

African Fat-Tailed Gecko's Tail Not "Fat"

Why is my African fat-tailed gecko lethargic and eating less?

By Margaret A. Wissman, DVM, DABVP

The tail of our African fat-tailed gecko is no longer fat. Also, he is not eating as much as he used to. He's about 11 years old and is a bit lethargic as well.

Is this a sign of illness? I saw in the pet store something called Reptile First Aid, which is a sort of vitamin that is administered via an eye dropper. We always dust his crickets with vitamins when we feed him, so I was also wondering if this might be too much.

Thanks for any help you can give.
Kathie

Instead of spending your money on a remedy that might or might not help, I would suggest that you take your gecko in to see a qualified herp vet in your area who can properly examine, diagnose and prescribe the appropriate medications for him.

The decrease in appetite that you have reported is probably a sign of some illness, as you suspected, because at age 11, he is not really more than a middle-aged gecko. If you have owned and cared for him for all 11 of his years, then I would suspect that your husbandry is adequate, at least. I don't think that the vitamins that you dust your crickets with is the problem, however I do recommend that all herps be offered a wide variety of insects, gut-loaded, and not just one type. The more the diet is varied, the less likely the chance of nutritional deficiencies.

Please find a herp vet in your area who can help you with your gecko. Even with a lizard as small as a gecko, it is possible to run diagnostics, including blood work, radiographs (X-rays), bacterial and fungal cultures, cytology and serology, to name just some. He might have picked up a bacterial infection, or he may have become infested with some sort of intestinal parasite. Less likely would be that he has developed a tumor, but the weight loss and lethargy are signs that should not be ignored.

Please make an appointment with a herp vet as soon as possible to have your lizard examined. As always, if you don't have access to a qualified herp vet, you can suggest that the vet you choose take advantage of the free consultation service offered by the larger veterinary diagnostic labs. Your vet can call in and ask for a consultation with an experienced herp vet who can offer advice regarding husbandry, nutrition, diagnostic testing and treatment options. This can prove invaluable for the herp vet who doesn't see many reptiles in daily practice or for one who would just like another opinion on a case.

Need a Herp Vet?

If you are looking for a herp-knowledgeable veterinarian in your area, a good place to start is by checking the list of members on the Association of Reptilian and Amphibian Veterinarian (ARAV) website at www.arav.com. Look for DVMs who appear to maintain actual veterinary offices that you could contact.

Or, check out the state by state ReptileChannel Vet Listings.