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HOLIDAY 2026 | ISSUE 9

FREE

CINCINNATI ANIMAL CARE - SHELTERING IN A DIFFERENT WAY

SPCA - MORE THAN JUST ADOPTION - EVERYTHING THEY DO FOR OUR COMMUNITY

COVER PHOTO - ROJO WINNER OF THE HOLIDAY CUTEST PET CONTEST-HIS STORY AND THE HOLIDAY PET COLLAGE PAGES 31-34

SKIBIDI RIZZ, THE HORSE IN OHIO

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Each year, Pets In Need serves more than 6,000 pets through wellness care, disease management, surgery, dental services, and other essential veterinary care. Behind every appointment is a story of a family receiving support when they need it most.

One of those stories belongs to Jennifer, a disabled veteran who turned to Pets In Need when her pets' care became financially challenging. Her pets are an important part of her emotional well-being. She relies on them as emotional support animals and describes the bond she shares with them as deeply meaningful.

After losing her beloved cat, Skittles, Jennifer welcomed Hughey into her life. But when Hughey developed a life-threatening condition, the timing could not have been more difficult. Jennifer was also navigating a transition into a new living situation while managing her disability and grieving the loss of Skittles. The possibility of losing Hughey, too, added another devastating challenge during an already difficult period.

Hughey needed surgery and significant aftercare, and the cost of that care was more than Jennifer could afford, even with Pets In Need's reduced fees. Recognizing how important Hughey was to Jennifer's well-being, Pets In Need partnered with her VA case manager to help make his care possible. Together, the VA and Pets In Need worked to cover the full cost of the treatment Hughey needed, allowing Jennifer to focus on his recovery rather than how she would pay for it.

Today, Jennifer calls Hughey her "miracle baby," a reflection of just how much his presence means to her. "Without him, I question the existence of my emotional well-being. I am so grateful to Pets In Need and thank God for them daily."



Jennifer's story is just one example of what can happen when organizations work together to support both people and their pets. Partnerships, along with the support of donors, help Pets In Need bridge the gap when even reduced veterinary costs remain out of reach.

For more than a decade, Pets In Need has worked to make veterinary care accessible to families who need it most. There are thousands of pets who still need care, and continued support makes it possible for us to provide essential services to the people and pets who rely on us. Every donation helps keep pets healthy and where they belong: with the people who love them.

Learn more about Pets In Need or make a donation at PINCincinnati.org.



HOLIDAY

A Life Is Not a Gift

The responsibility of bringing home a pet this Christmas

BY KIRA TACKETT

As the holiday season approaches, homes begin to shimmer with the familiar enchantment of Christmas. Beneath glittering trees and amidst beautifully wrapped presents, few surprises seem quite as heartwarming as a wide-eyed puppy adorned with a crimson bow or a curious kitten peeking from a festive basket as seen in many media depictions such as holiday cards or Hallmark films.

However, animals are not toys, nor are they temporary novelties to be discarded once the excitement of Christmas morning has faded. They are living, breathing creatures, endowed with individual personalities, emotional needs, and an unwavering dependence upon those entrusted with their care. And the decision to welcome an animal into one's home should never be made on impulse, however benevolent the intentions.

Before welcoming a new companion into the household, prospective owners must look beyond the initial enchantment of ownership and consider the years of commitment awaiting them. Dogs require exercise, training, companionship, and veterinary attention. Cats need enrichment, appropriate nutrition, and environments conducive to their physical and psychological well-being. Even seemingly undemanding companions, such

as hamsters, rabbits, reptiles, and fish, all possess specialized requirements that are frequently underestimated.

Before introducing an animal into the family, thorough research is indispensable. Understanding an animal's expected lifespan, dietary needs, habitat, temperament, and potential medical expenses can mean the difference between a flourishing companionship and a regrettable surrender. Prospective owners must also consider whether their schedules, finances, living arrangements, and long-term circumstances can accommodate another living being. For families with young children, the distinction between affection and responsibility is particularly important. While caring for an animal can cultivate empathy and accountability, children cannot reasonably be expected to shoulder the entirety of that responsibility. Ultimately, the adults of the household must be prepared to provide consistent care, even when youthful enthusiasm inevitably wanes.

Fortunately, the magic of Christmas need not depend upon introducing an animal before a family is ready! For children fascinated by the animal kingdom, consider gifting wildlife experiences, educational books, realistic plush animals, or opportunities to participate in age-appropriate shelter volunteering. Sponsoring a shelter animal or donating supplies in a child's name can also nurture compassion while supporting creatures already awaiting loving homes. Furthermore, the Cincinnati Zoo is open winter-long and hosts a variety of engaging events, such as the Happy Zoo Year countdown. These alternatives offer meaningful opportunities to celebrate animals without prematurely assuming responsibility for one. And for those who have carefully considered their circumstances and concluded that they are genuinely prepared to welcome a lifelong companion, consider adoption before purchasing from a breeder or pet store. Animal shelters and rescue organizations are home to countless deserving creatures, from exuberant puppies and affectionate kittens to overlooked senior animals whose greatest wish is simply another chance at belonging.

Adoption should never be an impulsive holiday gesture, but a thoughtful decision involving everyone who will share responsibility for the animal's future.

When the decorations have disappeared, the presents have been forgotten, and another Christmas has quietly surrendered to the coming year, that animal will remain, still needing nourishment, patience, affection, and protection. For while Christmas lasts but a day, the responsibility of loving another life endures long after the decorations are put away.



"For while Christmas lasts but a day, the responsibility of loving another life endures long after the decorations are put away."



COMMUNITY · SPCA CINCINNATI

A Foundation for a New Era



After more than 150 years, SPCA Cincinnati is redefining what an animal shelter can do for a whole community.

BY KIRA TACKETT

With more than 150 years of history behind it, SPCA Cincinnati is looking toward a future in which animal welfare means more than simply finding homes for abandoned pets. Under the leadership of President and CEO Chris Seelbach, the organization's longstanding commitment to compassion is entering an ambitious new chapter, one he describes as "A Foundation for the New Era."

For Seelbach, this new era is defined not merely by the number of animals rescued or adopted, but by a broader understanding of what meaningful, sustainable animal welfare can accomplish for an entire community. From behavioral enrichment programs and specialized veterinary facilities to initiatives helping families navigate the financial hardships of pet ownership, SPCA Cincinnati is expanding its mission beyond the traditional boundaries of an animal shelter. The foundation of this evolution? A philosophy believing animal welfare and human well-being are inseparably intertwined, and sometimes, the most compassionate intervention is

preventing an animal from needing shelter in the first place.

It is a philosophy reflected in the organization's far-reaching impact. According to its annual report, SPCA Cincinnati **helped 27,428 animals** throughout the year. Of those, **2,428 received shelter**, while **2,290 found adoptive homes**. Another **1,089 benefited from foster care**, receiving temporary refuge in private households while awaiting the next chapter of their lives. Beyond its shelters, the organization **assisted 25,000 community pets**, **distributed 147,000 pounds of pet food**, **performed 1,387 spay and neuter surgeries**, and provided thousands of medical services.

Behind these figures, however, is a leader whose dedication to animals began long before he entered the world of animal rescue. Before assuming the presidency of SPCA Cincinnati, Seelbach spent years navigating the complexities of public service and Cincinnati politics, and beneath this career in government was an enduring affection for animals, one that had shaped his personal convictions since childhood. In a September 2025 interview with the Association for Animal Welfare Advancement, Seelbach recalled learning from a preschool teacher, at just five years old, that some of the foods he enjoyed came from animals. Disturbed by the revelation, he informed his parents that he no longer wished to eat meat, and it was a decision he has maintained all throughout his life. That conviction would eventually find expression in his political career. Among his early actions on Cincinnati City Council was helping repeal the city's controversial pit bull ban, advocating instead for legislation that held irresponsible owners accountable rather than condemning animals solely on the basis of breed, and furthermore supporting efforts to prohibit the use of exotic animals in circuses.

