

Organiser

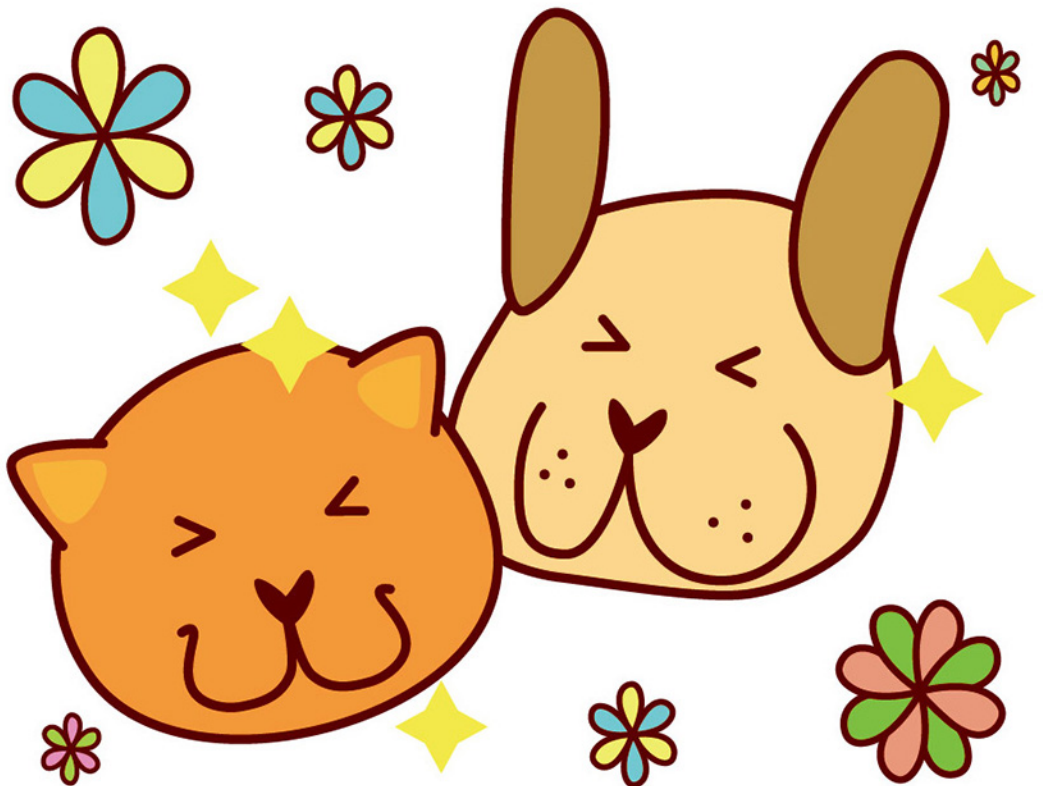
Funded by

**Responsible
Pet
Ownership**
Children's Kit



The Hongkong Bank Foundation
滙豐銀行慈善基金

Animal Lifecycles



This Children's Kit is sponsored by the Hongkong Bank Foundation to be given free to any interested parents of children who want to acquire a pet either through the SPCA, other animal-welfare organisations or pet shops. We encourage you to study and discuss the contents with your children before making any decisions.

Education Department

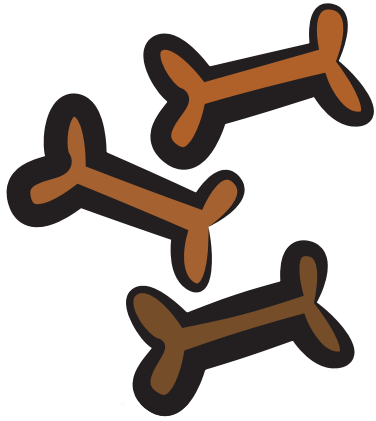
LIFE CYCLES

If you are thinking of getting a pet, it is important that you take into account the fact that animals, whether fish, amphibians, birds, insects, reptiles or mammals, are living beings and all go through different stages of development. They are born, grow up, grow bigger, have offspring (sometimes many), grow old and eventually they die. This is the life cycle of every living thing on earth.



How long will an animal live?

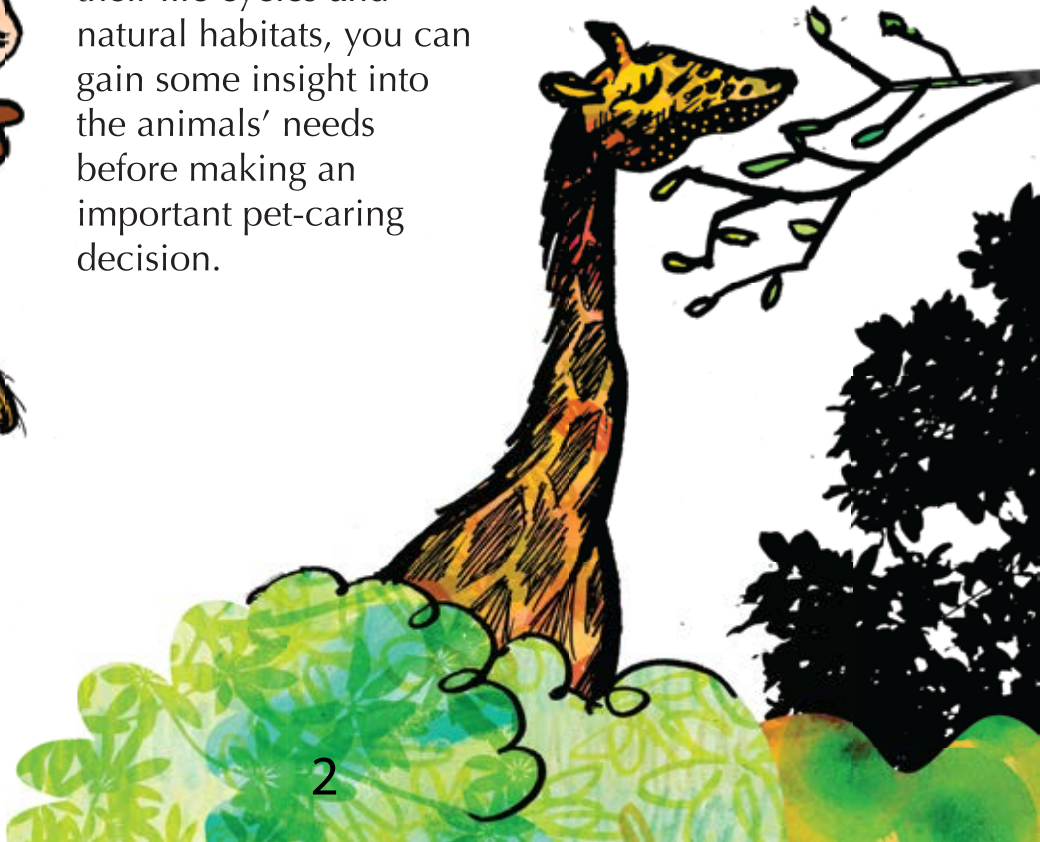
Different species of animal have different lifespans. Some live for a very long time, but others exist for only a short while. Regardless of how long they live, their behaviour, their physical features and their requirements may vary at different stages. As a pet owner, you need to be aware of these changes and to care for the animal's needs as they arise.



