

Creature Contraband

Adventures with six-legged roommates

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*Name changed to protect identity

For some college students, one of the hardest parts of being away from home is being separated from their pets. Coming home after a long day of classes just isn't the same without your best furry, scaly or feathered friend there to greet you at the door. According to the Department of Residence's policies, the only pets that students living in on-campus housing are allowed to have are fish—limited to one aquarium per student.

"All other organisms and pets, of any type," the policy states, "are prohibited for reasons of health and safety." However, some Iowa State students are taking matters into their own hands by hiding pets in their university-owned dorm rooms or apartments.

Kyndal Gardner, a sophomore in hospitality management, kept a pet hamster in her Larch dorm room for a semester last year. She found that the hamster, named Jai Ho, was surprisingly easy to keep a secret.

"It was pretty easy because my CA wasn't around a ton, so we just had to keep the door closed," she says. "We weren't worried about getting caught. She was small enough and she didn't make any noise."

Kyndal and her roommate decided to get the hamster to "defy the rules," as it was both against the rules and easy to take care of. "We both wanted to get a pet, so we were like, 'Let's go get a hamster!'"





A hamster was not the only animal to reside in Kyndal's dorm room, however. She also hosted a duck and several chickens for a day last year.

While Kyndal had a fairly easy time keeping pets in Larch, she can't say whether it's as easy in other buildings on campus.

"I think it depends on your CA, just because some are way more strict than others, and some are around a lot," she says. "Mine really wasn't, so it was just really easy for me to keep the hamster because I saw my CA maybe once a week, if that. And if we kept our door closed, he didn't bother us."

Steven*, a sophomore in animal ecology, has a variety of pets in his Frederiksen Court apartment, including two Halloween moon crabs, three hermit crabs, a jumping spider, a tarantula, two Asian forest scorpions, and over 100 freshwater shrimp.

Steven has always loved looking after these unusual animals, but has had to limit the number of pets he keeps since coming to Iowa State.

"Since I've started college, I haven't been keeping as many things as I used to, because of time... and legality," he says. "But I've never had a time in my life when I wasn't keeping something, ever since I was really young. So it's just one of those things I imagine would be hard to live without."

Steven has kept animals in his room since he lived in the Towers last year, and is not concerned about getting caught. In fact, his CA last year knew about Steven's pets, but luckily for Steven, didn't report him to the DOR.

"It was the beginning of the year, so I had Sebastian the tree crab in a big aquarium. The CA stopped by and said, 'Oh, what's in there? Do you have fish?' and I said, 'No, it's a crab,' and took it out and showed him, and

he thought it was awesome," Steven says. "He was really cool with it. He would stop by sometimes to see how the animals were doing."

Steven moved to an apartment in Frederiksen Court at the beginning of this school year, and made absolutely sure that his new roommates knew that living with him also meant living with "the kids."

"Sometimes I feel bad about breaking the rules," he says, "But they're not hurting anybody and they bring me a great deal of joy."

"I would never spring that on someone, Steven says. "But I think most people are okay with it, especially once they meet them. I've just noticed throughout my insect-keeping career that people who would act differently around a wild animal will fall in love with the ones I have."

Steven reports that his current roommates seem to be getting along well with the animals, though some of the creatures may not be their ideal pets. "My roommate Adam really doesn't like spiders, so if I happened to have a tarantula who liked to be seen, it would be an issue. But he [the tarantula] is totally unassuming," Steven says. "And sometimes I even catch Adam watching the hermit crabs when I come in, and I think that's really sweet."

Steven's roommate Jackson met him when they lived across the hall from each other in Wallace last year. Jackson knew about Steven's pets when he agreed to live with him, "Although I didn't realize how many he actually had!" he says. "It's actually kinda funny... it's just so unexpected for someone to have pet bugs."

It was an odd experience at first, Jackson says. "It took me a while to get used to them because he would occasionally let them roam the apartment all day, but I was just afraid I would step on one." Jackson has gotten used to his non-human roommates since then, but admits some of them aren't his favorite. "The only ones I really don't like are the cockroaches," he says.

If Steven were ever to face the university's consequences for breaking the rules, he thinks he would send some of his animals to Iowa State's insect zoo, and others back home to live with his parents. "They've gotten pretty good at taking care of them," he says.

Steven thinks he will continue to keep pets throughout the rest of his college career, but hopes to move out of Freddy Court at some point. "I would really like to live in UV [University Village] or a more off-campus apartment just so I don't have to feel bad about it, and I don't have to hide it," he says. But in the meantime, he will continue to keep his pets in Freddy and hope for the best.

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