Following his departure from City Council, Seelbach took a sabbatical to reflect upon the direction of his life. Rather than immediately pursuing another political position, he began considering where his professional experience, personal happiness, and desire to contribute something meaningful to society might converge.

His answer? Time and again, it was animals.

He soon became involved with Ohio Alleycat Rescue, eventually taking the helm of the organization and gaining firsthand experience with both the practical and emotional complexities of animal rescue. When the opportunity to lead SPCA Cincinnati arose, the transition represented a natural continuation of a journey that had begun decades earlier; In 2025, Seelbach succeeded longtime President and CEO Mike Retzlaff, whose nearly three decades of leadership had helped shape SPCA Cincinnati into the institution it is today. Inheriting responsibility for an organization with more than a century and a half of history was both an honor and an extraordinary undertaking. For Seelbach, it also presented an opportunity to build upon that legacy while reimagining how a humane society could serve animals and the people who love them.

One particular rescue has become an especially personal reminder of what compassion can accomplish. In March 2026, a five-year-old orange cat known as Pumpkin arrived at SPCA Cincinnati following the death of her previous owner. Unlike animals surrendered because of intentional

2025 BY THE NUMBERS

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~25,000
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of pet food distributed

1,387
spay and neuter surgeries

Source: SPCA Cincinnati annual report



PUMPKIN Seelbach with Pumpkin, who arrived at SPCA Cincinnati at about 25 pounds and has been slimming down in his home.

"Sometimes the most compassionate intervention is preventing an animal from needing shelter in the first place."

neglect or abuse, Pumpkin appeared to have come from a loving home. Nevertheless, her physical condition presented an alarming challenge. Weighing approximately 25 pounds, she was severely obese and with legs bowing beneath the strain of her own body. Walking had become difficult, and even routine veterinary examinations could pose a danger when her breathing grew labored.

For Seelbach, Pumpkin was more than another animal in need of assistance. She was an individual deserving the opportunity to live a healthier life, and thus he eventually welcomed her into his own household, joining his two resident cats, Doe and Dottie. The transition was not without its difficulties, as Pumpkin initially struggled to adjust to her unfamiliar surroundings and new feline companions. Yet with patience and a carefully managed approach to her health, she gradually began to flourish. By October 2026, Pumpkin had lost nearly three pounds. Her once-strained movements had grown more comfortable, her coat had become glossier, and she could even climb onto the couch to rest alongside her feline housemates. For an organization whose history stretches across more than a century and a half, the future is not about abandoning the principles upon which it was founded. It is about expanding their reach, recognizing that caring for animals also means supporting the communities that sustain them. And for the man guiding SPCA Cincinnati into its next era, sometimes the most compelling evidence of that mission's importance is an orange cat finally comfortable enough to climb onto a couch and make herself at home.

Just as Pumpkin once did, an animal entering the shelter for the first time can be profoundly disorienting. Unfamiliar sounds, strange scents, disrupted routines, and separation from everything they have ever known instinctively sends any animal into a state of fear. Recognizing that an animal's behavior under stressful circumstances does not necessarily reflect its true temperament, SPCA Cincinnati has begun reimagining how shelter animals are understood, rehabilitated, and ultimately prepared for their forever homes. One of the most significant developments in this effort came in 2025, when the organization introduced the nationally recognized **Dogs Playing for Life** program, an enrichment initiative that uses carefully supervised group play to improve the physical and behavioral well-being of shelter dogs. Rather than assessing their personalities exclusively through interactions inside kennels, the program provides opportunities for dogs to socialize in a more natural environment to observe behaviors that might otherwise remain hidden beneath the stress of confinement. Beyond providing much-needed exercise and companionship, these interactions help dogs develop social skills and demonstrate their com-



DAISY Daisy, before and after her recovery at SPCA Cincinnati.

patibility with potential canine housemates.

According to SPCA Cincinnati's 2025 annual report, the program contributed to a **reduction of more than 40% in the length of time dogs spent in the shelter**, helping more animals find permanent homes sooner. Perhaps no story illustrates its success more vividly than Caesar's. Initially, the brown pit bull mix exhibited behaviors that raised concerns about his ability to coexist with other dogs. Yet once introduced to structured playgroups, Caesar revealed an entirely different personality. What initially appeared to be a difficult dog blossomed into an affectionate, sociable companion, eventually becoming one of the shelter's trusted "helper dogs," welcoming newcomers and encouraging apprehensive animals to venture beyond their comfort zones. With a more complete understanding of Caesar's temperament, shelter personnel could confidently communicate his compatibility to prospective adopters. Eventually, he found a family who embraced his enthusiasm for canine companionship. His transformation also embodies Seelbach's longstanding determination to challenge misconceptions surrounding pit bulls, demonstrating how easily an animal can be misunderstood when judged solely by circumstance or breed.

Yet behavioral enrichment represents only one dimension of SPCA Cincinnati's expanding mission. For countless animals, the journey toward a permanent home must first begin with healing. In 2025, the organization welcomed a second full-time veterinarian, strengthening its ability to provide comprehensive medical attention. Throughout the year, its veterinary team administered **5,254 vaccines**, delivered **4,935 preventative treatments**, performed **1,387 spay and neuter surgeries**, and completed another **1,612 surgical procedures**. Behind those figures are animals like Daisy, a dog surrendered when her increasingly urgent medical needs exceeded what her previous owners could afford. By the time she arrived, Daisy was suffering from a severe skin infection complicated by antibiotic-resistant staph, alongside heartworm disease. Physically uncomfortable and emotionally withdrawn, she faced a difficult recovery requiring prolonged treatment and attentiveness - and so, over the following two and a half months, SPCA Cincinnati's veterinary and animal care teams worked tirelessly to restore her health. Gradually, the frightened dog emerged from her suffering, revealing the playful personality that illness had obscured. Where there had once been a visibly distressed animal now stood an exuberant, outgo

ing companion, her coat restored and her expression transformed into an unmistakably delighted, tongue-out smile. Daisy's remarkable recovery demonstrates what becomes possible when vulnerable animals receive the medical attention they deserve, regardless of the circumstances that brought them into shelter care.

Seelbach intends to strengthen that commitment through plans for a new medical center opening in January 2027, expanding access to essential veterinary services. Meanwhile, successful placements continue: as of October 11, 2026, SPCA Cincinnati had facilitated **1,701 adoptions that year**, including 588 dogs and 1,113 cats. However, some of the organization's most transformative work occurs beyond its veterinary facilities and adoption kennels, within the homes of community members willing to provide temporary sanctuary. In 2025, **1,089 animals entered foster care** through SPCA Cincinnati, finding refuge with families who helped them recover from medical procedures, develop social skills, or simply experience the reassurance of a stable household. Besides easing pressure on shelter facilities, fostering provides individualized attention in environments resembling the permanent homes these animals may eventually enter - and sometimes, having become far too attached, their foster parents may be the ones to adopt them in the end.

Such assistance becomes especially indispensable during kitten season, when newborn and vulnerable felines place extraordinary demands on shelter resources. Approximately 90% of kittens and nursing mother cats in SPCA Cincinnati's care are placed with foster families, ensuring they receive the specialized nurturing essential to their earliest stages of life.

"Animal welfare and human well-being are inseparably intertwined."

Sometimes, however, offering sanctuary becomes an unexpected source of healing for the person extending that kindness - such was the case with Buddy, a shelter dog whose story, recounted in the annual report: His eventual foster caregiver had been navigating a difficult period of depression when they encountered his photograph online. Something about Buddy inspired them to welcome him into their home, beginning a relationship that would transform both their lives. Buddy discovered security and affection, while his caregiver found companionship, renewed purpose, and emotional connection during a period of profound personal hardship, and it was the SPCA in which allowed this wonderful bridge to be built between them.

