

Avoid Reptile Neglect

Holiday neglect can be hard on reptiles.

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Helmut the red-eared slider.

I hope everyone had a great holiday. I'm still full of Honeybaked Ham and chocolate.

While we're running around buying presents and whatever else we need to focus on at this time of year, it can get easy to overlook some of the routine maintenance of our pets. Because of their generally uncomplaining nature, reptiles especially could suffer at the hands of busy owners who may usually be very attentive, but whose attention gets diverted during the busy holiday season. Owners such as myself, for example.

Right now I'm looking at Helmut's tank. For those who don't know, Helmut is the official REPTILES Magazine Editorial Department Turtle, a rescued red-eared slider. And I realize I am guilty of letting his tank remain dirtier than usual longer than I should have. Usually I spot-clean Helmut's enclosure as needed, and there's always a filter running. I also perform a thorough cleaning, emptying the tank completely, once a week. But it's been over two weeks since the last complete cleaning. Although I've still been spot cleaning, Helmut's water is a bit murkier than normal and algae is more prominent.

I could blame the fact that the holidays are playing a role in de-railing my usual processes. For one thing, there's the trough. That's a table here in the editorial department upon which we place food for people to share. Food will appear on the trough periodically throughout the year, but it explodes with treats every year during the holidays. Right now there are bagels and cream cheese, four different kinds of cookies, Fritos, yogurt pretzels, mushroom salsa and chips, a fruit platter, potato chips and one of those buckets containing three types of popcorn. With all the stuff that's out there, I find myself leaving my office more than usual to peruse the offerings. And the more time I spend at the trough, the more down to the wire it gets for me at the end of the work day, with a need to get my work chores done at a time I might otherwise take to clean Helmut's tank.

Because it's not a great idea to trundle buckets of dirty turtle water through the editorial department during the work day, I clean Helmut after hours. Lately, though, because of Christmas activities that commanded my attention, I was anxious to leave the office for parties and whatnot rather than take the time to clean Helmut. This more than anything is my excuse – and I know it's just an excuse – for putting off a thorough cleaning of his enclosure.

Have any of you experienced a similar situation? At this very busy time of year, we need to remember that our pets rely on us. I know one person who will be giving a turtle tank an extra-thorough cleaning tonight!

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