

# Elburn Animal Hospital Newsletter

May, 2010

## Welcome

Reptiles are some of the oldest vertebrate forms of life on Earth. They were here before the dinosaurs, survived the natural disaster that killed those mighty creatures, and have remained virtually unchanged for millions of years to the present day. Because of their ancient anatomy, caring for reptiles in captivity can be a challenge. In this issue we will review what types of reptiles we commonly see at Elburn Animal Hospital, the types of illnesses and injuries reptile keepers must be aware of, and why it's important to have all reptile pets thoroughly examined at least once a year. Any questions can be addressed to a member of our staff at (630) 365-9599, or you can contact us via email at [3lburn@sbcglobal.net](mailto:3lburn@sbcglobal.net).

## Safety First

Spring has finally arrived! In May, we expect warming temperatures and flowers all around. People and their pets become more active. But May brings risks to our pets, ranging from increasing contact with wildlife to an increased risk of poisoning from garden supplies. The following tips can help keep your pet safe during this exciting season.

- Supervise your pets when outside. During the spring and summer, there is a higher likelihood of running into a wild animal if your pet is unsupervised. Although cats and smaller dogs are at a greater disadvantage in these encounters, do not assume your pet can adequately defend itself just because it is large.
- Confine your pet in either in a fenced yard or on a leash. As with wild animals, people are more active this time of year, and out driving in cars.
- Keep pets out of the garden. Many fertilizers and pesticides are not only toxic if eaten, but can cause chemical burns on skin or the pads of the feet. Plant parts, especially bulbs, may be toxic if ingested. Some may even be fatal.
- Put away tools. Our pets enjoy the spring as much as we do, and will want to be out playing more often. But now is when many of us are



beginning or completing home-repair projects. Tools of all kinds can pose a threat from puncture wounds and deep cuts.

- Clean up fishing equipment. Fishing lures are especially attractive, but fishing line can cause great injury as well.

## May: Reptile Month

### What kinds of reptiles do we treat?

At Elburn Animal Hospital we see and treat all kinds of reptiles regularly. Dr Cechner has performed examinations and laboratory testing on reptiles ranging from hatchling turtles to large boa constrictors. Following is a list of pet reptiles most commonly kept in this area, and some vital statistics for each type.

- Leopard Gecko: This lizard lives in the arid scrubland of Afghanistan, Pakistan, and northern India. Many different color morphs are found in the pet industry, including the natural yellow with black spots, all white, all yellow, striped, and even a morph with bright red eyes. They usually live 6-10 years, but with proper care, specimens reaching their 20s are not unusual.



- Bearded Dragon: These medium-sized lizards hail from hot Australian savannahs, although all the ones in the pet trade are captive bred. They require warm temperatures and a varied diet of vegetables and insects. Beardies are often very personable and seem to enjoy handling more than many other types of lizards.



- Iguana: The green iguana is found wild in Central and South America, in subtropical and tropical forests. These are one of the most common lizard pets, but also one of the most demanding. They require a huge variety of vegetables for a staple diet, high temperatures in their enclosure, and high humidity. Add to this their average size of 4-



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6 feet long and it is understandable why many of these lizards do not live longer than 10 years, although they are capable of thriving into their 20s with proper care. We advise careful consideration of the housing requirements for these large lizards before you decide to keep one as a pet.

- **Ball Python:** This medium-sized constrictor



usually has a timid personality. They rarely get over 4 feet long and are often easily handleable.

The biggest issue this snake faces is they are known for refusing to eat, sometimes for months at a time. Without the proper temperatures, humidity and a feeling of security, these snakes rarely live more than half of their 20-year life expectancy.

- **Red-Tailed Boa:** These constrictors often get rather large in adulthood, sometimes reaching lengths of 8-10 feet long.



The state of Illinois requires a keepers permit for snakes over 6 feet in length, so again, please consider the adult size of your pet before you obtain it. Red tails are often docile and good eaters, but require temperatures and humidity levels to match their Central and South American forest habitat. At full size, they also require large food items (although many take readily to pre-killed prey).

- **Colubrids:** This is a group of snakes including milk, king, rat and corn snakes. There are many



different species, and they originate from almost every continent. They are slender and fast-moving, but most species are docile.

The length of colubrid snakes varies according to the species being kept, but most range from 3 feet to 6 feet at adult size. Most colubrids live 10-12 years in captivity.

- **Water turtles:** There are many different types of turtles sold in pet stores, and most have similar

requirements. Turtles have several issues we see routinely. They are often kept in enclosures too small for them; the water they swim in contains too many chemicals and waste products; and they rarely get the amount of UVB lighting or the proper diet. Because of these problems, turtles have very short captive lifespans—up to 10 years in captivity, while some wild specimens can live 30 years or more.



- **Box turtles and tortoises:** Many of these chelonians live exceptionally long if given the proper care.



Unfortunately, not enough is known about many species for us to be able to provide them with adequate care. They can be quite personable and entertaining, but become dull and lethargic if their needs are not met.

- **Crocodylians:** These reptiles are illegal to keep in the state of Illinois without a state-approved permit.