Among the organization's 2025 accomplishments, Seelbach identifies the Chow Now Pantry as a particular source of pride. What began in 2020 as a modest collection of donated pet food, inspired by a volunteer who recognized an emerging community need, has developed into a substantial regional assistance program. Today, the pantry operates from a 4,000-square-foot warehouse, distributing food through community partners across eight counties. In 2025 alone, SPCA Cincinnati distributed approximately **147,000 pounds of pet food**, helping families provide for more than **2,000 animals** without sacrificing their own financial stability. Demand increased by 40% compared with the previous year, underscoring the mounting challenges facing pet owners. The Chow Now Pantry operates upon a principle of assistance without judgment, recognizing that temporary financial hardship does

not diminish someone's love for their companion - all they need is a little assistance, in which its ~280 volunteers will happily provide.

Beyond direct care and community assistance, SPCA Cincinnati is cultivating a more compassionate future through education. During 2025, its humane education team reached more than 2,000 students across 140 classrooms throughout Greater Cincinnati, introducing young people to responsible animal interactions, empathy, and the commitments associated with pet ownership. Sometimes, these lessons begin with something as simple as learning how to approach a dog. In one example highlighted by the annual report, preschool children gathered around a gentle therapy dog named Coda. Before petting him, they learned to request permission, approach slowly, and respect boundaries. Although seemingly modest, such encounters establish an essential foundation for understanding the needs and feelings of other living beings - which is important for children, whose senses of empathy are still developing.

For Seelbach, leadership means "bringing new energy to already good work," building upon generations of accomplishment while envisioning how the organization can become even more impactful. **Plans for an adoption center in Cincinnati's Over-the-Rhine neighborhood** represent another step toward strengthening connections between animals, prospective families, and the surrounding community. Yet none of these ambitions would be possible without the volunteers, donors, foster families, and community partners who sustain SPCA Cincinnati's mission. As a private, independent nonprofit, the organization relies heavily on charitable contributions rather than funding from a parent organization or government agency, and its adoptions only make up 1% of its income. In 2025, volunteers contributed 24,328 hours of service, a 15% increase from the previous year. With 275 active monthly volunteers and growing corporate and community participation, their collective efforts represented more than $400,000 in estimated operational value.

Fundraising initiatives proved equally essential. The organization's 23rd Annual Fur Ball Gala welcomed more than 600 supporters and raised $703,640 for its lifesaving programs, while the Tails on the Trail community event generated nearly $30,000 in additional support. Together, these contributions demonstrate that SPCA Cincinnati's future rests not upon the vision of any single leader, but upon a community united. After more than 150 years, that enduring promise remains the organization's greatest inheritance, and the foundation upon which its new era will be built.

Among those who experienced that spirit of community firsthand was my father, Matt Tackett, who had the pleasure of attending Tails on the Trail. Through his personal observations and photographs, he offers a closer look at the people and costume-wearing animals that made the event memorable. And with this, I will turn the spotlight over to him.

CARE IN 2025

5,254
vaccines given

4,935
preventative treatments

1,612
surgical procedures

24,328
volunteer hours

$703,640
raised at the Fur Ball Gala

Source: SPCA Cincinnati annual report



OHIO'S OWN

Skibidi Rizz, the Horse in Ohio

The internet's favorite "brainrot racehorse" is a real athlete, and he just won in Ohio.

BY KIRA TACKETT

Born March 27, 2022, Skibidi Rizz is an American Thoroughbred gelding whose pedigree is considerably more traditional than his unconventional name suggests, registered by 2016 Kentucky Derby winner Nyquist, out of Sinwaan, and currently races for trainer Saul M. Morales and owner N and E Racing Stables. His sire, Nyquist, won the 2016 Kentucky Derby, while his dam, Sinwaan, originates from another established racing bloodline. For those fortunate enough to have escaped the internet's ever-evolving lexicon, his name combines two particularly notorious expressions of Generation Alpha slang, his name combines "Skibidi," the nonsense term popularized by Skibidi Toilet, and "rizz," internet slang for charisma. Together, they produce a phrase so delightfully ridiculous that hearing a professional race announcer proclaim it with the utmost seriousness has become entertainment in its own right.

Skibidi Rizz first captured widespread online attention during the summer of 2025, particularly following his maiden



“There is a legitimate athlete shining brightly behind the viral phenomenon.”

victory at Horseshoe Indianapolis on July 15. As the young Thoroughbred thundered toward the finish line, the announcer's enthusiastic declaration of his name transformed an otherwise ordinary racing triumph into an extraordinary moment of internet hilarity. Video clips spread rapidly across social media, introducing countless spectators to a horse - and perhaps even a sport - they might never otherwise have encountered. His newfound popularity coincided with the international resurgence of interest in Umamusume: Pretty Derby, the Japanese multimedia franchise that reimagines real-life racehorses as anthropomorphized characters. Inevitably, fans began envisioning what Skibidi Rizz might look like within its universe, transforming the real-life gelding into an unlikely muse for fan art and online discussions of unlikely intersection of traditional equestrian sport and contemporary digital culture, bridging generations through a shared appreciation for the wonderfully ridiculous.

However, his growing reputation is not entirely dependent on his comical name. On July 13, 2026, Skibidi Rizz secured another victory at Thistledown in North Randall, Ohio, prevailing in the fourth race, a one-mile claiming contest contested over dirt. The geographical coincidence was almost too perfect to manufacture. After all, the expression "Only in Ohio" has long occupied the same peculiar corner of internet humor as "Skibidi" and "rizz", furthermore adding fuel to the fire - that the internet's beloved so-called "brainrot racehorse" should claim a victory in the very state immortalized by another viral meme seemed nothing short of poetic absurdity.

With jockey Brandon Tapara among those guiding him to success during his racing career, Skibidi Rizz continued building upon his competitive record, ultimately accumulating three victories across 23 career starts as of late October 2026. And while he has yet to become a major stakes-winning superstar, the young horse’s performances demonstrate that there is a legitimate athlete shining brightly behind the viral phenomenon, and we the people of Ohio shall be cheering him onwards!

AT A GLANCE

Born: March 27, 2022

Breed: American Thoroughbred gelding

Sire: Nyquist, 2016 Kentucky Derby winner

Dam: Sinwaan

Trainer: Saul M. Morales

Owner: N and E Racing Stables

Record: 3 wins in 23 starts (as of late October 2026)

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Emily - Raleigh, NC

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"Got this for our trip to Florida where our unit is on the 21st floor with a balcony. Such a life saver & peace of mind knowing our pup would be safe so high up on the balcony. We used it everyday without a worry. Highly recommend!"

Danielle Rodriguez

★★★★★

"It did exactly what it's designed to do! My little one kept going through the gate into my neighbor's yard, or he'll get out and run back and forth in front of the house until he decided to return to his own yard."

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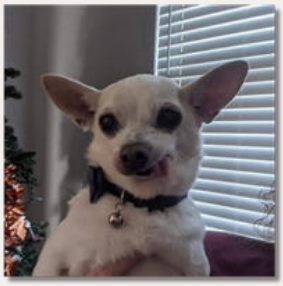
Dog Mom Coffee Co.



Where Coffee, Canines & Community Come Together

Dog Mom Coffee Co, was build around a simple kind of comfort: a warm cup, a beloved dog nearby, and a place where coffee, self-care, and community can meet.

For the woman behind Dog Mom Coffee Co., the dream has always been bigger than coffee: one day becoming a full-time dog mom and providing a soft place to land for elderly dachshunds and chihuahuas in need. Coffee became the perfect sidekick, especially on a chilly fall morning with a dog curled up beside you, but the business also grew from something personal. With a family history of high blood pressure, she wanted the people she loves to enjoy all the fun flavors of coffee without caffeine being their only option, which is why every Dog Mom Coffee Co. flavor is available in both regular and decaf. And while Dog Mom Coffee Co. is proudly female-owned, the dream has never been hers alone. Her husband and family have been beside her every step of the way, helping turn ideas into reality, stepping in wherever needed, and reminding her that with hard work, a supportive family, and maybe a little coffee, even the biggest dreams can become possible.