Animals that live in the wild can grow and reproduce without human care. Pets cannot; they are vulnerable and rely totally on human hands to take care of them. It is the responsibility of pet owners to meet the needs of the animal over its entire lifetime.



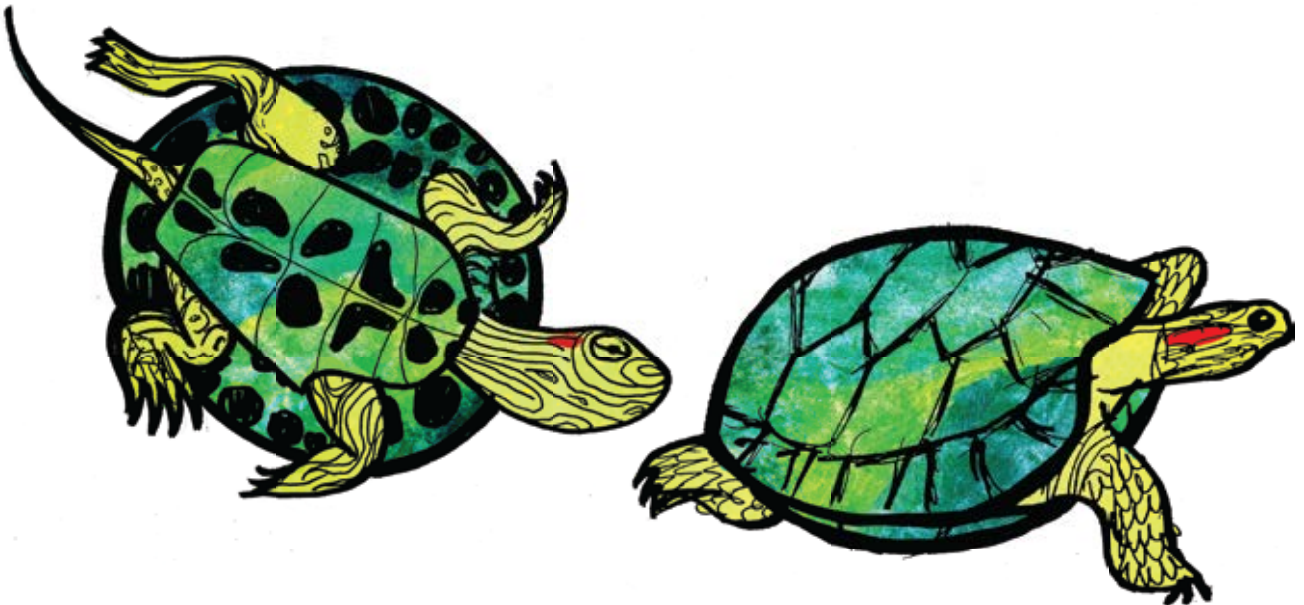
In this booklet, we will focus on one common example of a pet that children like to have from the six main classes of animals. By learning about their life cycles and natural habitats, you can gain some insight into the animals' needs before making an important pet-caring decision.



TURTLES

There are many different species of turtle. Some live in the sea, some live in fresh water (often referred to as terrapins) and some live on land (tortoises). They generally live from between 30 and 60 years. Some sea turtles have an 80-year lifespan, while some giant tortoises are known to live for over 100 years.

Turtles are reptiles and like most other reptiles they give birth by laying eggs on land. The newly hatched turtles look very much like the adult but are a lot smaller. The young turtle grows into an adult, the adult female will lay eggs and the life cycle repeats itself.