## Illnesses and injuries of pet reptiles:

Generally, pet reptiles are rather hardy creatures. There are some types found in the pet trade that are considered delicate or temperamental, such as the green anole or the day gecko, but these are more often sold as “viewable” pets instead of “handleable” ones. Still, even the most handleable reptiles may get injured or fall ill if they are not provided with adequate housing or nutrition. Below is some general information about common diseases and injuries we see in captive reptiles. Many, you will find, are directly related to husbandry issues.

- **Burns:** One of the more common injuries we see in pet reptiles is burns. These are usually caused by malfunctioning or improperly used heating equipment. We recommend



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to never use a "hot rock" for any reptile, as these are the primary culprits in cases of burns. Also, if you use a ceramic heat emitter or incandescent bulb for heating purposes, please place them far enough away that your pet cannot reach the bulb, fixture or cord.

- Abscesses: An abscess is an infection trapped under the skin or in the body wall. They are most



often caused by wounds that heal quickly, such as those from being bitten by live food items. Reptile abscesses are hard and very rarely rupture (unlike mammal abscesses). They require antibiotics and surgical repair. An abscess in a reptile will *not* heal on its own.

- Toenail/toe/tail loss: This type of injury is caused by one of a few reasons. Toes can be lost in fighting with cage mates or due to one of several nutrition deficiencies collectively called Metabolic Bone Disease. Low humidity can also cause problems with shedding at the digits, restricting blood flow and causing the tissue to die and fall off. Although toenails sometimes may grow back, if a reptile loses an entire toe it will not regrow. Fighting among cage mates can be fatal and is usually a reflection of not enough space or hiding areas in an enclosure. Metabolic Bone Disease will be discussed below.
- Respiratory infection: These infections are often caused by either too much humidity in an enclosure, improper air circulation or improper



cleaning of the substrate. Most reptiles require at least 50% humidity, but you must always make sure the terrarium has adequate ventilation so the air does not stagnate and harbor mildew and mold. Respiratory infections require veterinary care or they may become fatal.

- Metabolic Bone Disease: This is a cluster of diseases having similar causes and similar symptoms. It is caused by improper nutrition and/or low UVB light levels, which are necessary for proper calcium absorption. MBD is one of the

more serious disorders we see in reptiles, and causes many different symptoms.

Softening of the jaw (called "rubber jaw"), warped limbs and spine, softening and bending of scutes in turtles and tortoises, toe loss, partial or complete paralysis, and death are possible outcomes. MBD also causes a rise in secondary bacterial infections, including those that can cause abscesses, respiratory infections, and necrosis of toes, nails and tails.



## Routine examinations are necessary:

Reptiles do not require veterinary visits unless they're sick, right? Wrong! It is very important to have your herp examined at least once a year to ensure its health and longevity. The following are reasons to bring your repti-pet in on an annual basis.

- Reptile diseases take a *long* time to develop. Your pet may experience discomfort and other effects of disease processes for years before it becomes physically apparent.
- Reptile diseases and injuries take a long time to heal. Because their metabolism is so slow, it usually takes a minimum of 2-4 months before notable progress is made in recovering from many illnesses. Regular visits allow us to monitor your pet's healthiness and catch illnesses before they get to a dangerous point.
- Parasites are very common, even in captive-bred animals. Intestinal parasites are found in almost all reptiles. Sometimes these parasites are easy to treat. Unfortunately, parasites are also easy to catch. They may be transmitted from unwashed or improperly washed plant material or from prey animals infested with parasites. Yes, even insects can harbor parasites and pass them on to reptiles. What's worse is that parasites can not only cause your pet discomfort, but they can be transmitted to people and other animals. A physical exam and regular stool check is imperative to detect these unwanted critters.

The medicine we practice is designed to keep each of our patients at their healthiest from

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start to finish. We are in this business to help, and would like nothing better than to see our patients for routine exams only. Following a schedule of wellness visits, lab work, and high-quality nutrition can help realize this goal. When our patients are the healthiest they can be, then we are happy.

call at (630) 365-9599. If you would like to opt out of receiving the Elburn Animal Hospital newsletter, please send an email to us at [3lburn@sbcglobal.net](mailto:3lburn@sbcglobal.net).

**May Special:** This month's special applies specifically to reptiles. During the month of May, mention this ad to receive \$25 off a new reptile exam.

**Upcoming Events:** Sign up soon for our **charity dog wash**. We will be offering discounted bathing, nail trims, ear cleaning, and anal gland expression. The date is set for Saturday, June 12<sup>th</sup>, so reserve your space now.

Also mark the calendar for this year's annual **Open House!** Yes, we are hosting another open house at our office on Saturday, September 25<sup>th</sup>. We are featuring games, treats and area rescue groups.

If you have an idea for a newsletter topic, or a question you would like answered, send it to us! We're interested in what you want to know about! Email us at [3lburn@sbcglobal.net](mailto:3lburn@sbcglobal.net).

Thanks for your patronage. Our June newsletter will include information about exercising your pet, and helping to prevent (and reduce) obesity, and we'll be continuing our weight-loss campaign. If you have any questions or would like more information, go to our website at [www.elburnanimalhospital.com](http://www.elburnanimalhospital.com), or give us a