"In 2018, my dream became even more personal when Max came into our lives. Our beautiful senior Chihuahua was an old soul with an old body, but he never let age hold him down. Loving Max strengthened something we already felt deeply: senior dogs deserve more than being overlooked because they have gotten older.
We gave Max the best senior life we could until we lost him in 2024 following a brain bleed. His impact never left. He continues to inspire our passion for rescue and our dream of someday doing even more for elderly dachshunds and chihuahuas in need". - Nellie



More Than a Coffee Company

Our dogs are woven into the brand. Some have been with us since they were old enough to come home; others are rescues who joined the family later. They inspire products, have coffees named after them and make appearances at our shops. Supporting the pet community also means showing up. We participate in events hosted by local rescues and community groups, and if your organization has a special event coming up, we would love to hear from you.

Not Your Average Coffee Shop

Dog Mom Coffee Co. was not created to be an extravagant cafe where the coffee gets lost beneath everything added to it. Our coffee speaks for itself. We want you to discover a coffee you love, take it home and make it part of your own routine - a Sunday morning, a quiet porch, time with family or a few peaceful minutes with your dog.

As we grow, we plan to expand our ability to brew for the community while keeping things simple. Think of us as the "mom-and-pop" cafe of coffee shops: we brew it, and you dress it up however you like. For those who prefer something different, we also offer a wide selection of teas.

Behind the Slogan - SIP. STAY. HEAL.

As a Licensed Therapist specializing in mental health, Sip. Stay. Heal. holds a much deeper meaning for her than a simple coffee slogan. She knows how easy it can be to become overwhelmed by life, to put everyone else first, or to forget that you are important, too. Sip is the reminder to slow down, take a moment for yourself, and breathe. Stay is about being present, in the moment, with yourself, and maybe beside the four-legged companion who loves you without judgment or expectation. Heal is the reminder that healing doesn't have to happen all at once; sometimes it happens one day, one choice, and one small moment at a time. Through Dog Mom Coffee Co., she hopes Sip. Stay. Heal. reminds people that their mental health matters, taking care of themselves matters, and even on the difficult days... they matter.

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Cincinnati Animal CARE

Sheltering in a Different Way

By Sharon Boyles



Some people see a need and just turn away. Others see a need and put their heart and soul into doing something about it.

Carolyn Evans is one of those people. She is a local nonprofit executive, founder, and organizational transformation leader who has helped build two highly successful initiatives to help animals in need in Greater Cincinnati. Carolyn is a co-founder of Cincinnati Animal CARE (CAC), and founder of My Furry Valentine, Greater Cincinnati's largest annual pet adoption event.

CAC got its start in 2020, after SPCA Cincinnati announced it would no longer operate Hamilton County's animal shelter and dog warden services. Hamilton County was left without a shelter operator, and as the weeks turned to months, no one was coming forward to fill the role. "Our team believed the animals of our county deserved better," Carolyn says. "We knew we could usher in a new way of sheltering that focused on lifesaving, and Cincinnati Animal CARE was born."

CAC currently operates two locations, one at 3949 Colerain Avenue, and one at 4210 Dane Avenue. The organization offers a variety of affordable services and care for pets in Hamilton County and throughout the Cincinnati area. More than just a shelter, CAC's primary operational functions are animal sheltering and animal control, supported by veterinary care, foster and adoption programs, a weekly free vaccine clinic, dog behavior training and other community-based services. "We work to keep pets with their families whenever possible, reunite lost animals with their owners, expand access to veterinary care, and create pathways to placement beyond the shelter walls," Carolyn explains. "Our goal is to make the shelter a temporary stop on the way to a safe, compatible home."

With 100 employees providing services such as animal care, veterinary care, animal control, and lifesaving programs and approximately 1,000 volunteers contributing to enrichment, animal care, fostering, adoption, and outreach, CAC is making an enormously positive impact on pets and their people in the Cincinnati area.

Carolyn shared a memorable impact story from CAC's early days. "Gino came to us unable to use his back legs," she recalls. "Our staff, many of whom had worked for the previous operator, assumed that would be a death sentence. Instead, our Medical Director brought out a wheelchair and explained to our staff, 'We are not euthanizing this dog.' The tears from our staff said everything. As a shelter team, they had expected one





> **"We are not euthanizing this dog."**
>
> *— CAC's Medical Director, on Gino*

outcome, based on what they had known before. Instead, they watched Gino get his bearings and then run across the parking lot. That moment has stayed with me ever since. It was one of those moments when our staff began to truly understand what we meant when we committed to 'sheltering in a different way.'"

More than 9,000 animals enter care at CAC annually, and tens of thousands more pets and their people are positively impacted through CAC adoptions, reunifications with owners, transfers to placement partners, foster care, veterinary services, and community support.

Cincinnati Animal CARE set out to do more than operate an animal shelter differently. The team knew that saving more lives required a fundamental shift in the community's relationship with its shelter and in what people believed was possible. They made transparency and community engagement central to their work, inviting the community to become partners in its lifesaving mission because people can't help solve problems they don't know exist. The community responded, becoming an essential part of what it means to shelter in a different way.

BY THE NUMBERS

9,000+
animals enter care at CAC every year

100
employees

~1,000
volunteers

2
locations: 3949 Colerain Ave. & 4210 Dane Ave.





Photos courtesy of Cincinnati Animal CARE

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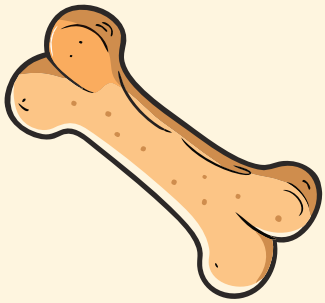
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Cole & Marmalade
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IN MEMORIAM

In Loving Memory of

Cole & Marmalade

BY KIRA TACKETT



Jessica Josephs and Chris Poole with Cole and Marmalade.

There was once a simpler, more innocent era of the internet, when authenticity flourished in its most unassuming forms and "crazy cat videos" could unite millions through laughter. Among the countless feline personalities that captured the world's affection, two unforgettable faces emerged, that being of Cole, a magnificent black cat, and Marmalade, his mischievous orange-tabby "little brother."

Unlike viral sensations such as Keyboard Cat or Grumpy Cat, whose fame arose from one-hit wonders or amusing appearances, Cole and Marmalade's appeal was something altogether more intimate. Through their filmed playful and everyday eccentricities, viewers discovered the extraordinary beauty concealed within the ordinary experience of loving an animal. Their devoted humans, Chris Poole and Jessica Josephs, transformed these precious mo

ments into a celebration of feline companionship that would eventually touch millions of lives.

Adopted in 2013, the spirited Marmalade would soon face challenges unforeseen, as a year later, his family received devastating news: Marmalade had cancer. Further testing revealed that he furthermore had feline immunodeficiency virus - or FIV - a condition that can compromise a cat's immune system. Refusing to surrender hope, his family pursued treatment. Following surgery and twelve chemotherapy sessions, the orange tabby kitten entered remission, continuing to embrace life with his characteristic enthusiasm. His survival became a testament to compassionate veterinary care and the possibilities awaiting medically vulnerable animals when afforded a fighting chance.

Sadly, on October 10, 2021, Cole passed away following his own battle with cancer, leaving behind a profound absence in the lives of his family and the countless admirers who had grown to love him. Then Marmalade followed his brother over the rainbow bridge exactly five years later, on October 10, 2026, at thirteen years old. His final moments were spent at home, surrounded by the unconditional affection of Chris and Jess. Two beloved companions, departing this world on the same calendar day, separated by five years.

Yet, their passing does not signify the end of their story~ quite the opposite, it rather illuminates the remarkable legacy they leave behind. Through Cole, countless viewers discovered that black cats, unjustly burdened by centuries of superstition, deserved affection rather than apprehension. And through Marmalade, audiences learned that an FIV-positive diagnosis need not preclude a fulfilling life overflowing with companionship and love. Together, Chris and Jess transformed their cats' popularity into a platform championing adoption, rescue efforts, spay-and-neuter initiatives, and compassionate animal care. Entertainment became education, admiration became advocacy, and two ordinary cats became extraordinary ambassadors for their species.

