



THE CENTER FOR

BIRD & EXOTIC ANIMAL MEDICINE

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Care and Feeding of Carnivorous Snakes and Lizards

Carnivorous reptiles include snakes and large lizards including monitors, tegus, alligators and crocodilians. Most illness is caused by improper diet and husbandry. Poor diet, unsanitary enclosures and temperatures that are too warm or consistently below optimum temperature, stress the immune system and may eventually result in disease.

Feeding

All carnivorous reptiles do well on a diet of whole prey. The most commonly fed prey items are mice, rats, chicks and rabbits. The importance of *whole* prey cannot be over emphasized. Muscles and organs of prey provide amino acids, proteins, vitamins and trace minerals, adipose stores provide a fat source, thyroid glands provide iodine, bones provide calcium, and food eaten by the prey provides vitamins B and K. If the prey is sick or thin, they are likely deficient in nutrients. Extremely fat prey cause an imbalance of fat to protein, and *will* cause nutritional illness in reptiles as well. Very small or young reptiles fed a constant diet of pinkie mice can develop calcium deficiency, as the bone structure of pinkie mice is immature. Pinkie mice should be fed with a stomach full of milk, or dusted with calcium supplement three times weekly.

Husbandry

Most reptiles can be housed in aquariums or Plexiglas cages with secure lids. Wood should be avoided in constructing cages, as it is more difficult to thoroughly clean. Use newspaper, reptile carpet or commercial reptile beddings for the cage bottom. Note that occasionally some animals have eaten and impacted on sand reptile bedding~. Provide a temperature gradient so the reptile can choose a preferred temperature. An overall cage temperature of 80-85 degrees with a hot basking site of 100 degrees is adequate. Turn bright lights off at night and allow the nighttime temperature of the enclosure to drop, but not below 75 degrees. Keep the enclosure warm at night with a heat lamp or night lamp.

Heat rocks should not be relied upon to warm the enclosure. Hot rocks have been known to overheat or short out, producing severe burns. Commercial under tank heaters can be of benefit, but will not warm an animal that does not constantly contact the bottom of the enclosure. Don't rely on just feeling the air in the tank to gauge temperature. Purchase two quality thermometers, one *for* the hot spot, and one for the cooler area. Occasionally check the temperature of the enclosure in the middle of the night (especially in winter) to be sure your reptile is not becoming too cold overnight.

Equipment/ supplies for carnivorous reptiles

Glass or Plexiglas enclosure with secure lid

Daytime heat lamp

UV-B lamp (most of these do not provide heat)

Nighttime heat lamp that produces heat but no bright light

2 Thermometers, one for the hot spot, one for the cool spot

Reptile carpet, newspaper, or bedding

Source of healthy whole prey

Calcium supplement for reptiles eating pinkie mice

Optional: appliance timer that will switch from day to night heat sources automatically