

## Lizard Spaying and Neutering

### **Can lizards be sterilized, and how difficult is this procedure?**

*By Margaret A. Wissman, DVM, DABVP*

Can iguanas, chameleons and the like be sterilized, and how difficult is this procedure?

By sterilize, I assume that you mean removing the gonads (sex organs) of males and females. Neutering (removing testicles) of male iguanids is a relatively routine procedure for veterinarians who are experienced in herp medicine. It is considered a major surgery, because unlike dogs and cats, this surgery requires exploring the coelom, so it is considered major abdominal surgery. This surgery is an elective procedure, so it is best to wait until the lizard is of appropriate size to best withstand the operation. This should be decided by the surgeon and the owner after evaluation of the lizard.

Prior to surgery, it is best if a thorough physical examination, blood tests (complete blood count and plasma chemistry panel) and fecal parasite exam are performed to ensure that the pet is in the best health prior to undergoing surgery. (This holds true for females, as well.) While I'm sure that this procedure can be performed on chameleons, due to their delicate constitution, I would hesitate to recommend this as a routine procedure. Chameleons are easily stressed, so this would not be a good thing to do.

For female iguanid lizards, the spaying procedure (removal of the ovaries and shell gland) is also fairly routine in both reproductively active and quiescent females, in the hands of an experienced herp veterinarian. A spay procedure can be performed during a C-section if a gravid female full of eggs or follicles is decompensating, or as an elective to prevent future reproductive problems. Again, I would not recommend this as an elective procedure for chameleons, although C-sections and concurrent removal of the reproductive organs have been performed on gravid females for dystocia (difficulty in laying her eggs), with varying degrees of success. Chameleons are quite fragile and the stress of dystocia combined with surgery is often a recipe for disaster.

Owners often request neutering male iguanas as a way to decrease hormonally-driven aggression. This may be helpful in about 60 percent of the cases; however, sexually mature, territorial males should always be considered dangerous. Neutering a male can be performed to prevent unwanted fertile clutches of eggs, and is thus used as a method of "birth control."