Ultimately, their legacy transcends the superficial value of internet fame. It lives within the animals adopted because someone watched their videos, the black cats welcomed rather than feared, and the vulnerable felines afforded another chance at happiness. Cole and Marmalade may have exhausted their nine lives, but the compassion they inspired will live on in countless more.



“Cole and Marmalade may have exhausted their nine lives, but the compassion they inspired will live on in countless more.”

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The Region's Authority in Anything Pets

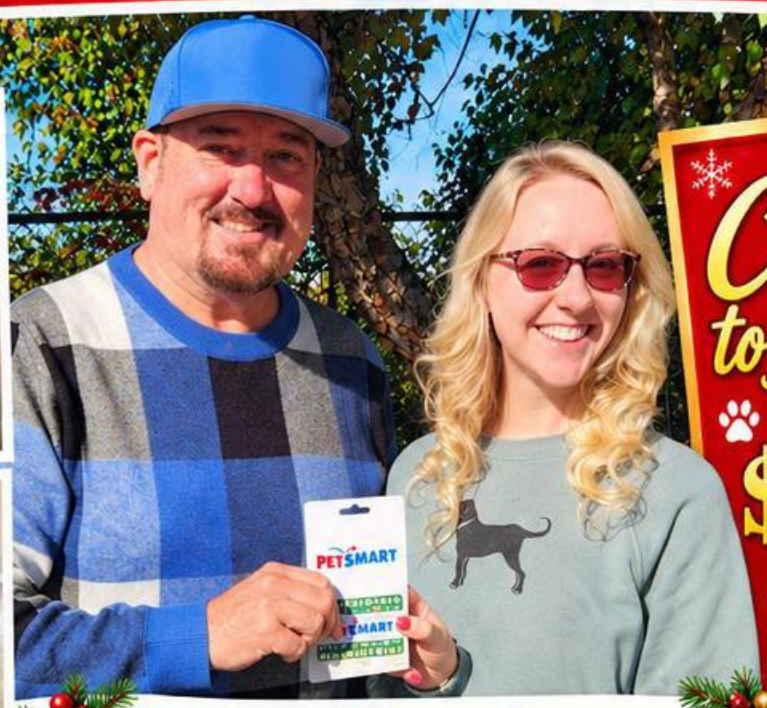
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Cutest Pet Contest Winner!

By NatiPets Magazine

Meet Angela Florea and her beloved dog Rojo, the winner of our 2026 Holiday Issue Cutest Pet Contest!

Angela and Rojo have been best friends for years, and she says he brings joy to everyone he meets. "Rojo is always happy, loves adventures, and has the biggest heart," Angela shared.

Whether they're playing in the backyard, going for walks around Cincinnati, or cuddling on the couch, Rojo is always by Angela's side.

Thank you to everyone who entered our contest. We loved seeing all of the amazing pets from across the Tri-State!

Wishing you and your pets a happy, healthy and joy-filled holiday season!







The Next 3 Pages Feature Our Holiday Pet Picture Collage!

Thank you to everyone who submitted their pet pictures.
Your amazing pets make this issue so special!

Different Species Same Love

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Holiday Issue

Celebrating Amazing Pets All Season Long!

Holiday Picture Collage


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Birdie


Cleo


Crash


Fire Flower


Haylee


Jackson


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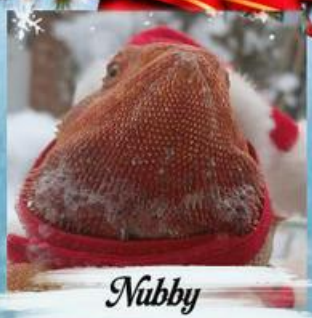
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Lucky


Moose


Noodle


Nubby


Oliver



Rojo


Stanley


Thorfin

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UNIQUE PETS

Blue Death-Feigning Beetles

Deceivers of the desert

BY KIRA TACKETT

Of all the extraordinary little creatures I have had the privilege of keeping throughout my adventures in invertebrate husbandry, few have captured my affection quite like a certain blueberry-shaped beetle. For the past two years, I have had the honor of sharing my home with these delightful little desert dwellers, whose unassuming appearances conceal an abundance of charm and curious character. With their powdery, sky-blue exoskeletons, inquisitively twitching antennae, and rather theatrical tendency to pretend they have shuffled off this mortal coil, blue death-feigning beetles (Asbolus verrucosus) are living proof that sometimes simpler is better!

Native to the sunbaked deserts of the southwestern United States and northern Mexico, these endearing little arthropods are famously named after their defense mechanism. When confronted with danger, these beetles may abruptly collapse into an almost comically convincing imitation of death, drawing their delicate legs and antennae inward and remaining motionless until the perceived threat has passed. This peculiar performance, scientifically known as thanatosis, serves to discourage predators with a preference for living prey. Their characteristic blue coloration, meanwhile, is no mere aesthetic extravagance. A protective, waxy coating envelops their exoskeletons, helping preserve precious moisture beneath the relentless desert sun. Interestingly, excessive humidity can temporarily diminish this powdery finish, revealing the darker exoskeleton underneath. In my experience, this transformation is particularly amusing when one of my little blue gluttons decides to bury its

"Blue death-feigning beetles are living proof that sometimes simpler is better!"

entire face in a particularly juicy piece of fruit or beetle jelly!

Fortunately, providing these miniature desert wanderers with a comfortable home is wonderfully straightforward. I would confidently consider them among the easiest arthropods to maintain, requiring neither elaborate equipment nor an especially demanding husbandry routine. A well-ventilated, approximately 10-gallon enclosure can accommodate a small colony, furnished with several inches of dry sand or a suitable sand-and-soil mixture. Cork bark, securely arranged stones, and weathered pieces of wood or even dried animal bones (for that desert aesthetic) provide opportunities for climbing, exploration, and shelter. Temperatures ranging between approximately 70 - 85°F are generally suitable, ideally with a gentle daytime temperature gradient. Above all, their surroundings should remain predominantly arid, as persistently damp conditions can prove detrimental to their health. Although much of their moisture comes from food, a shallow water dish with secure footing may also be provided.

As for their culinary preferences, scavenging omnivores, they are not picky- carrots, squash, sweet potatoes, and occasional morsels of fruit make welcome additions to their menu, supplemented by protein-rich offerings such as dried insects, freshly killed mealworms, or appropriate commercial insect diets. Fresh food should be offered sparingly and removed before spoilage, preventing unwanted mold and moisture from disturbing their miniature desert paradise.

Unlike many commonly kept insects, blue death-feigning beetles can live for several years in captivity, with some reportedly surviving five to eight years or longer under favorable conditions. Their peaceful temperament also makes them excellent communal inhabitants, some owners in which have even co-habitated them with scorpions or red velvet ants, provided the resources and space are available - overcrowding will cause them stress.

Breeding these beetles, however, is a challenge in itself. Although adults may reproduce readily, successfully nurturing their offspring through larval development and pupation requires considerably more specialized conditions. Larvae benefit from a separate, carefully managed environment with greater substrate moisture than their desert-loving parents, although their dietary preferences remain similarly accommodating. It is a husbandry milestone I have yet to achieve myself, but one I eagerly hope to celebrate someday. Until then, I am perfectly content to admire my little blue companions as they clumsily tumble over their decorations among equally silly activities befitting of such a creature.

CARE SHEET

Native to: deserts of the southwestern U.S. and northern Mexico

Enclosure: well-ventilated, about 10 gallons for a small colony

Substrate: several inches of dry sand or a sand-and-soil mix

Temperature: about 70–85˚F

Diet: carrots, squash, sweet potato, a little fruit, plus dried insects or mealworms

Lifespan: 5 to 8 years or longer



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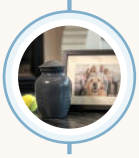
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EVENT RECAP • SPCA CINCINNATI

Tails on the Trails

SPCA Cincinnati's 5K Run & Dog Walk

By Matt Tackett, Publisher, NatiPets



The NatiPets booth at Francis RecreAcres Park.

