



### **EXOTIC ANIMAL AND WILDLIFE SERVICE**

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## **Bearded Dragon**

### ***Pogona vitticeps***

Bearded dragons come from Eastern Australia. They can grow up to 50 cm (1.5 feet) in length. They can live for up to 12 years in captivity.

#### Diet

They are omnivorous but take a greater percentage of herbivorous food as they age. Juveniles will take a higher percentage of invertebrate prey such as house crickets, black crickets and locusts. Waxworms and mealworms should be given in moderation. Livefood should be gut loaded with a high calcium content food (8% of calcium in the dry matter) and many products are commercially available. It is worth checking the label for the calcium content. Livefood should also be dusted with a high calcium balancer with no or minimal phosphorous content. Livefood should be fed immediately after dusting and eaten promptly. Dark leafy salad items and weeds should be the main vegetable matter offered and this also needs to be dusted with a calcium supplement.

#### Water

Water should always be available and a container is required which will allow the lizard to submerge completely. This should be changed daily.

#### Accommodation requirements

- A large vivarium as possible should be provided, but at least 120 cm (4 feet) long x 60 cm (2 feet high) and 60 cm (2 feet) deep. This is required to enable a thermal gradient to be created along the length of the tank (hot to cold). Wooden or fibreglass vivaria are ideal as this provides the lizard with some visual security and ventilation can be provided at lizard level.
- Reptiles are ectothermic so a heat source is required. Typically a spot area is created using a spot bulb, providing a basking temperature of 40°C. This should be kept on all day. Temperatures should be measured to ensure the tank is not overheating. The cool end should be maintained at 25°C. Background heat can be provided with a heat mat (on the back wall) a tubular heater, a heat plate or a ceramic bulb. This should be set on a thermostat so that the overnight temperature does not drop below 25°C. The temperatures should be measured with a maximum/minimum thermometer. During the cold winter months careful checking is required to ensure the heat sources are keeping the tank sufficiently warm. Heat sources should be guarded to prevent thermal burns.
- Bearded dragons must be exposed to UV-b light. The best sources are the mercury vapour lamps which give out heat as well. This will need to be on all day for 12 hours and at a distance of 30 cm (1 foot) from the lizard. A small branch or rock can be placed below the basking site. It is important to get the basking temperature correct. The mercury vapour lamps cannot be fitted to a thermostat. These lamps should be checked regularly for their UV output and should be changed at least annually.

- Good ventilation is required and many commercial vivaria are lacking good ventilation. Additional ventilation holes may need to be created.
- Hides are required to provide some security. Artificial plants, cardboard boxes, plant pots, logs or commercially available hides can be used. They should be placed both at the warm and cooler ends of the tank.
- Substrates suitable for housing lizards include newspaper, Astroturf and some of the commercially available substrates. It is important that the substrates either cannot be eaten, or if they are, do not cause blockages as this can prove fatal. Wood chip based substrates should never be used for this reason.
- The vivarium should be cleaned out at least once a week to help prevent disease and a suitable disinfectant used.

### **Companions**

- In general the happiest lizard is the solitary lizard. Adults can be maintained in pairs or a harem.

### **Salmonella**

- All reptiles can potentially carry Salmonella.
- However it is rarely a cause of illness and treatment is not required.
- It can be transmitted to people and good hygiene after handling the reptile is important. Generally washing your hands in soap is sufficient. There are commercially available disinfectants that can be used as an alternative.

### **Parasites**

- Internal parasites are common but it is important to check what parasites are present as both pinworms and coccidiosis are commonly found and the treatments vary. It is best to get a faecal sample checked by your vet.
- Cryptosporidium is one that is of concern and special stains are required to detect if it is present.

### **Signs of ill health – call your vet if you see any of these**

- Anorexia – although lizards can go for a little while without eating it is important to get the lizard looked at early so that husbandry corrections or treatment can be started as it can take time for the lizard to respond.
- Dysecdysis – shedding problems are commonly seen and this can be due to husbandry problems or a sign of ill health.
- Poor growth – There are a number of reasons for a lizard to grow poorly and if your lizard is not growing it should be presented to your vet.
- Stomatitis – in many bearded lizards dental disease can develop over time if fed on a poor diet and if there is any discolouration of the mouth veterinary advice should be sought.
- Metabolic bone disease – this is sadly still very common. Lizards may have difficulty moving around and feeding. It is important to get these checked out early on so that treatment can be started.
- Reproductive disease – many females can collapse while trying to produce eggs. It is important that these are presented promptly to your vet for medical or surgical treatment.

### **Insurance**

- Unfortunately there is no NHS for reptiles and many conditions can be ongoing and require a number of diagnostic tests, leading to a financial strain which would be removed by insurance.

### **The Exotic Animal and Wildlife service offers**

- All our vets are very experienced and have extra qualifications in reptile medicine and surgery and can offer your pet a high quality standard of veterinary care
- All reptiles are hospitalised in appropriate vivaria
- First opinion consultations
- For the more unusual and complex cases you can be referred to us
- For emergencies, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year, please ring our veterinary hospital on 0131-6507650

### **Resources:**

- [www.dickvetexotics.co.uk](http://www.dickvetexotics.co.uk) our website providing up to date information on our services.
- [www.proteus.uk.net](http://www.proteus.uk.net) a good source for information sheets and husbandry advice.

- [www.eawt.co.uk](http://www.eawt.co.uk) a good source for information sheets.
- [www.uvguide.co.uk](http://www.uvguide.co.uk) the latest information on UV light sources.