

ASSIGNMENT 216 TASK 1 HANDOUT

BEARDED DRAGON HEALTH

Condition of Skin and Scales

Skin should be undamaged with no sign of parasites and shedding should occur regularly.

Swellings on the toes and tail is very often an indication of shedding problems.

Before the bearded dragon is going to shed the colours will fade or dull out. During shedding, don't try to peel off the skin if it is not ready to come off as it can cause damage to the scales underneath. Routine soaking of the beardie is recommended so he is well hydrated to begin with and avoids future problems.

Scale rot is a bacterial infection extremely harmful to a bearded dragon. The scale disease requires proper treatment because it can lead to death if left untreated. Bacteria can quickly enter the beardies skin through a small cut or bite they have received. Blisters and flaky skin are some of the first signs of scale rot. Ulcers can begin to appear and are very painful. Once the scales are infected with the ulcers, they will start seeping, and eventually, the scales will begin falling off. If it looks like the bearded dragon's pores are clogged, it likely could be scale rot.

Signs and symptoms of other skin conditions

- Yellow fever - Yellowing and pus on the scales
- Mouth rot - Discolouration and discharge in the mouth
- Tail rot - Discolouration and wasting on the tail
- Sunken fat pads - Small or non-existent pads behind the eyes where they store fat
- Retained shed - Bits of dead skin stuck to the body
- Skin burns - Injury on the skin from heating elements too close
- Wrinkly skin - Bunched up skin resulting from dehydration

Behaviour and posture

- Head bobs

Head bobbing is a sign of domination. It occurs when bearded dragons want to establish a social hierarchy among themselves. Faster bobs are meant to serve as a warning and a threat. Slower bobs signal submission. Also, male beardies will do jerky bobs when they are courting a female.

- Waving

This "greeting" essentially says two things: "I am here," and "I come in peace, don't hurt me." It's both a signal of presence and submission. That is the reason why insecure young beardies will perform the wave more often than mature adults.

- Changing colour

The bearded dragon's trademark beard will become enlarged and dark if he is excited, scared, aggressive and ready to attack an intruder, or ready to mate. In these cases, the black beard is a passing occurrence.

However, if the black beard is persistent, it is a sign that your beardie is suffering. He could be in pain, or there might be something wrong with his habitat.

- Mouth gaping

The most common reason for a beardie to keep his mouth open is controlling his body temperature. Bearded dragons will often open their mouths while basking to prevent overheating.

- Beard puffing up

There's usually no need for concern when this happens. This behaviour doesn't harm the animal and may be just their way of instinctively helping themselves feel safe when they feel threatened.

- Tail pointing upwards

The bearded dragon is most likely feeling alert. You may often spot this body sign while the bearded dragon is hunting for prey such as Dubia roaches and crickets.

- Basking

Basking under a heat lamp or in full sunshine is a behaviour that beardies exhibit daily. That way they collect heat, and UVB radiation which helps create vitamin D3 to metabolise calcium.



Abnormal and undesirable behaviours of bearded dragons include:

Lethargy, Wobbly walking, lack of movement or moving the front legs only, Twitching or jerking movements, Looking upwards for no reason ("stargazing"), Soaking too much

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Appetite and water intake

Bearded dragons are omnivorous, which means they eat both meat (primarily insects) and plant matter. In the wild, bearded dragons consume insects, plants, and the occasional small lizard found in their native environment. They consume a wide variety of food items in the wild, and this should be replicated as much as possible in captivity. You should feed your bearded dragons a good selection of leafy greens and use a calcium supplement to keep them healthy.



One of the most common reasons a Bearded dragon might go off their food is if they are shedding. Another cause could be if your Bearded dragon is brumating which is a natural process and a period of dormancy that Bearded dragons go through during the winter, where they enter deep sleep, their metabolism slows to allow them to reduce their food intake and remain sheltered during the cold months. Naturally, a brumating Bearded dragon will have very little appetite and this is not a cause for concern.