Red-eared terrapins

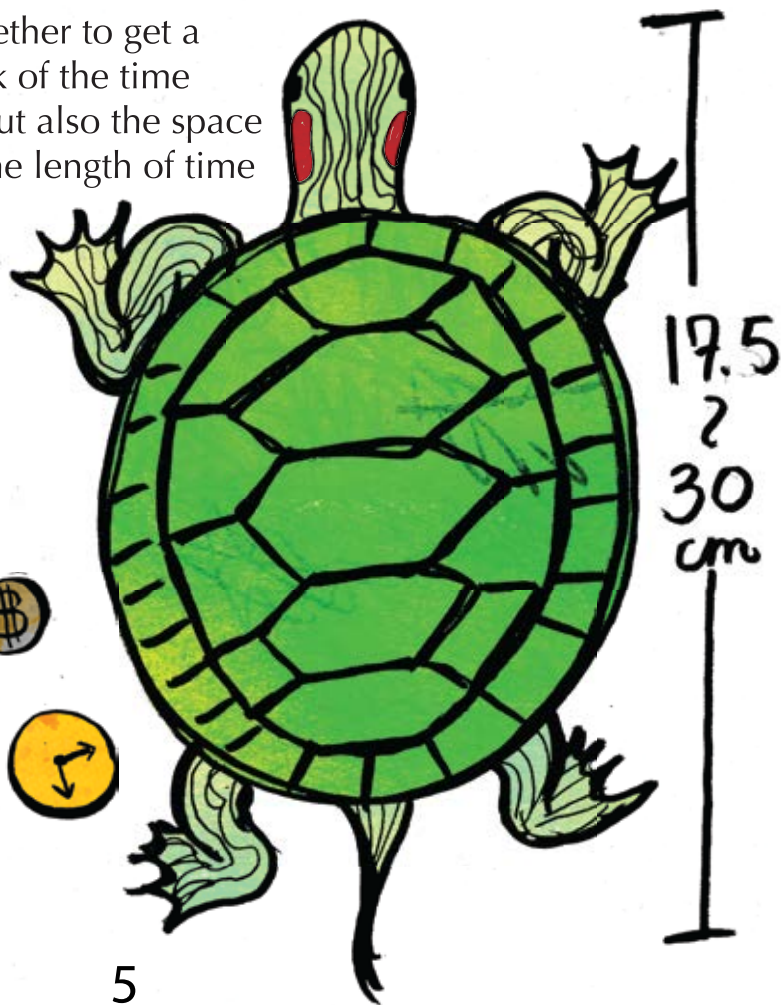
This is one of the common breeds of reptile that young children like to keep as a pet. They are usually kept in an aquarium. The baby turtle is small in size, around 4.5 centimetres (cm) in length, and can be held easily in your hand.

But do you know how big they can grow and how long they live?

Red-eared terrapins may live 40 years or more and when they are fully grown they can reach between 17.5 cm and 30 cm in length.

So, when deciding about whether to get a turtle as a pet, don't just think of the time involved in looking after it, but also the space it will need as it grows and the length of time it will live.

Without the proper knowledge of how to care for and treat these animals, many die within weeks or months of being taken home.

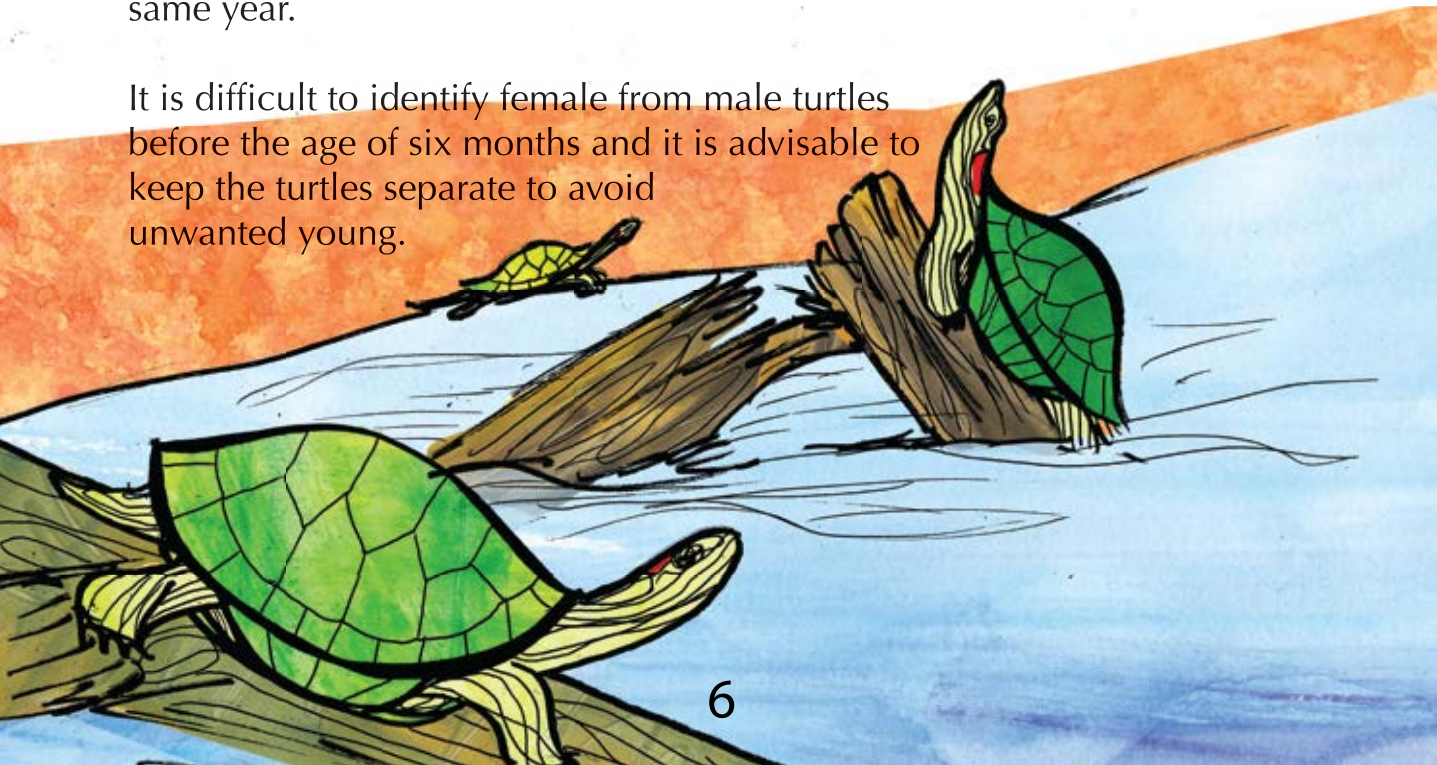


Do you know the habitat of these animals?