I was at SPCA Cincinnati's Tails on the Trails 5K, the annual fundraiser held at Francis RecreAcres Park (next to SPCA Cincinnati's Sharonville Campus) at 11982 Conrey Road, and it was a big hit. It was chilly and cloudy and spitting a little rain on that Saturday morning, October 19th, but that didn't stop people from coming out and participating, from the runners and walkers to the vendors. There was a lot to do, from the run/walk itself to the DJ spinning great tunes to the shelter tours. There was plenty of fun to be had.

The setup was nice, with Dunkin' providing donuts and coffee for breakfast in the morning and Chick-fil-A providing chips and chicken sandwiches for lunch in the afternoon. I met a lot of interesting people, several clients and the SPCA staff, who are wonderful. Mandy, who I worked with to get our booth set up and create a partnership with the SPCA, was wonderful too (thanks, Mandy!).

We are very excited to have formed this partnership with the SPCA, and NatiPets is going to be very involved in 2027, not just with the SPCA but with all the local shelters and nonprofits. We have a great platform and can be the voice for everyone. Bringing a voice to the pet industry, to the nonprofits, to the shelters and to those who generally don't have a voice is something we take great pride in.

I want to thank everyone from the SPCA and all the vendors involved in this event for a lovely time. And congratulations to our costume contest winners: **Josie and family** for the cutest group costume, **Charlie** for the scariest costume, and **Roscoe** for the cutest costume.

If anybody is interested in getting involved with NatiPets, whether you'd like to submit stories for your nonprofit or business or you'd like advertising information, feel free to reach out to me at **Matt@natipets.com**. Happy holidays, everyone, and thank you for a great 2026. All of us at NatiPets are looking forward to a fantastic 2027.

AROUND THE EVENT



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SPCA Cincinnati



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Continued Tails on the Trails article from page 52

Costume Contest Winners



Cutest Group Costume: Josie and family



Scariest Costume: Charlie



Cutest Costume: Roscoe



Matt with the SPCA mascot.



5K finishers show off their medals.

Get Involved with NatiPets

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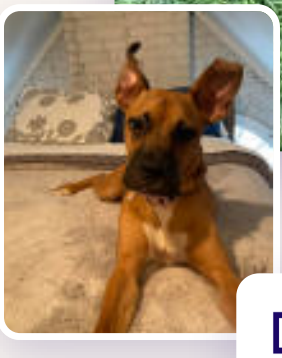
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WILD DISCOVERIES

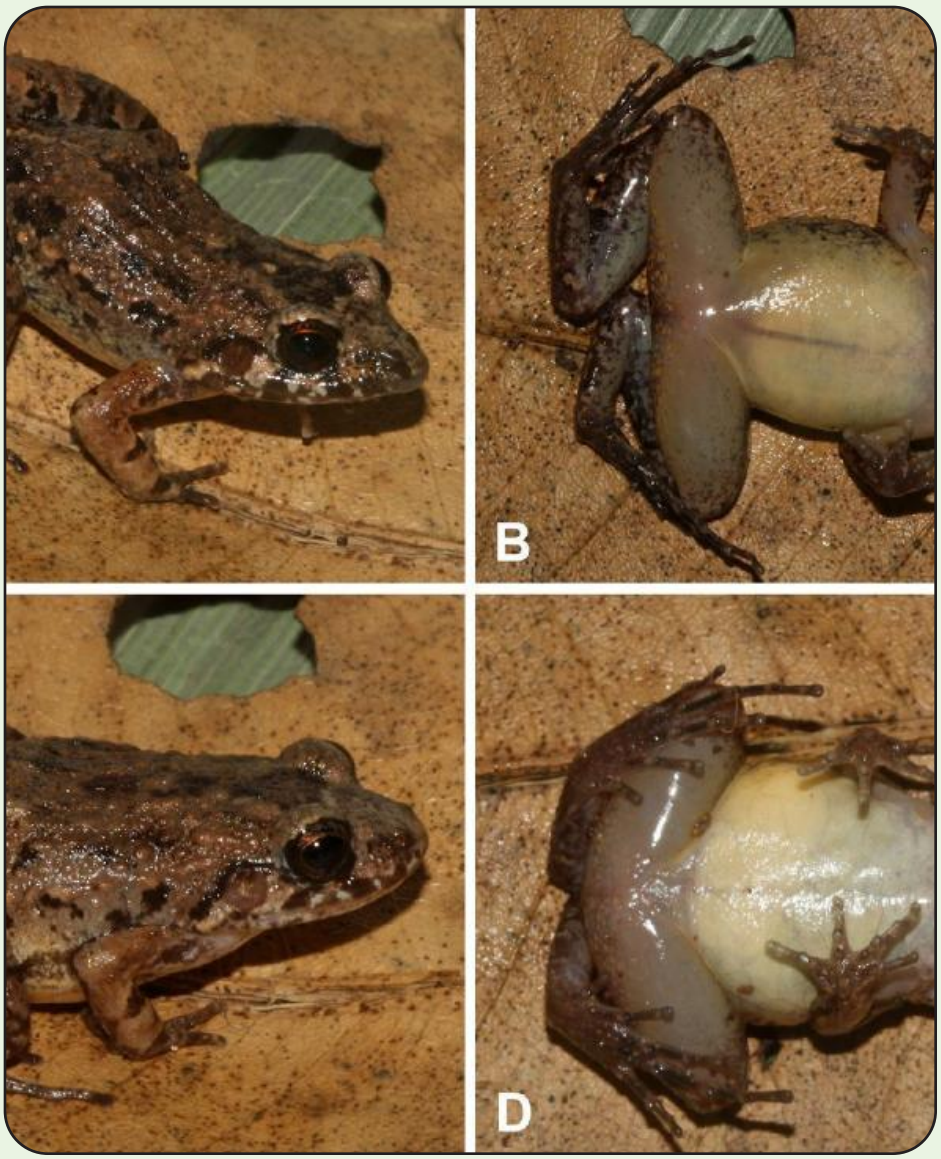
Meet the Remarkable Species Found in 2026

From a tiny spotted wildcat to a five-pound fungus, 2026 was a big year for new species.

BY KIRA TACKETT

Despite centuries of scientific exploration, the natural world remains an inexhaustible source of revelation. Throughout 2026, biologists have documented remarkable organisms previously unknown to science, uncovering extraordinary lives concealed within even familiar surroundings. Each discovery illuminates another passage in Earth's evolutionary history, enriching our understanding of biodiversity while lending renewed urgency to its protection. With every passing year, we learn how much remains beyond our knowledge, and how precious are each and every of the wonderful creatures that flourish there.

One of the year's most astonishing discoveries came from Bolivia's cloud-covered Yungas forests, where researchers identified a new wildcat species, Leopardus tilcayo, the first new wild cat species identified in over 100 years. Smaller than a domestic housecat and adorned with distinctive spotted fur, this elusive feline represents the first newly described living wildcat species in more than a century. Genetic studies revealed that South American tiger cats, previously grouped into fewer species, possess considerably greater



FROG Adenomera varcena, a tiny frog from the Amazon's seasonally flooded várzea forests.



BIRD The cheerful fantail, Rhipidura laguceria.

diversity than scientists once believed, a distinction in which could prove crucial to protecting vulnerable populations threatened by deforestation and habitat fragmentation.

Meanwhile in the várzea forests, a seasonally flooded Amazonian ecosystem associated with whitewater rivers, scientists discovered a diminutive frog with a surprisingly unusual voice. Named Adenomera varcena, the brown amphibian measures approximately 22 to 24 millimeters long and closely resembles its relatives. However, its remarkably slow mating call sets it apart. While related frogs may produce dozens of calls per minute, this species emits just one to five. Researchers believe such vocal differences play an important role in reproduction and species recognition.

