HEALTH & DISEASES



This column is taken care of by the "Studygroup for Diseases and the Optimum Keeping and Breeding of Terrarium Animals" of the Belgian Society "Terra". If there is a question concerning health or diseases, feel free to contact the president of the Studygroup: Mr. Hugo Claessen, Arthur Sterckstraat 18, B-2600 Berchem, Belgium. He will try to answer your question in this column to the benefit of all members.

WHAT TO DO IF YOUR ANIMALS ARE TAKEN ILL ?

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On behalf of the "Studygroup for Diseases and the Optimum Keeping and Breeding of Terrarium Animals".

Contents: Introduction - Quarantine - Examination - Documentation - References.

INTRODUCTION

As cited in earlier publications, reptile keepers who watch their animals regularly and accurately will soon learn to know if everything is well. Many departures from natural behaviour are due to illness, obviously the sooner one notices an illness the better the chance of saving the animal. Also the danger of disease spreading to other animals can be reduced by immediate separation.

QUARANTINE

Any animal suspected of being ill should be separated from all other animals immediately and closely observed without neglecting the others. In the case of contagious diseases other animals may show the same symptoms. Should this happen they also will have to be separated. They must not be put with any animals separated earlier because of possible differences in the level of contamination. From then on painstaking hygienic measures should be followed concerning instruments, cleaning tools, food, and the snake keeper himself. No tools should be used for both groups of animals. Instruments like a pair of tweezers used in feeding, a drinking trough, etc., are best washed out with hot water and a quaternary ammonium compounds (Cetavlon, Zephiran, etc.) based disinfectant. When using disinfectants based on chlorine phenols or cresoles (Dettol, G-11, etc.) care should be taken due to their toxicity to reptiles. When you are disinfecting tools and materials it is essential to allow the disinfectant to work for some time (up to several hours), if you only brush them off with disinfectant and rinse in hot water, the more resistant germs will not be affected.

EXAMINATION

When an animal, suspected of illness, has been separated, it is essential to find out as quickly as possible whether the animal is actually ill and if the illness is contagious. If it turns out not to be ill one can take the opportunity to administer extra minerals and vitamins.
It is wise to describe and/or photograph any observed changes in behaviour from that time on.
- First one should check the animals externally for changes in colour, thickenings or ectoparasites.

- Then one palpates the animal and looks for internal swellings or hard spots.
- One must have the faeces examined as soon as possible.

Depending on the experience one has had with sick animals and having observed and examined the animal well, including microscopic faeces examination, one can try to diagnose the illness. When one has no or little experience advice can be sought from an experienced snake keeper or a vet who has knowledge of reptiles. One can also check the available literature, which often is not satisfactory.
When the illness has been diagnosed, the prescribed treatment has to be carried out. If it is a contagious disease it is advisable to traet all untouched animals (if the vet has not mentioned it one can carry out the same treatment but for a shorter period).

DOCUMENTATION

It is wise to note all changes in the animal, behavioural or reactions to the treatment, and re-examinations. This information can be the base of an article in a magazine and add to the personal documentation of the animal.
Should the animal die it is advisable to have a post mortem performed to confirm the cause of death. Any changes noted and documented could lead to a better understanding of the disease through which it can be treated more efficiently, causing less casualties.

REFERENCES

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