If the Bearded dragon's tank temperature is consistently too low, they will be unable to properly digest their food, and in turn, will lose their appetite.

Bearded dragon's may go off their food due to poor ratio between plant and animal matter. An adult Bearded dragon fed on too many live insects may begin refusing food, particularly their greens, favouring the insects. This can, in turn, lead to vitamin deficiency.

The average amount of water a bearded dragon would need a day would be around 10 ml. Always provide fresh drinking water daily to prevent dehydration.

Movement

Bearded dragons tend to be active creatures. If yours is particularly lethargic and doesn't seem to be moving much, it may not be in optimal health.

Cold lizards tend to be less active because they depend on external warmth for their body heat. If it's the change of seasons, then low activity could mean the Bearded Dragon is about to go into Brumation.

A bearded dragon that is shaking or moving in abnormal, jerky motions is exhibiting another sign of Calcium or Vitamin D deficiency. If your bearded dragon has unusual twitching behaviour during meals or while it is young, you should take him to the vet as soon as possible.

Abnormal or undesirable behaviours include lethargy, walking in circles, and low activity levels. If your bearded dragon exhibits any of these behaviours, they may be experiencing stress. If you pick up your bearded dragon and they wiggle, this may indicate discomfort.

Beardies will run back and forth alongside their enclosure (often a glass tank) and stand on their hind legs trying to run up the side. This is called glass surfing.

Bearded dragons are most active during the day. In the wild they sun themselves on rocky outcrops or trees where they have a good view of the surrounding area. Bearded Dragons in captivity will spend most of the day basking under their light and perching, which mimics being high up and a sign of dominance.

Condition of eyes, ears, nose and mouth

Eyes

When a beardie's eyes droop so that he or she looks like a bloodhound, he or she may have an infection or a problem with parasites. It's also possible that they may have kidney issues. Swollen/puffed out eyes are also something to watch out for. They can be signs that your beardie is shedding or that he or she is suffering from an overdose of vitamin A, parasites or an eye infection.

Ears

Despite having an internal ear structure, bearded dragons have excellent hearing. This trait is especially important in the wild because bearded dragons need to hear even the smallest sounds that could be an indication of approaching predators, and they need to be able to locate their prey. Because they have such sensitive hearing, it's very important to make sure that your pet bearded dragon is given the respect and consideration that it needs in order to have a happy living environment. This means that you should never tap on the glass of its tank, and its tank should be kept far away from noisy kids, loud pets and other sounds that may cause stress or anxiety.

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Due to the nature of a bearded dragon's ears, it's not surprising that lots of unwanted dirt and debris ends up inside of them. This is actually a pretty natural occurrence and is usually nothing to worry about. You may find that your bearded dragon's ears become clogged with shedding debris, but it's important to let them remove this shed on its own.

If you notice that the debris in the ear is not coming out, or if there is a large object that's stuck, take your bearded dragon to the veterinarian. A vet has the tools and experience needed to safely remove objects from their ears.

Nose

Bearded dragons have a little flap which looks like it is blocking the nose? That is normal and should never be pulled out. There is a piece of cartilage in their nose that lets them open and close their nose to protect them from the environment. If they are under water or in a dust storm, it closes to prevent anything from getting in. When they shed and get "nose plugs" do not pull them out because you could accidentally pull the nose cartilage out. What looks like a piece of unshed skin that plugs the nostrils of a bearded dragon can be referred to as nose plugs. This is fairly common and usually requires little or no assistance. If your bearded dragon is having trouble breathing you can help moisten the area with a bath or misting. Removing the nose plug with tweezers is a risky procedure that is not recommended. Always consult your vet.

Mouth

Bearded dragons are predisposed to periodontal disease that can progress into severe calculus buildup, gingivitis (inflammation of the gum line), gingival recession, and even deep bone infections. The cause of this is suspected to be related to poor diet. Bearded dragon's teeth need to be cleaned and inspected routinely. If neglected, they can lose their teeth, wear their teeth down, or suffer from painful gum disease.

