinarian said it was probably caused by some sort of puncture wound and had become infected, and then necrotic. So she cleaned it out, stitched it up, and started her on antibiotics. We struggled with this reoccurring mystery infection for almost three years, but I'm happy to report that she's been healthy and clear for over a year now.

Some of the things Pearl really enjoys are swimming or going on walks on warm, sunny days. She also loves her hideout den or being rubbed when she's shedding. Pearl isn't as famous as Cheeks the rabbit, but she's been a longtime animal ambassador, and we appreciate her for her own unique self.

Well, that was really fun. I hope you enjoyed meeting Cheeks and Pearl. We love to get to know the individual personalities of each one of our animals and find ways to make their lives really enjoyable. Thanks for watching, guys! If you would like to go on an adventure with us every week, you could subscribe to our YouTube channel at AnimalWondersMontana, or if you have any questions or comments, leave 'em below, or find me on Twitter, Tumblr, and Facebook throughout the week.

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