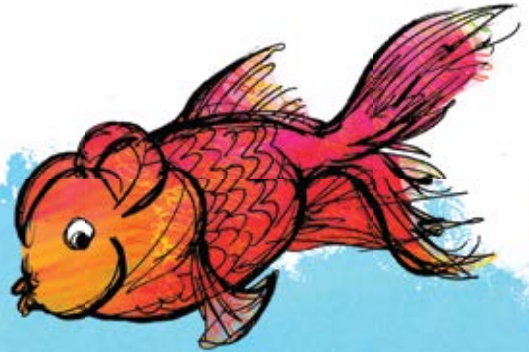
Red-eared terrapins are semi-aquatic animals which originate from the southern United States. They are found near ponds and streams. They eat their food in water, but they lay their eggs on land. They are now present in many countries and can be commonly found in Hong Kong pet shops that carry aquatic life. It is essential for pet-owners to feed them with a proper diet consisting of good quality pellets.

The female breeds at age five to seven years and may lay a clutch of from 2 to 30 eggs at a time. She can produce five clutches within the same year.

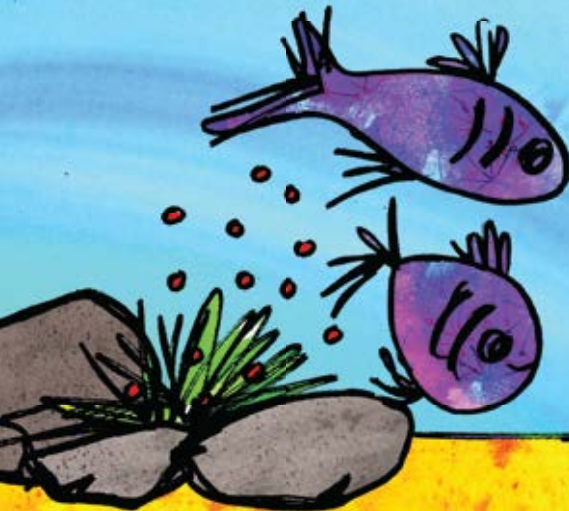
It is difficult to identify female from male turtles before the age of six months and it is advisable to keep the turtles separate to avoid unwanted young.



FISH



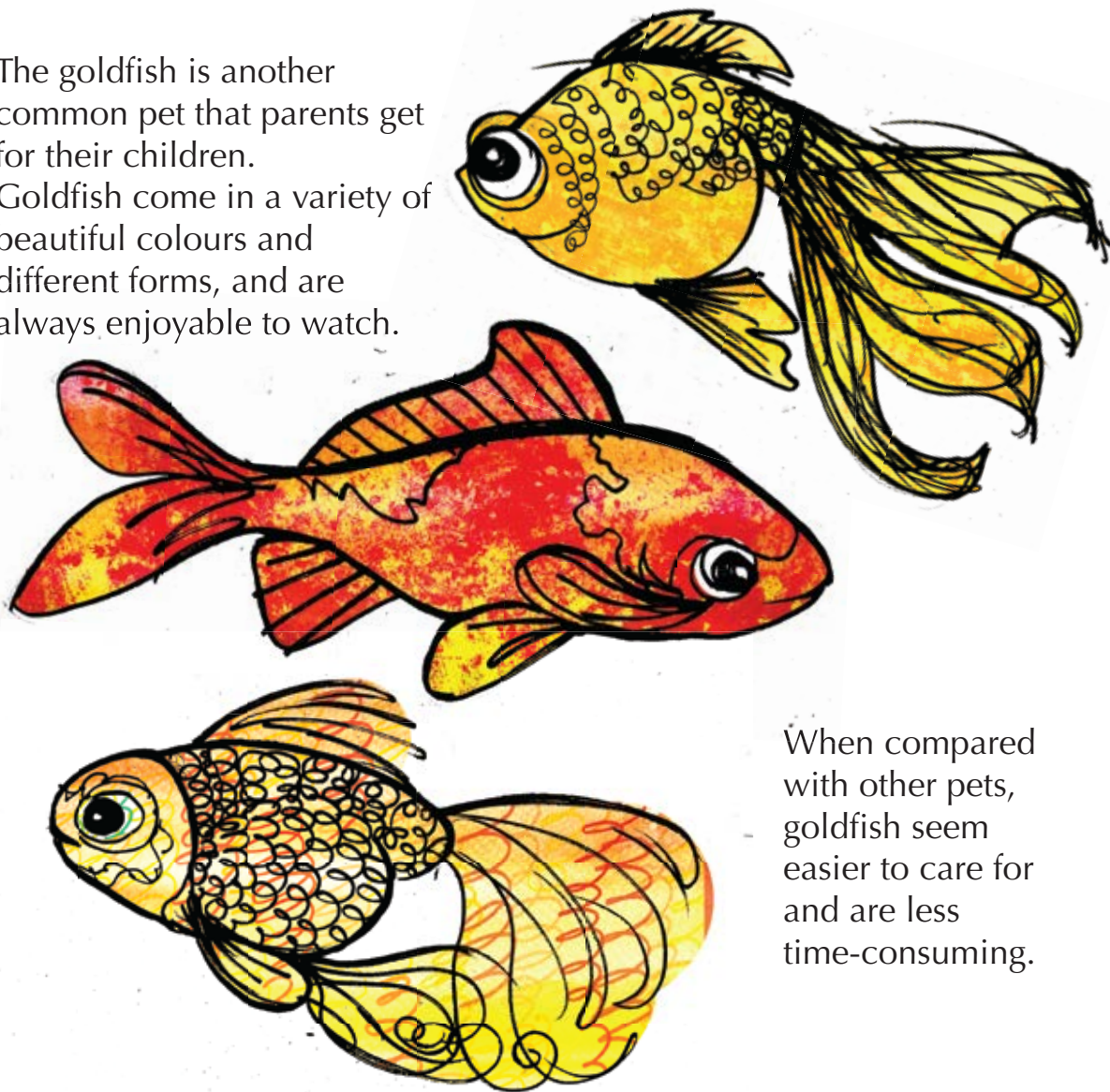
Fish live their whole lives in water and their life cycles vary among species. When they breed, some fish lay eggs and some produce live babies. Whether fish have babies or lay eggs, the process is called spawning.



