

VEILED CHAMELEON

The veiled chameleon (Chamaeleo calypratus) is a large, colorful, and robust lizard indigenous to coastal regions of Yemen and Saudi Arabia. Now well established in captivity, it is one of the most popular and widely recommended chameleons for the novice reptile keeper.

A characteristic feature of this species is the impressively high casque on the head. Adult males have a higher casque than females. Some authorities have suggested that the casque may serve to collect and channel water, such as morning dewdrops or fog, into the mouth. Others believe that it functions to dissipate heat. A more recent hypothesis suggests that it may amplify a low frequency “buzzing” used by this species to communicate with one another.

Veiled chameleons also possess prehensile tails, long whip-like tongues, independently moving eyes, zygodactyl feet, and a spectacular array of changing colors.

Zoological Education Network provides educational materials about exotic companion animals.

Most Common Disorders of Veiled Chameleons

- Dystocia (egg-binding)
- Metabolic bone disease
- Toenail loss / foot infections
- Intestinal parasites
- Respiratory / sinus / ocular infections
- Stomatitis / periodontal disease
- Abscesses / cellulitis / osteomyelitis
- Loss of tongue function
- Kidney disease
- Hemipene prolapse
- Dehydration

Having your veiled chameleon examined on a regular basis by an exotic animal veterinarian who is familiar with reptiles can prevent many of the common disorders above.



© 2007 Zoological Education Network
800-946-4782 561-641-6745 www.exoticdvm.com

Companion Reptile Care
S E R I E S

What to Expect from Your Veiled Chameleon

Chameleons are unique, attractive and fascinating lizards that require special care. Providing proper care demands dedication and knowledge.

Vital Statistics

Total length: males 17-24 inches (43-61 cm)
 females 10-13 inches (25-33 cm)
 Body weight: males 100-200 grams
 females 90-120 grams
 Average life span: males 4-8 years
 females 2-4 years
 Age of sexual maturity: 6-8 months

Veiled chameleons are among the largest, most resilient and most popular chameleons in the pet marketplace. They are well known for their beauty, extreme territoriality and aggressive behavior. Veiled chameleons can tolerate moderate handling by their owners,

but in general are considered display animals that do not fare well with excessive handling.

Is Your Veiled Chameleon a Male or Female?

The easiest way to sex a veiled chameleon of any age is to look for a small “tarsal spur” on the back of the hind leg. These are present in males and are lacking in females. Additionally, males possess a larger casque height than females and have a greater total body length. Males and females display distinctively different color patterns.

What Should You Feed Your Chameleon

Veiled chameleons feed primarily on live, moving insect prey. Vegetation is enjoyed by some veiled chameleons and may also be part of their captive diet.

- The insect portion of the diet may consist of commercially-raised crickets, silkworms, roaches, mealworms, superworms (*Zophobas*), waxworms, and other live insects. Wild-collected insects are also beneficial, as long as they are collected from a pesticide-free area. Prey items should be fed a high quality diet (“gut-loaded”) for at least

24 hours before feeding them out.

- Other live prey might include occasional snails, small lizards and pinkie mice.
- Live prey can be offered either in deep containers or allowed to free roam. Be aware that hungry free-roaming insects can chew on chameleons and will sometimes cause injury to them. Chameleons need to be conditioned to eat from a container, but once this behavior is learned, this will reduce insect dispersal in the enclosure.
- Appropriate-sized prey items should be offered every day for juveniles, and 2-4 times a week for adults.
- For vegetation, try offering a shallow bowl with mixed greens and assorted chopped vegetables and fruits. Hibiscus and ficus plants are also relished.

Water and Supplementation

- Free-ranging chameleons drink the dew from leaves and other wet surfaces. In captivity, they generally will not drink from a bowl. Their enclosure should be misted once to twice daily so that they may drink from wet surfaces as they do in the wild. Water should also be provided in a “drip system,” which can range from simple drip cups and melting ice cubes to more elaborate automatic drip line systems. Chameleons that are not watered regularly are susceptible to dehydration, which can lead to severe illness.
- Vitamin and mineral supplementation is controversial in chameleons; consult with your exotic animal veterinarian. Dusting prey items with a calcium supplement is probably beneficial. Prey are dusted daily for juveniles, while prey are supplemented every 2-3 feedings for adults.

What Your Veterinarian Looks for in a Healthy Veiled Chameleon



How to Keep Your Veiled Chameleon Healthy, Happy and Safe!

- ✓ Take a newly purchased veiled chameleon to an exotic animal veterinarian for a wellness examination and fecal check for parasites.
- ✓ Quarantine new chameleons in a separate area of the house for at least 30 days.
- ✓ Keep chameleons physically and visually separate from one another.
- ✓ Deliver water by misting the cage daily and by using a drip system.
- ✓ Provide heat with a basking light 6-12 hours a day.
- ✓ Include exposure to artificial UVB lighting or natural sunlight 10-12 hours a day.

Housing for your veiled chameleon should:

- ✓ be at least a 10-gallon size enclosure for juveniles.
- ✓ consist of a screen enclosure for adults: minimum size 24” x 24” x 36”(61 x 61 x 91 cm). Glass aquariums are acceptable only for hatchlings and small juveniles.
- ✓ have no substrate, only plain plastic or glass as cage flooring.
- ✓ be easy to clean with good ventilation.
- ✓ provide branches for climbing and artificial or real plants for shelter.
- ✓ maintain a gradient of temperatures in the daytime, from 65-75°F (18-24°C) on the cool end to 90-110°F (32-43°C) on the warm end.

It is important for a veiled chameleon to avoid:

- ✗ being housed together with another chameleon
- ✗ being bred before reaching its full adult size (usually 9-12 months)
- ✗ sharp edges in the enclosure
- ✗ free roam of the house
- ✗ cats, dogs, or other predators
- ✗ direct contact with heating elements or light sources
- ✗ excessive handling
- ✗ overheating