

J A X H E R P N E W S

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CRITTER OF THE MONTH: COMMON IGUANA (*Iguana iguana*)Contributed by: John Rossi

The Common Iguana (*Iguana iguana*) is perhaps the most common pet lizard in the world. Unfortunately, it is not the easiest lizard in the world to care for. The young, 8-9 inches at hatching, are mainly insectivorous but rapidly begin to add vegetation to their diet. Adults will eat bananas, pears, apples, lettuce, cabbage, flowers, and vegetables and only occasionally small mice and insects.

The real secret for success with these lizards is to get them on dogfood in addition to vegetables as soon as possible. This will avoid the all too common metabolic bone diseases seen in young iguanas. These diseases often appear as swollen legs and tail in an otherwise healthy lizard or fracture without much trauma. Radiographs (X Rays) will reveal very thin bones. If the deformities are not serious the disease process can be reversed by correcting the diet to include an excellent source of calcium like bone meal, but most dog foods have enough calcium in order to prevent the disease.

Iguanas should be housed in smooth sided cages that are kept above 80 degrees F with a fairly high relative humidity (above 60%). The substrate should be peat moss which is changed regularly. A water dish should be sunk into the peat moss so that it is almost flush with the surface of the peat. Some lizard experts place a cuttlebone in the drinking water to provide extra calcium. Vitalites or sunlight (unfiltered) is essential especially for young and growing lizards. Larger lizards may be allowed free run of the house (and will do wonderfully) if given a basking area near a large window. Care must be taken in these instances not to turn up the air conditioner too high as temperatures below 80 degrees interfere with digestion and immunity, and can lead to respiratory infections. A hide box is also very helpful for young and adults alike. In conclusion, this is not a good reptile to begin with and it may be trying on the patience of even the most avid herpetologist.

Tip of the Month: Vitamin Supplements

Vitamins are a necessary supplement for many reptiles in captivity but only those that have a natural diet that is difficult to duplicate in captivity. Most turtles and tortoises fall into this category. Green snakes (*Opheodrys aestivus*) and (*O. vernalis*) and insect eating lizards are also good candidates for vitamin supplementation as captive raised crickets are always deficient in calcium. Herbivorous or omnivorous lizards such as Iguanas (*Iguana iguana*) all require vitamin supplementation. Most snakes, on the other hand, do not require vitamin supplementation because mice, birds, lizards, frogs, fish, and earthworms, if eaten whole, represent a completely balanced diet for them. There is one catch, however. Natural sunlight or a vitalite is required by these snakes in order for them to produce Vitamin D3 (a vitamin used to absorb calcium from their gut and prevent its loss in the kidney). Therefore if these snakes do not have a good light source they may be receiving a wonderfully balanced diet with loads of calcium and not be able to absorb it anyway. The common complaint with one of these snakes will be failure to grow, loss of appetite, or sudden death for no apparent cause.

Reptovite or Reptocal are excellent sources of vitamins that most good pet shops will carry. These products can be sprinkled on whatever you are feeding to your pet.

Last Meeting

The last meeting featured an interesting discussion on exotic snakes by John Berger and our first discussion on turtle husbandry by Mike Rossi. Both talks were extremely informative. Over 50 people attended and officers were elected. Co-Presidents for this year are John Berger and John Rossi. The Vice President is John Nevaquaya. The Treasurer is Bill Moeller. The Secretary is Rex Rowan. Next years election will be held in July.

Next Meeting

The next meeting will be held on Thursday, October 15, 1987 in the Church Room of the Jacksonville Museum of Arts and Sciences at 7:30 PM. Mr. Vic Morgan will discuss reptile care for pet shop owners and those who buy reptiles. Mr. Mike Rossi will discuss the care of the Box Turtle (*terrapene carolina*).

Back Issues

Back issues will be given to any members who wish to get them at the next meeting.

BURMESE PYTHON (Python molurus bivittatus)

Actually, the correct name is Indian Python and there are two subspecies, the other being Python molurus molurus, and being considerably lighter with an incomplete arrowhead marking on top of its head. The lighter subspecies however, is no longer exported and so this article is concentrated on the latter species, which is commonly seen and purchased. This is probably my favorite snake, although it's a close run with the Amazon Red Tailed Boa. It is a large snake, ranging from 10-22 feet depending on which book you read. I have found the average to be 15-17 feet and 100-125 pounds as adults. They are beautifully marked, having reticulations that remind me of a giraffe, and I think the sweetest face of all the snakes, probably due to it's big eyes! This snake is located throughout India and Indo-China although it isn't indigenous to southeast Asia like the reticulated python. This snake often breeds in captivity, and the female, if left undisturbed will coil around the eggs and incubate them by twitching her muscles, which raises the air temperature. This is for the most part, unique, among pythons as well as other species of snakes.

These snakes are very easy to keep in captivity and benefit from a sturdy branch and a large basin to soak in.

Care should be exercised in the handling of larger Indian pythons as they are quite strong and heavy. Never handle one alone. This is not to say that the snakes are aggressive or dangerous, because they rarely display either of those characteristics, but any large reptile could easily overpower a man, woman, or child. This approach should be taken with all large species of pythons or boas.

