

## Anorexic Leopard Gecko

**After an examination by my local vet and a feces culture, I was told my lizards have worms and was prescribed Panacur, which I've administered now for a week without any change in condition. What else can I do?**

*By Margaret A. Wissman, DVM, DABVP*

I recently purchased two leopard geckos (two months ago), one of which is doing fine but unfortunately the other is not. After an examination by my local vet and a feces culture, I was told they have worms and was prescribed Panacur (for pigeons?), which I've administered now for a week without any change in condition.

I accept my leo won't get better over night, but the problem I have is the little ill one just refuses to consume anything but water. I cannot tempt it to eat anything and have been trying tirelessly at night around normal feeding time. I have even tried mashing crickets, mealworms, etc. and administering them through syringe as with medicine. I am now getting extremely frustrated as it seems I am sitting watching my leo fade away to nothing. Can you offer any advice on this situation, as anything would be appreciated?

It is time to get on the phone with your herp vet and discuss what is going on with your little leo. Intestinal parasites, such as worms, can occur in geckos, but most respectable breeders do work with a herp vet to minimize parasite loads. Imported leopard geckos are more likely to harbor intestinal worms and/or protozoal organisms.

Geckos with intestinal parasites can develop secondary bacterial infections in the gastrointestinal tract. In my experience, salmonellosis (infection with the *Salmonella* sp. bacterium) can wreak havoc in the gut of heavily parasitized geckos. Are you sure that your vet performed a fecal culture? A culture identifies potentially dangerous bacteria found in the feces, and offers a list of antibiotics that can be used to treat this particular set of organisms. Perhaps your vet performed a fecal parasite examination? This test examines the feces for the presence of parasite eggs or larvae, and may also identify protozoal organisms (although certain other tests may be more specific for protozoa).

It sounds as if you are concerned because your vet prescribed a pigeon dewormer for your lizards, but you shouldn't be. There are very few medications that are specifically labeled for use in herps, or for birds, for that matter. So, often we exotic animal veterinarians must choose to utilize medications made for humans, dogs, cats or farm animals, and extrapolate the dosages for herps. Panacur, is a fine dewormer that is frequently used in herps. When properly dosed, it is very safe and effective. However, it will not treat bacterial infections.

While I admire your commitment to your little, sick lizard, and the extreme degree of support care that you have been administering (mushed-up insects syringe fed is above and beyond the call of duty, although I admit that I have done the same thing for a very sick marmoset who normally loved mealworms...), your herp vet can recommend alternative diets for supplemental feeding. Also, if your herp vet did perform a bacterial culture and sensitivity, then you need to find out what potentially pathogenic bacteria were recovered from the feces, so that appropriate therapeutics can be prescribed.

Your little lizard may require parenteral fluid therapy (given by injection), supplemental feedings, antibiotics and other support care, as deemed necessary by your herp vet. Now, if the veterinarian who you took your lizard to is not well-versed in herp medicine, he or she may not feel comfortable performing additional diagnostics and treatment. If that is the case, perhaps you should ask your vet for a referral to a more experienced herp vet in your area. However, if you choose to continue with the vet you already have, you can recommend that he utilize the consultation service offered by most large veterinary laboratories. Through this service, herp vets can speak with more experienced herp veterinarians, who can offer advice regarding testing and treating herp cases. This can be a great help to new herp vets or ones dealing with a difficult case, as they can benefit from the experience of herp vets who have a higher caseload of reptiles and amphibians.

Please call your herp vet who did the initial testing and make arrangements to have your little gecko examined and treated. Don't wait, as we don't want it to become more debilitated than it already is.

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### 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) web site at [www.arav.com](http://www.arav.com). Look for DVMs who appear to maintain actual veterinary offices that you could contact.