

Do female degus communally nest and nurse their pups?

Luis A. Ebensperger, Claudio Veloso, Petra K. Wallem

Abstract

We examined the nesting and nursing behavior of females of the caviomorph rodent *Octodon degus*. We recorded the behavior of two, three-female groups of lactating degus kept in captivity and compared it with that of singly housed lactating females. Grouped females spontaneously nested communally. Five of six lactating females had non-offspring pups hanging from their teats, which suggests that some non-offspring nursing took place. Non-mothers increased their maternal behavior after the delivery of their own pups. Although time allocated to parental care by each communally nesting dam did not differ from that of solitary lactating females, young of communal litters spent less time alone and enjoyed more time cared for by a lactating female than young of single dams.