

## Bearded Dragons Not Gaining Weight

**My bearded dragon eats well, but doesn't gain any weight. What's wrong with him?**

*By Margaret A. Wissman, DVM, DABVP*

Hi, my name is Jim and I live in Southern California. I own one male and two female bearded dragons. All of them appear a lot smaller than the ones I see in pet stores. The male is about 3 years old, 22 inches long with tail, but is a mere 180 grams. I have been packing his cage with greens and every other day I've been feeding him mealworms or pinkies. He is active, but I can't figure out why he doesn't gain weight. Can you help?

Also, I was wondering if you could refer me to a great herp vet in Southern California?

It would have helped if you had provided me with the temperature range, focal hot spot and lighting conditions in your beardies' habitats. If you are housing them all together, it might be best to separate out the male. That way he isn't competing with the females and doesn't have to share with them. Often, larger beardies can intimidate smaller ones and it may be so subtle that you wouldn't even notice it occurring.

I suggest that you look through the archived bearded dragon questions and answers to get detailed information on husbandry, nutrition and other bearded dragon issues. Some owners don't keep their beardies in a high enough temperature. They should have a focal hot spot of 110 to 115 degrees F. If a bearded dragon doesn't sit gaping with its mouth open while basking, it's probably not warm enough. Full-spectrum lighting, with UVB, is most important for proper growth and development.

I also recommend that about 1/4 to 1/3 of the diet for bearded dragons be composed of a good quality bearded dragon pellet for their specific age range. I also recommend that the insects be varied as much as possible, mealworms alone are not enough. You should be feeding some waxworms, some crickets (either gut-loaded or dusted with a vitamin/mineral supplement) and when available, other types of insects that you can catch around your house and yard.

There are too many reasons why your bearded dragon may not be growing properly to discuss in this column. I would recommend you take him to see a qualified herp vet and if possible, bring in a fresh fecal sample so that your lizard can be checked for parasites. Parasites are one of the most common reasons for poor growth in a pet herp. Blood tests and radiographs may also be necessary once your herp vet has evaluated your lizard's husbandry, diet and other factors.

I'm sorry that I am not able to refer you to a specific reptile veterinarian. Ask local pet retailers that sell herps who they use for a reptile vet, or call vets in your area who do not work on reptiles and ask them who they refer reptile patients to. Also, you can check the Association of Reptile and Amphibian Veterinarians website for herp vets in your area.