



General Reptile Care

Introduction

Reptiles as a group make fascinating pets. Because reptiles do not generate heat internally, they rely on the use of external heat to maintain their bodies at a thermal optimum, which makes the correct husbandry crucial. Digestion, immunity and breeding will be impaired if reptiles are kept at suboptimal temperatures.

A Recreational Wildlife Licence is required to keep most species of reptile. This can be sourced from the Environmental Protection Agency (www.epa.qld.gov.au).

General Enclosure Requirements

Your enclosure should be designed to fulfill the specific needs of the species which you are keeping. For instance, an arboreal snake would benefit from a taller enclosure whereas a Bearded Dragon would benefit from more floor space. The general rule is to purchase the largest enclosure that you can afford for your animal, keeping in mind that young or small animals may need to be restricted within the enclosure until they are larger. The enclosure should be cleaned and disinfected regularly.

The substrate of your reptile enclosure can be as functional, or as naturalistic as you like, as long as it is easy to clean and disinfect. Newspaper, crushed walnut shell, reptile sand or Astroturf are commonly used. If using sand, be certain that it is not contaminated (building sand is not appropriate) and feed the reptile off the sand. Some animals can develop sand obstructions in the gastrointestinal tract if they inadvertently eat sand while consuming their food.

Reptiles need to be able to feel secure in their enclosure, so 'hides' or privacy areas should be provided. These can be as simple as a cardboard box, or purpose-made, but must be easy to clean and disinfect. Care should be taken to secure the hide, so that it cannot fall on to or entrap your reptile.

A water bowl should always be provided, in the opposite end of the cage to the heat source. This will provide humidity. Certain species need to either immerse themselves in water or even swim.

Heating

A supplementary heat source is essential, and is ideally a globe, which can be either infra-red or emit visible light. These should be enclosed so that animals cannot contact the naked globe (especially snakes). Visible light globes should not be used at night (it will disturb your reptile's day/night rhythm), so another source of night-time heating is required if they are used. If an infra-red globe is used, additional lighting is required during the day. Heat rocks and heating mats should be used with caution, as incorrect use can lead to burns on the underside of your reptile. Whatever the heating source, it should be connected to a thermostat, with the probe placed in the hottest part of the enclosure. Remember to always confirm the correct functioning of your thermostat with a second, independent

thermometer. Your reptile's enclosure should have a thermal gradient, with the hot end (having the heat source) being 2-3°C above the species' preferred body temperature and the cool end being 2-3°C less. This will allow your reptile to control its body temperature precisely.

Lighting

In the wild, most reptiles bask in unfiltered sunlight every day. This provides ultraviolet (UV) light essential for calcium metabolism. In captivity, if your reptile will not have unhindered access to natural sunlight (i.e., NOT through glass windows or Perspex), then the provision of an ultraviolet light source is essential. Some heating lamps give out UV light as part of their light spectrum. If your lamp does not, or you are uncertain, then UV light should be supplied separately to your reptile's enclosure. In summer, the UV light should be on for 12-14 hours per day, while in winter this can reduce to 9-12 hours. The UV component of any light source will degrade faster than the visible light source, so it is recommended to change the globe every 6-9 months.

Species	Scientific Name	Preferred Body Temperature (°C)
Children's Python	<i>Antaresia childreni</i>	30 - 33
Coastal Carpet Python	<i>Morelia spilota variegata</i>	30 - 32
Diamond Python	<i>Morelia spilota spilota</i>	29 - 30
Bearded Dragon	<i>Pogona sp.</i>	34-35
Eastern Snake-Necked Turtle (long neck)	<i>Chelodina longicollis</i>	26
Murray River Turtle (short neck)	<i>Emydura macquarii</i>	26
Blue Tongue Lizard	<i>Tiliqua scincoides</i>	28 - 33