Mouth rot is a condition that can affect bearded dragons at any age. Also known as infectious or ulcerative stomatitis, it's a bacterial infection that causes swelling, irritation, discharge, and more. It occurs when bacteria in the mouth proliferate and enter the lizard's system through physical injury.

Appearance of urine and faeces

Bearded dragons do not urinate. Instead they pass urate – a uric acid paste. Secreting this uric acid allows them to get rid of the nitrogenous waste in their bodies whilst conserving water.

A Bearded Dragon's faeces should be brown with white urate. If a bearded dragon is healthy their stool will be brown, firm in consistency and log shaped. Urate will be either white or yellow and usually remains at the end of the poop. The white portion of the poop is called urate and it should be soft in consistency and not smell foul. Some changes in poop colour are not a cause for concern and are relatively common. Poop and urate are passed simultaneously so you should always see them together.

Diarrhoea can severely dehydrate a bearded dragon. Diet changes, bad diet and parasites are the three biggest reasons for bearded dragon diarrhoea. If you have just changed your beardie's diet and notice runny stool it should settle down in a couple of days. Runny poop can also indicate parasites. The most common way bearded dragons get parasites is from the insects they eat. Insects can contain parasites which are passed on when they are consumed.



Signs of stress or pain that bearded dragons may show

Vocal signs

Bearded dragons do not make loud noises as compared to mammals because they do not have vocal cords. Therefore, they rely on body language to communicate instead of making noise.

Visual signs

One of the most common and telltale signs of stress is dark spots or marks that may appear on your dragon's chin, neck, and belly. Stress marks may look like dark lines, ovals, or spots, or your dragon's entire beard may be black even while it is not expanded. Sometimes, the stress marks will be found on your dragon's limbs in addition to the belly.

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If you notice stress marks on your bearded dragon, don't panic. Chances are, this is very normal. The best thing to do is make note of when the stress marks appeared and if they have an obvious cause. If they don't, then give your vet a call. But in most cases, you're going to be able to connect the stress marks with an obvious source of temporary stress.

The procedure to follow if an animal is found to be sick or injured

- Reporting and recording - Report to the manager immediately if a bearded dragon is sick or injured. A vet may need to be contacted in some cases. Record the illness or injury in the animals records and staff communication book so that all staff members are aware. Record any signs or symptoms, especially anything new relating to the illness or injury.
- Monitoring - Keep a close eye on the bearded dragon and monitor behaviour, eating and drinking and movement. Check on the sick or injured animal at least every hour and record your findings. Look out for any new symptoms.
- Isolating - Bearded dragons are usually solitary, however if they are housed together you must isolate a sick or injured animal and place them in their own enclosure to prevent cross-contamination or further injury.
- When to call the vet - Always consult your manager before contacting the vet. Treatment from a vet should never be put off if the bearded dragon is injured or sick. If you notice severe signs of stress, weight loss, not moving or laboured breathing you must contact the vet immediately.

The records kept to help maintain the health of animals

- Age - Knowing the age of a bearded dragon is important as they have different food requirements at different ages. They will also be less active as they become older so it is important to know the types of behaviour to expect relating to their age.
- Type - The type of bearded dragon should be recorded so that they are easily recognisable and they can be identified easily.
- Diet - The food source and amount should be recorded so that they are fed the correct quantities and food types needed to keep them healthy. It is also useful to see how much they are eating to check they are in good health and are receiving the correct requirements. If a bearded dragon has a diet related illness, recording their diet will help to eliminate any foods that maybe making them ill.
- Weight - A bearded dragon's weight should be recorded to ensure there is no drastic weight gain or weight loss as this could indicate a serious health problem that may need addressing.
- Comments - Extra information relating to behaviour, sleeping patterns etc. should be added to provide a better understanding of the animals health.

