

ASPCA Releases Annual Estimate of Small Animal Care Costs

Results estimate small animals would cost \$340 in their first year.

By Rose Gordon

Posted: March 31, 2008, 5a.m. EST

The American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (ASPCA) released today its estimate of how much it costs to care for pets at a basic but acceptable level. Not surprisingly, a large dog breed runs up the biggest household tab while caring for a pet fish or bird is a little easier on the wallet.

A large dog's first year of care, which often includes vaccinations and spay or neuter surgery, will cost about \$1,843, compared to \$270 for a small bird or \$235 for a fish setup.

The cost estimates do not include the initial cost of the animal or adoption fees.

What might surprise some new pet owners, however, is ASPCA's estimate of caring for a rabbit, which costs more on an annual basis – excluding the first year – than a cat's care, as well as all other small animal, bird and fish categories.

Dr. Katherine Miller, assistant science advisor for the ASPCA and chief author of this year's listing, said not everyone is aware of the equipment a rabbit needs, such as a hutch, toys to keep its teeth healthy, a litter box, bedding and abundant hay in addition to its pelleted feed.

"Rabbit food is a bit more expensive than cat food," she added.

Annual care for a rabbit was estimated at \$730 while a cat was \$670.

Small mammals would cost \$340 in their first year and drop to \$300 in subsequent years. A small bird (ASPCA used a parakeet or budgie) – which are not spayed or neutered – would cost \$270 in its first year and \$200 afterward. That estimate includes a \$70 cage purchase.

Fish were the best bargain. Their sparse eating would run an estimated \$20 in food each year while a basic 20-gallon aquarium setup with light, air pump, filter and gravel averages \$200, the ASPCA said.

The overall estimate did not vary much from last year, Miller said. Dog costs went down slightly due to the availability of cheaper food, while rabbit care increased in line with hay cost increases. Other categories stayed relatively the same.

Miller stressed that although the figures released today are estimates, they are not "guesstimates."

"I think the estimates are very solid this year," she said. "It is a scientific process."

It devised the veterinary costs by consulting ASPCA's veterinarians as well as the American Animal Hospital Association's annual "Veterinary Fee Reference" book, an industry standard, Miller said. Food costs were developed by averaging premium food prices at Petco and PetSmart and following the label's feeding instructions. Similar methods are used to estimate litter and other recurring costs while health insurance estimates were the average sum of three national, basic plans.

The treat and toy category might be an area where individual pet owners' spending and pet indulgent habits vary widely. While fish need arguably less accouterments, the ASPCA estimates that cat and dog owners will spend from \$25 to \$75 a year on toys and treats. Those figures are based on the average cost of three toys per year and one to two treats each day, Miller said. Guinea pigs' yearly treat/toy expenditure was estimated at \$30 and a small bird at \$25.

A complete list of ASPCA's estimates can be found [here](#).