Goldfish

The goldfish is another common pet that parents get for their children.

Goldfish come in a variety of beautiful colours and different forms, and are always enjoyable to watch.



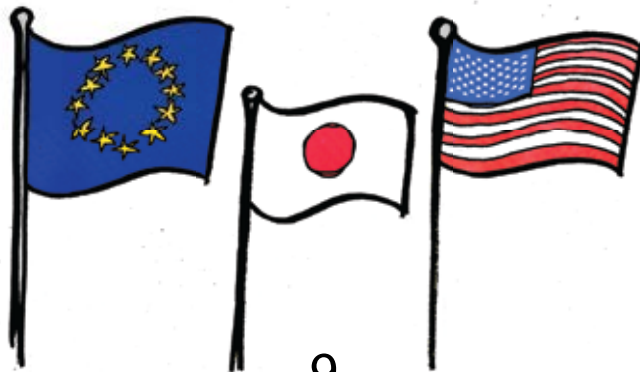
When compared with other pets, goldfish seem easier to care for and are less time-consuming.



What do you know about them and how long can they live?

Goldfish originated in China. They are fresh-water fish and are said to be the first fish raised as pets. Then they were exported to different countries, notably Japan, Europe and America, where they developed into different varieties. It is estimated that there are over 125 types of goldfish.

They do best at a temperature of 18°C to 22°C and can live for a very long time – as much as 20 years or more – but of course this all depends on how you as a pet owner to take care of them.



Female goldfish usually rub against aquatic plants to release their eggs in the water. After the male fertilises the eggs, they start to develop as baby fish. However, the parents commonly eat the eggs as they hatch and they should therefore be kept apart in separate aquariums.

The eggs hatch within two to three days. A baby goldfish is called a fry and stays attached to the aquarium plants for about two days. Within a week or so, the fry will look more like a little goldfish and will start to swim looking for food. They adapt and grow quickly in their environment. It takes around a year before the young goldfish becomes mature. As the fish reaches adulthood and lays its own eggs, the life cycle begins again.



BIRDS



There are thousands of species of bird on the planet, but all birds share the same basic life cycle. The females lay eggs in nests and the parents cover the eggs to keep them safe and warm until they are ready to hatch into nestlings. Baby birds are fed by their parents until their feathers grow and they learn to fly. Then they leave their nest and their parents and become breeding adults.

Few birds are suited to be kept as pets. A popular type of pet bird in Hong Kong is the lovebird.

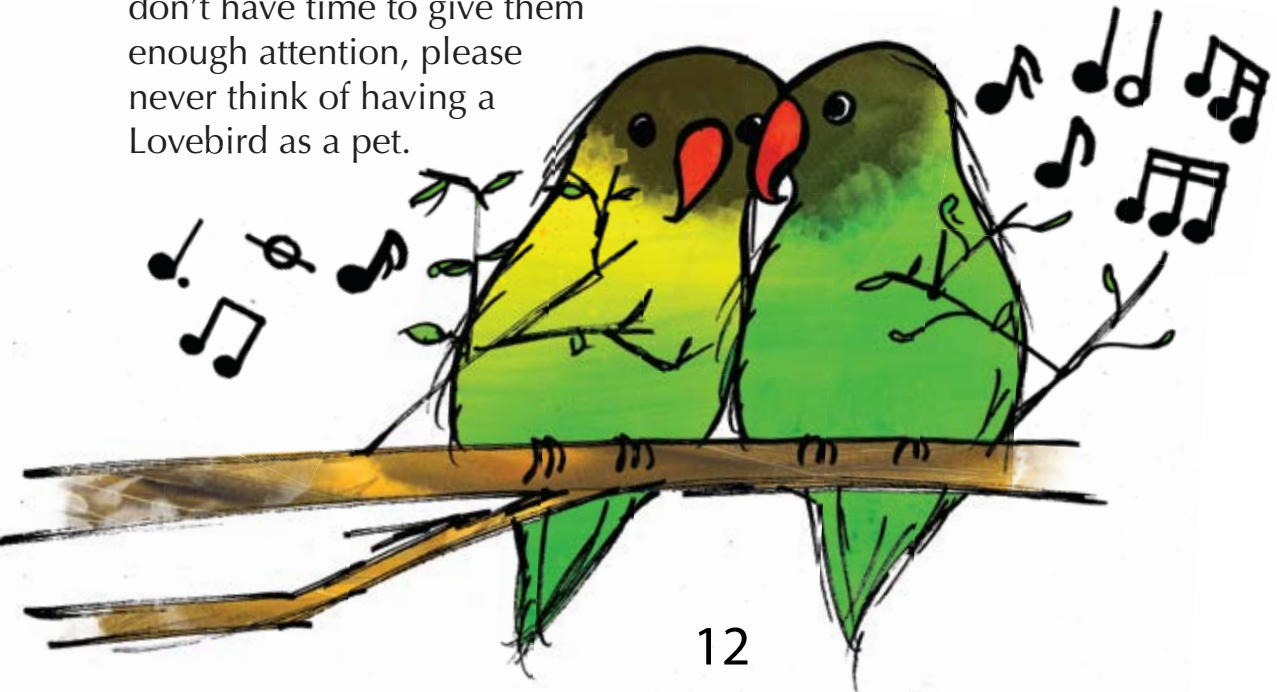
Do you know anything about them?

