

Video Otoscopy in Exotic Companion Mammals

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KEYWORDS

• Otoscopy • Endoscopy • Otitis • Ear disorders • Rabbit • Rodent

KEY POINTS

- Ear disease is a common reason for presentation of exotic companion mammals to the practitioner.
- Video otoscopy is a valuable diagnostic and therapeutic tool for the complete evaluation of the external ear and tympanic membrane of exotic companion mammals.
- Video otoscopy enables foreign object retrieval, external ear canal flushing, intralesional drug administration, myringotomy, and middle ear cavity flushing.
- Video otoscopy is an easy and simple technique requiring minimal training.
- Video otoscopy and photo documentation improve the educational experience of students and clients, and allow accurate case follow-up.

INTRODUCTION

Ear disease is often associated with systemic conditions in exotic companion mammals, such as infections, trauma, neoplasia, and abnormal behavior (Fig. 1).¹ Otoscopy is essential for the evaluation of the external ear and tympanic membrane, but other diagnostic modalities are also used for the complete evaluation of ear disease, including radiography, computed tomography, and magnetic resonance imaging.²

Specific otoscopes were design for the examination of the dog and cat ear; however, because of to the variety and anatomic differences of exotic mammals, the use of the 2.7-mm rigid endoscope is often preferred.

Otoscopic applications in exotic companion mammals are wide,³ as these species commonly suffer from peripheral vestibular disease (rabbits, rats, gerbils), ear mites

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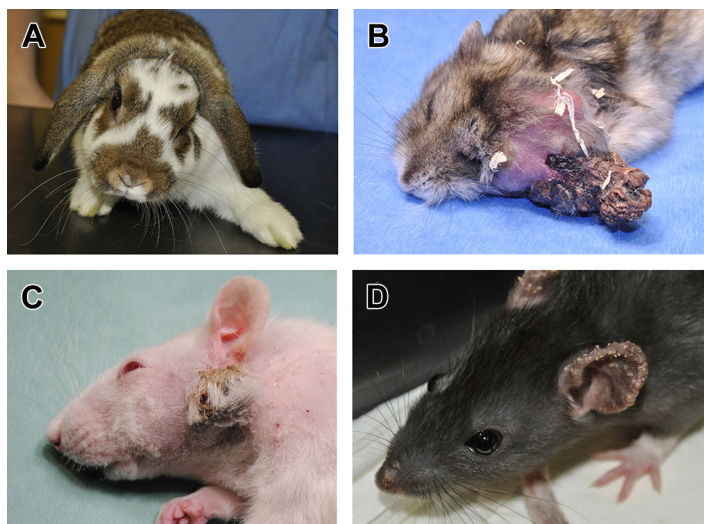


Fig. 1. (A) Rabbit with a head tilt to the left with bilateral otitis media. (B) Aural neoplasia (squamous cell adenocarcinoma) in a hamster. (C) Otic abscess with fistulation in a rat. (D) Severe otitis caused by ear mites (*Notoedres muris*) in a rat.

(ferrets, rabbits), and ear neoplasia (hamsters). Early evaluation and diagnosis not only help in the treatment of ear disease but can also be valuable for excluding ear disease in cases of head tilt or other vestibular disorders.⁴

When compared with conventional otoscopy, video otoscopy allows a more thorough and detailed external ear and tympanic membrane evaluation because of the magnification provided by the endocamera. Moreover, the ergonomics of examination using a monitor are preferred over bending over the animal. Photo documentation improves the educational experience of students and clients and facilitates accurate case reevaluation over time.

The purpose of this article is to describe the video otoscopy technique and main findings in common exotic companion mammals, such as ferrets, rabbits, chinchillas, guinea pigs, degus, rats, hamsters, and mice.

INDICATIONS AND CONTRAINDICATIONS

Indications for otoscopy are any suspected ear disease or the exclusion of ear disease in cases of central vestibular/neurologic problems. Clinical signs may include hemorrhagic or purulent discharge, presence of pruritus, nervousness, head shaking, rictus, unilateral chewing, vestibular syndrome (head tilt, circling, nystagmus), or unilateral dry eye syndrome (see [Fig. 1](#)).

There are no known contraindications for this technique. Standard anesthetic risks exist, and any animal should be stabilized beforehand. Treatment of ear disease should not be started until after otoscopy. Any bleeding, discharge, or the presence of a large mass in the external ear canal that cannot be flushed might hinder otoscopic examination.

INSTRUMENTATION AND EQUIPMENT

- A video otoscope or rigid endoscope can be used for external ear examination.
 - A standard veterinary video otoscope is seen in [Fig. 2](#) (5 mm × 8–10 cm, 0° telescope with 3-way stopcock, irrigation adaptor, and an integrated

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