In Ethiopia's mountainous Harenna Forest, another discovery emerged in the form of the white-throated egg-eater, Dasypeltis albigularis. This nonvenomous snake possesses striking black scales, bluish skin and a contrasting white underside. Rather than hunting rodents, it feeds exclusively on bird eggs, using specialized vertebrae to crack their shells. Initially mistaken for a known relative, the snake was eventually distinguished through anatomical and genetic examinations.

In China's Yunnan province, researchers identified Dianjunus rex, an extraordinary fungus nicknamed "D-rex." Its reproductive structures can reach 20 inches tall and weigh nearly five pounds, making them the largest known among the ascomycete fungi. So genetically distinctive is this organism that scientists established an entirely new fungal family to accommodate it. Its evolutionary



SNAKE The white-throated egg-eater, Dasypeltis albigularis.



FUNGUS Dianjunus rex, the "D-rex" fungus from China's Yunnan province.

lineage may date back approximately 65 million years, shortly after the dinosaurs' extinction - ironically enough.

Across the ocean, researchers also identified the cheerful fantail, Rhipidura laguceria, on Indonesia's remote Babar Islands. Previously confused with the cinnamon-tailed fantail, this songbird was recognized as a distinct species following comparisons of historical museum specimens. Its identification demonstrates how scientific collections can continue yielding discoveries long after specimens were first gathered.

Together, these discoveries illustrate both nature's extraordinary complexity and the urgency of protecting it. Many newly identified species inhabit ecosystems increasingly threatened by human activity, raising the troubling possibility that some organisms could disappear before scientists even recognize their existence. And as 2026 continues, it remains apparent that Earth still holds countless biological mysteries, and every newly discovered species provides another reason to preserve the remarkable diversity of life surrounding us.



"Earth still holds countless biological mysteries."

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AROUND TOWN

Light in the Forest

Cincinnati Nature Center's winter light trail returns to Rowe Woods in December.

BY KIRA TACKETT

As winter descends upon Ohio, and the last vestiges of autumn surrender to the season's icy embrace, the forests of Cincinnati Nature Center prepare to awaken beneath an extraordinary tapestry of color and light. Where the woodland canopy once shimmered with the golden brilliance of falling leaves, thousands of twinkling lights will soon illuminate the darkness to breathe enchantment into an otherwise slumbering landscape. This December, the beloved Light in the Forest celebration returns to Rowe Woods in Milford, inviting visitors to wander into a whimsical world where nature and imagination intertwine reminiscent of the fantastical wonderland of Lewis Carroll's Alice in Wonderland, promising to transform the otherwise quiet desolation of an Ohio winter into something positively magical.

Beginning with its Opening Weekend Celebration on December 4th - 6th, 2026, Light in the Forest will transform approximately one mile of winding woodland trails into an illuminated spectacle. Beneath the silhouettes of towering trees, meadows, and alongside the tranquil reflections of forest ponds, visitors will discover a landscape reborn through the artistry of light. This year's celebration introduces imaginative new installations from eight regional light artists, including six associated with Cincinnati's internationally celebrated BLINK light festival, all collaborating together to illuminate the forest's natural





architecture.

Here, families may immerse themselves in interactive light displays, festive children's crafts, and a whimsical scavenger hunt that encourages young adventurers to uncover the woodland's hidden wonders. The cheerful melodies of live music will drift through the wintry air, while the comforting glow of a crackling campfire offers a welcome refuge from December's chill. Visitors may also wander through a beautifully decorated historic home, indulge in seasonal refreshments from visiting food and beverage trucks, or discover distinctive holiday treasures inside the Nature Shop at Rowe Visitor Center. Opening Weekend brings an additional flourish of holiday spirit, with costumed woodland creatures greeting guests, traditional carolers filling the evening with song, and a ceremonial tree lighting at Krippendorf Lodge at 6 p.m. each evening from December 4th - 6th. Guests are even encouraged to become part of the spectacle themselves, adorning their winter attire with illuminated accessories and twinkling lights.

For those seeking a more grown-up enchantment, Cincinnati Nature Center will introduce Glow Wild!, an inaugural adults-only celebration on January 2, 2027. Reserved exclusively for guests ages 21 and older, this special evening offers a delightful marriage of woodland serenity and festive sophistication, featuring live music, complimentary hors d'oeuvres, beverages available for purchase, and celestial exploration through stargazing experiences courtesy of the Cincinnati Observatory.

General admission tickets are $20 for nonmember adults and $8 for nonmember children, with discounted admission available to Cincinnati Nature Center members. Children ages two and younger may attend free of charge. Advance registration is required, with timed arrivals available on select December evenings.

Located at 4949 Tealtown Road in Milford, Light in the Forest offers families, couples, and nature enthusiasts an opportunity to rediscover the beauty of the natural world during a season too often spent retreating indoors. Visitors should dress warmly and wear sturdy, weather-appropriate footwear, as the approximately hour-long experience unfolds primarily outdoors. Pets are not permitted, although service dogs are welcome.



IF YOU GO

Opening Weekend: Dec. 4–6, 2026; tree lighting at 6 p.m. nightly

Glow Wild! (21+): Jan. 2, 2027

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KEEPING SPIRITS BRIGHT: Pet Safety Tips for the Holidays

By Sharon Boyles

Temptation For Your Pet Abounds When The Holidays Roll Around! A beautiful Christmas tree is the perfect opportunity for your cat to conquer and destroy. An abundance of festive holiday food is the perfect opportunity for your dog to launch a surprise attack on a tasty new snack.
Holiday lights and holiday plug-in decorations provide the perfect opportunity for your intrepid bunny to chew through an electrical cord lying around.

Keeping your pets safe during the holidays often requires nothing more than a little bit of forethought and some basic awareness. Here are a few things to keep in mind this holiday season:

• **Open Flame:** A curious paw or a wagging tail plus a candle equals disaster and a possible trip to the emergency vet. Keep candles in places where they aren't easily reached or likely to be knocked over, and don't leave them unattended. If you have a fireplace, place a screen to prevent sparks from flying out and landing on your pet.



• **O Christmas Tree:** Everyone's seen those YouTube videos of a cat climbing the Christmas tree. It's cute and funny, but it's also very real. Christmas trees are the ultimate temptation for many cats because there's an abundance of shiny or feathery ornaments, things that dangle just out of reach, and a perfect vertical area for climbing. Secure your tree well so it doesn't get knocked over, and hang ornaments on the higher branches. Avoid tinsel, as well, because if your cat snacks on it, it can cause blockages in the digestive tract.

• **Electrical Cords:** If you have small animals, you know they have a tendency to nibble on cords. There are usually more electrical cords present during the holiday season, so make sure your little furry friend won't find them or reach them, or use a cord sleeve or bitter apple spray to deter chewing.

• **Festive Food:** Avoid feeding your pets from the holiday table. Fatty, spicy, and sweet foods can cause digestive issues, as can turkey or chicken bones, which splinter when chewed. Don't leave candy and chocolates out in the open, and pick up any unattended alcoholic beverages, so they aren't sampled by a curious pet.

• **Live Plants:** Several popular holidays plants are not friendly for pets. Holly, mistletoe, and poinsettia can cause stomach upset if they are eaten, and amaryllis can cause lethargy, drooling, and vomiting. Keep plants out of reach or choose pet-friendly options, such as an African violet or a Christmas cactus.

• **Holiday Roar:** If you have a sensitive pet or a small animal, create a safe zone where they can find some quiet time away from the lights, noise, and action. You can also run a white-noise machine to help calm them down and block out the festivities. If your pet is sensitive to the point of become panicked and hysterical, consult with your vet to see if medication would help to calm them.

With a little bit of thought and care, both you and your pet will enjoy a happy, healthy, safe, and loving holiday season!