Lovebird

The Lovebird originated in Africa. It is a small, colourful and attractive parrot about 15 cm in size. It has an average lifespan of between 10 and 12 years. Lovebirds can breed after about ten months, the female laying three to eight eggs in a clutch. The incubation period is 22 to 25 days. The parents will feed and care for the nestlings once they hatch and until they can look after themselves.

Lovebirds are energetic and playful. They love to socialise and need a lot of attention. Bored birds will feather-pluck themselves or each other.

While it is best to keep them in pairs to keep them occupied, if you don't have time to give them enough attention, please never think of having a Lovebird as a pet.



DOGS



Dogs are mammals, as are cats, rabbits, chinchillas, hamsters and guinea pigs. Mammals have two unique shared characteristics: they all produce milk for their babies and they all have hair, if only a little.

Most baby mammals grow inside their mother's body and when born they look like their parents, but are smaller in size. Many mammals are born with their eyes closed.

Dogs usually have a litter of around six puppies or more, depending on the breed. The mother dog will provide her puppies with milk until they are about eight weeks of age. Puppyhood lasts until 6 to 18 months of age; dogs are usually sexually mature by the age of one year.



Do you know dogs age faster than people?

Dogs can be considered adolescent from about five months and adult from about one year, at which time they are able to breed.

When a dog reaches seven years of age, it enters the senior phase of its life, begins to slow down and becomes less active. Dogs live for around 12 to 16 years but this varies with different breeds. Large breeds (such as Great Danes and the St Bernard) generally have a shorter lifespan than smaller breeds.



Most dogs have been bred to be companion animals, usually living in towns, villages or cities where human beings have settled. However, certain breeds of dog may be really suited only to their natural climatic or geographical habitats. For example, the Siberian Husky with its thick double coat has evolved to live in very cold places like Siberia and the wilds of Alaska. Hong Kong's hot and humid weather definitely does not provide a suitable environment in which these dogs can live happily.

So when making the decision about a dog, make sure it is an informed one based on the animal's real needs and usual habitats, and not solely on your own interests.

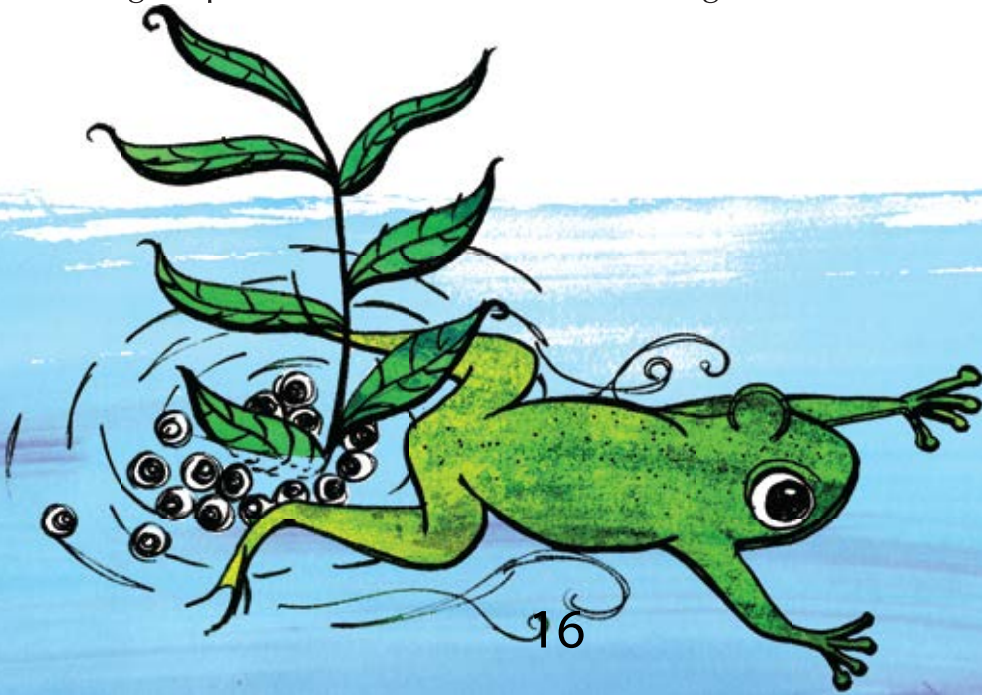


FROGS

With the recent trend for keeping exotic animals, pet frogs have become a popular choice.

But do you know anything about them?

