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CHAMELEON HUSBANDRY

DIET

The correct diet in chameleons is important because they can be difficult to keep in captivity and are susceptible to vitamin A and D3 deficiencies as well as toxicities. Gut loading insects (see cricket care) is extremely important to prevent problems. Feeding a variety of insects, such as crickets, flies, butterflies, wax-moth (*Galleria* sp.) larvae and adults, will help in conjunction with a calcium supplement and a multivitamin supplement containing vitamin A. Calcium powders, that are phosphorus free, can be used daily. Vitamin D3 can be used three to four times a week in juveniles and twice weekly for adults. Vitamin A can be used one to two times a week in juveniles and every other week in adults. In a few of the larger species of chameleons, pinky mice may be fed once a week. Placing the insects within a container that they cannot climb out of, within the reptile cage is the best way to feed these lizards. Fresh water needs to be provided by a drip system or misting the cage frequently. Generally, they will not drink from standing water. If a drip system is used, it must be disinfected regularly.

ENVIRONMENT AND ENCLOSURE

Researching the species of chameleon that you have is important to providing the proper environment. Generally, chameleons can be separated into two groups. The montane or highland species prefer cooler day time temperatures. Maximum basking temperatures should range from 82 to 84 F. Daytime ambient temperatures should range from 70 to 80 F and night time temperatures should drop to 55-60 F. Species in this group include the Jackson's chameleon, and panther chameleon. The lowland or tropical group of chameleons prefer higher temperatures in the range of 79-88 degrees F with basking sites reaching 93-100 degrees F and night temperatures as low as 64-66 degrees F. Species included in this group include the veiled chameleon and Meller's chameleon. These species generally require higher humidity but an average of 50-75% is adequate for both groups. Ventilation is important, also. The best cages are made out of soft screening material for adults and vertically oriented aquariums for juveniles. Different sized branches and plants should be placed in the enclosure to provide climbing surfaces and areas to hide. Ficus and pothos plants are generally non-toxic. Newspaper, other paper sources can be used as substrate for hygiene purposes and to prevent foreign material from being ingested while hunting. Chameleons should be housed separately and with a visual barrier between cages. Like other lizards, chameleons require UVb light. Lights containing 5.0 UVb should be placed above the basking site and should be the appropriate distance from the lizard. Straight fluorescent bulbs or mercury vapor bulbs such as Active Heat by T-Rex and PowerSun by Zoomed are ideal. Natural sunlight is the best source of UVb light.

VETERINARY CARE

Because chameleons are difficult to keep healthy, veterinary care is extremely important for them. Yearly examinations and post purchase examinations are recommended to make sure they do not have preexisting conditions. Veterinary care can help identify internal parasites, metabolic bone disease, infections or reproductive problems. If you would like to schedule an appointment, please call our office at 240-687-1414.

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