From Hissing Cockroaches to Hedgehogs: Exotic Pets are Taking Center Stage

By Sharon Boyles

When most people think of pets, they usually think of a cat or dog. While it's true that cats and dogs get the most love in the U.S, exotic pets (such as small reptiles, pocket pets, arachnids and insects, and miniature farm animals) are on the rise, especially among **Millennials and Gen Z.** The trend for exotic pets is also being driven by the shift toward urban and apartment life and overall smaller living spaces. Exotic pet ownership reached an all-time high in 2026, with an unusual pet present in nearly 18.5 million households in this country. There are even a few insurance companies that are now starting to offer insurance for 50+ different exotic pets. **If you're the kind of person who likes to think outside the box or if you've always been curious about exotic pets, here are a few ideas to get you thinking.**

African Pygmy Hedgehogs are not only cute, but they also make curious, quirky, and fun companions! They are quiet, low allergen, and relatively independent, and despite their spiny exterior, they can be really affectionate and enjoy time with their owner. Keep in mind that they are primarily nocturnal animals, and they need a diet rich in protein and low in fat to stay happy and healthy. They also thrive in a warm environment and an enclosure that is safe and cozy for them.



The Fennec Fox is a tiny fox with huge ears, which help to dissipate heat in their native homeland of the Saraha Desert. They are high-energy pets who need space to roam, lots of interaction, and mental stimulation to thrive. They enjoy noshing on insects, high-quality cat food, raw meat, some fruits, and vegetables. They are not domesticated in the same sense as dogs and cats, so you will likely see more instinctual behavior, such as digging and escaping. If you're up for a challenge, a Fennec Fox might be just right for you!

If you're an aquarist, then an Axolotl, also called the "Mexican walking fish", might be something to consider. These freshwater, aquatic salamanders will need at least a 20-gallon tank with a clean, cool aquatic environment, good filtration, and several hiding places in order to thrive. They are easier to care for than most fish, and they enjoy a diet of small fish, special pellets, and worms. They are highly sensitive to water quality, so you'll need to be vigilant about your water parameters and keep the tank clean.



Many people might be put off by the name Bearded Dragon, but did you know that these small reptiles (affectionately known as beardies) have a calm personality and are friendly and interactive with their human? They typically grow 16-24 inches, and they need an enclosure that is at least 40-75 gallons and fitted with UVB lighting, heat lamps, branches to

climb on, hiding places, a shallow water dish, and a temperature gradient. They enjoy a diet of insects (such as crickets), fresh fruits, and veggies.



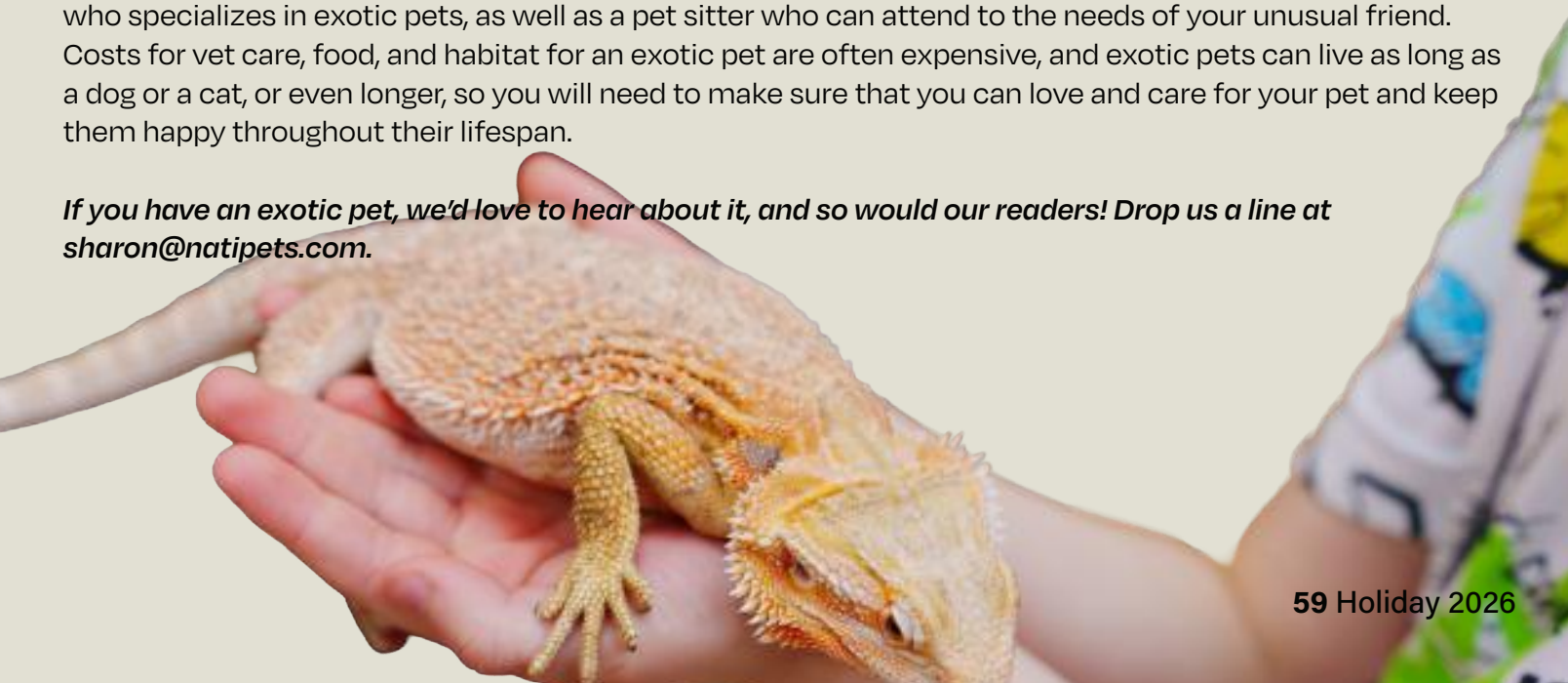
It may seem strange to think about having a pig running around your house, but a Miniature Pig (also called teacup, potbellied, or micro pig) can be a great addition to your household, if you have the space. Pigs are smart and can be house trained, given complex commands, and taught to do tricks. They bond well with their family and enjoy having indoor and outdoor space to roam and ramble. Regular care includes hoof trimming and a balanced diet with controlled portions to reduce the risk of obesity. Be aware that miniature pigs typically get a lot bigger than a teacup! They usually continue to grow and fill out for about five years, at which time they may weigh anywhere from 100-200 pounds.

If a teacup pig isn't quite what you had in mind, maybe a Sugar Glider would be a better fit. These small, flying marsupials, native to Australia, New Guinea, and Indonesia, are not only cute, but they are social, playful, and curious, and they can form bonds with their owners. They can live 10-14 years in captivity, and caring for them can be intricate and tricky, so plenty of research is needed before adopting one, and they are not recommended for beginners. They require a very specific diet and consistent handling, socialization, and activities, and because they do fly, they need a larger enclosure in which to explore. You'll need to spend dedicated time with them each day. Because they are highly social animals, it's best to adopt them in pairs, so they don't get lonely or depressed.

If you're really courageous, then a Madagascar Hissing Cockroach might be just right for you. Hissers thrive best in a clean terrarium with a substrate of coconut fiber or bark and good ventilation. They like dark, warm, humid, and secluded conditions, and a steady diet of fresh fruits and vegetables and dry pet food. Some table scraps are acceptable. Hissers can climb any surface, including glass, and the nymphs adore exploring, so make sure your terrarium is very secure to prevent any escape artists. Be advised that hissers really do hiss when suddenly disturbed or when they need to ward off predators, establish territory, or communicate with each other.

As with any pet, be responsible and do your research before adopting and committing, and **absolutely check out your local and state regulations regarding exotic pets.** You'll also want to seek out a local veterinarian who specializes in exotic pets, as well as a pet sitter who can attend to the needs of your unusual friend. Costs for vet care, food, and habitat for an exotic pet are often expensive, and exotic pets can live as long as a dog or a cat, or even longer, so you will need to make sure that you can love and care for your pet and keep them happy throughout their lifespan.

If you have an exotic pet, we'd love to hear about it, and so would our readers! Drop us a line at sharon@natipets.com.



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