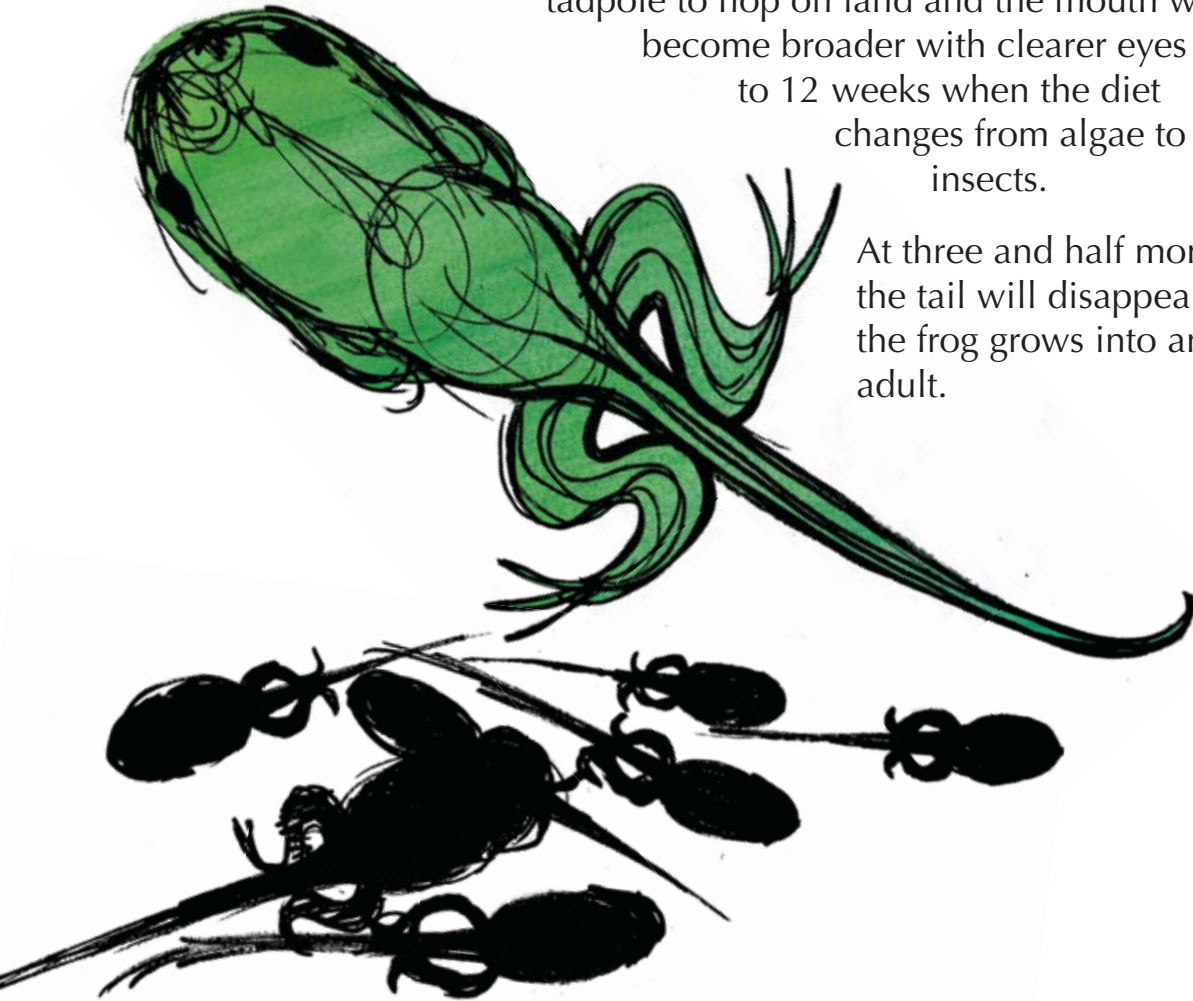
The frog is an amphibian (meaning it spends part of its life in water and part of it on dry land); it is a vertebrate (has a backbone) and cold-blooded. Frogs are born in water, hatching from jelly-like eggs. The female generally lays the eggs in lakes or ponds; she often lays thousands of them, which the male externally fertilises. After about three weeks, frog tadpoles will hatch and feed on algae.



The tadpole develops a long compressed tail for swimming in the water, but within five to eight weeks, its appearance changes as it develops two hind legs and lungs. The development of forelegs will enable the

tadpole to hop on land and the mouth will become broader with clearer eyes at 10 to 12 weeks when the diet changes from algae to insects.

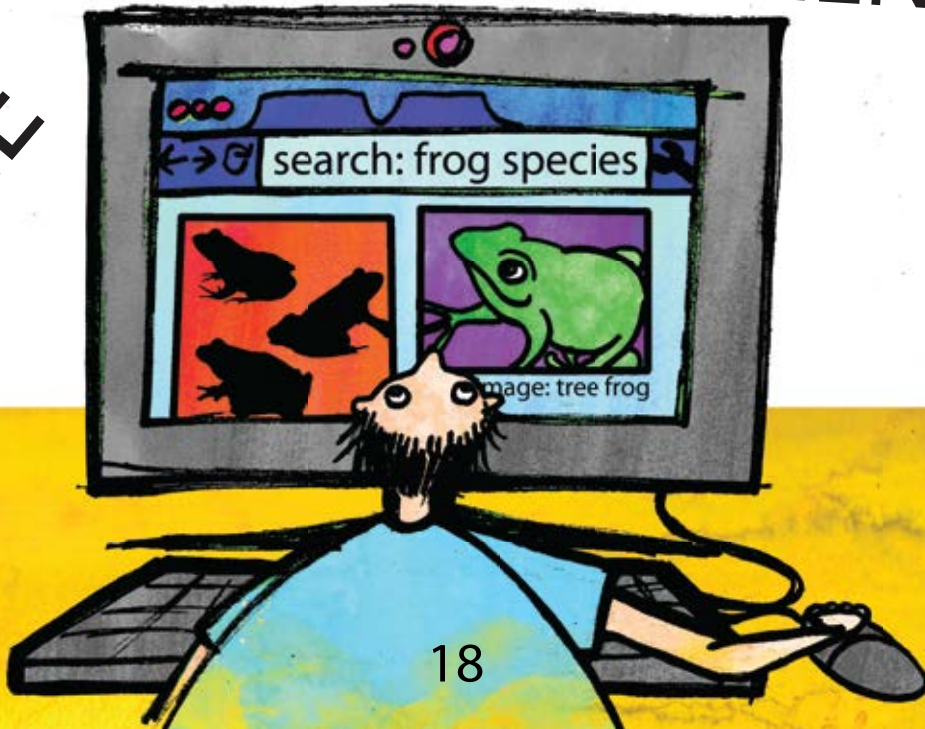
At three and half months, the tail will disappear and the frog grows into an adult.