Sherry LeClair

10 Tips toward a healthy reptile - Good for beginners

1. Never leave a reptile alone with a rodent. Rodents have been known to injure, maim, or even kill reptiles.
2. Provide ample light several hours daily, and a hiding place.
3. Record on a calendar or log book, dates your reptile ate, shed, past waste, and any unusual changes.
4. Make sure shedding is complete, especially the skin over the eyelids (BRILLE).
5. Handle as often as possible, but exercise caution and care, especially with large snakes, amphibians, and lizards.

6. Provide ample heat during winter months, and if you have your Air conditioning very cold. For those of you out there who have native snakes, it is best to let them "winter" over. Keeping them warm through the winter months would disrupt their natural cycle. Remember, you brought them in from their natural habitat, be sure to duplicate it in every possible aspect, including all seasonal changes. Exotic snakes live in warm, humid climates year round, thus necessitating heat during the winter months.
7. Use water soluble vitamins twice weekly, more often if the animal is not eating. Some brand names: Nekton-Rep, Vitalife.
8. Buy and check out books. Learn as much as you can. Refer to Volume 1 Number 2 of the JAX HERP NEWS for a list of some very good books.
9. Avoid skeletal and internal injuries at all costs. Some causes of these injuries are dropping, squeezing, stepping on, or sitting on, etc.
10. Any very unusual or lengthy observations such as long fasts, mucous in the nose or mouth, puffing out of the throat, raspy breathing, mushy, gray, or very foul smelling feces, or any other unusual occurrences should be checked out by a vet.

Sherry LeClair

Questions & Answers

Question: Will a female Tegu lay eggs even after being separated from the male?

Answer: Most female reptiles will retain the sperm of its male counterpart for up to 3 years, and reproduce during this time with no "active" participation from the male.

Question: Will bird mite protectors hung in my cage help control or rid my pet of mites?

Answer: Based on our experience we have found that there was no noticeable decrease in mites with the bird mite protectors present. This answer could vary depending upon who you talk to, but we believe that these protectors do not kill mites associated with reptiles. A better solution would be a oral injection by

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a veterinarian followed by disinfection of the cage. A no pest strip is another good way of getting rid of mites, but the strips are harder to come by. If you can obtain one, the following procedures should be followed when using it, which will ensure the complete safety of your pet. Cut a small piece of the strip off, or if you wish use the whole strip. Let it sit for 24 hours before placing it on top of the cage. Prior to using the strip it would be a good idea to completely clean and disinfect your cage. Mites hide in all sorts of places and can re-infect your animal long after treatment. If you wish to lay the pest strip in the cage, be sure to enclose it in a sturdy box, and to punch small holes in the box to allow the chemical on the strip to take effect. Do not leave the strip in the cage without shielding it in a box. This could kill your pet. Exercise caution with small children as well. The strip is quite lethal.

Question: What is the best way to disinfect a reptile cage?

Answer: The best way is to completely empty the cage and clean it inside and out, top to bottom with a mixture of bleach and water. 1 part bleach to 20 parts water makes a good mixture to use for disinfecting. All decorations must be cleaned, also. Rinse very thoroughly before setting up the cage and putting your pet back into it. If you are using corn cob for the bottom material, discard the old and put brand new corn cob into the bottom after disinfection and cleaning. Never re-use old corn cob.

NOTE TO ALL

If you are planning on bringing your pet to any meetings please be aware of the cooler weather, and protect your pet accordingly. Remember, our pets are more susceptible to cold than most pets. Wrap your pet in a blanket prior to taking them out in the cool weather. Your pet will thank you for it.

THE TURTLES

The eastern and florida box turtles are one of my favorite turtles. Pretty in color and easy going in temperament, these turtles make wonderful pets. The eastern box Terrapene carolina carolina and florida box Terrapene carolina bauri are land turtles. Although essentially terrestrial, they sometimes soak themselves for long periods of time. During hot, dry weather they burrow beneath rotting vegetation, but showers bring them out in large numbers. Box turtles adapt readily to captivity and require a backyard pen and a pan of water. They are omnivorous, and are fond of foods that are red. This includes fruits, berries, worms and raw hamburger. A good staple diet could be canned dog food which contains all the vitamins and the correct calcium to phosphorus ratio. A freshly caught specimen may only eat worms until relaxed enough to expand its eating horizons.

Males can be identified by an indented rear lobe of the plastron and a longer thicker tail. The eyes are usually red. Females have a rear lobe that is flat or slightly convex. The eyes are normally brown. Florida box turtles can be identified by light radiating lines (that may be broken or irregular) on the carapace (top shell).

I have a large male eastern box turtle named Tank. Tank battles over his food and chases other males around the pen. Though fights rarely cause any obvious harm, close supervision during feeding may be necessary. The average life span of these turtles ranges from 30-40 years but some specimens have exceeded the century mark. I have a female florida box turtle that is so old that her shell is worn smooth. It makes me curious to know how old she really is. What has she seen in the development of Jacksonville? How many predators have tormented her? What was the environment like when she was born? These turtles are like living history books. Its too bad they can't tell us what they know. These turtles should be treated with respect. They are dwindling in numbers due primarily to habitat destruction and are protected in many states. Florida box turtles may be legally kept as pets but not sold for profit. If you see one in a pet store please warn the owners of this and if it happens again call the Florida Fresh Water Fish and Game Commission. They will hand out stiff fines for this. If you are collecting your own turtles please do not collect more than you can keep. NEDD BUNCH : THE COUNTERS


 Ned Bunch

Favorite Canned dog Food : Mighty Dog - BEEF