Within four years, this new frog starts breeding and the life cycle of the frog continues. Their average life span is around 15 years.

There are around 5,000 described species of frog, but before bringing one home make sure you have done lots of research about the type of frog that best suits you and the frog's needs. In order to give your pet a happy life, you need to think carefully about the commitment you are making and the length of time you will need to be responsible for the animal.

RESPONSIBILITY
COMMITMENT
TIME



BEEETLES

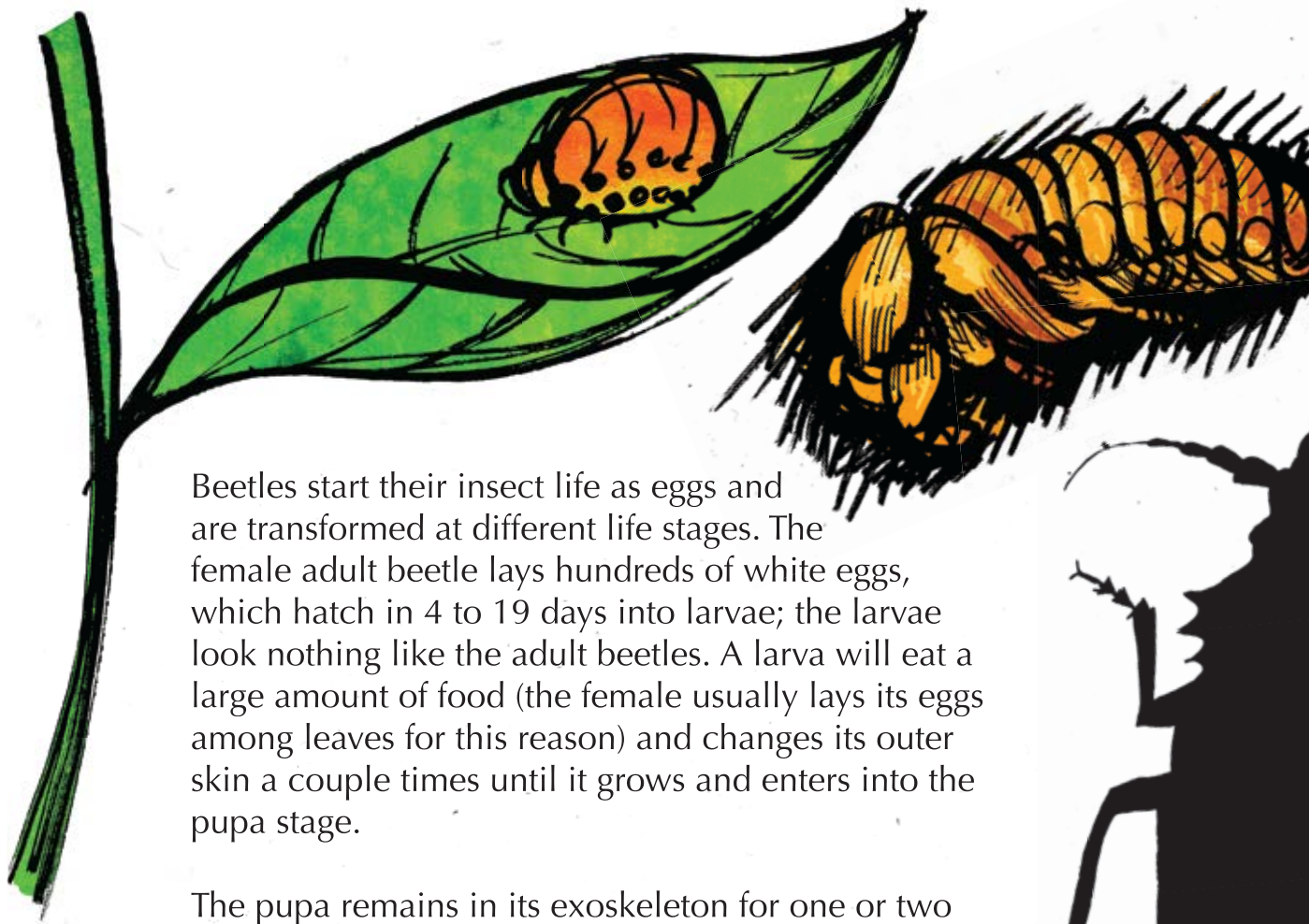
Beetles are also a popular pet for children.

But do you know where they naturally live?

Beetles live in all parts of the world except in salt water and at the Earth's polar regions. They can be found in almost any type of habitat on land – whether dry, moist, hot or cold – in freshwater, also deep in the ground, in trees, in fruit, inside dead wood, inside live plants and even in carcasses.



There are more than 300,000 species of beetle, but the common type kept as a pet is the rhinoceros beetle. This is the largest type of beetle and can reach to 60 millimetres in length. The male has a large horn on the head to use for fighting during the mating season.



Beetles start their insect life as eggs and are transformed at different life stages. The female adult beetle lays hundreds of white eggs, which hatch in 4 to 19 days into larvae; the larvae look nothing like the adult beetles. A larva will eat a large amount of food (the female usually lays its eggs among leaves for this reason) and changes its outer skin a couple times until it grows and enters into the pupa stage.

The pupa remains in its exoskeleton for one or two months while the adult develops inside, during which time it cannot move. When the adult beetle breaks out of the shell, the life cycle will repeat. It is therefore very important to separate the adults to avoid unwanted babies.

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Author & Chief Editor: Vivian Chiu

Volunteer English Editor: Carol Dyer

Volunteer Chinese Editors: Cheng Ngai Lai, Elizabeth Huang,

Cover Designer: Kitty Lau

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