

Basilisk Belly Irritation

What is the red irritation on my basilisk's belly?

By Margaret A. Wissman, DVM, DABVP

I recently rescued a basilisk from somebody who no longer wanted her...or him...not sure on that account actually. I have been looking up pictures of brown or striped basilisks online, which I assume her to be, and I have noticed a discoloration on my basilisk that I haven't seen on any others in pictures. Her belly from her neck down is red and splotchy. A pinkish discoloration goes right down her underside almost to her tail. Her belly looks irritated. Also she has white spots on her legs and under her chin that I'm worried about.

I feed her crickets dusted with a reptile vitamin supplement. I have never seen her drink, but I don't know if I'm just not looking at the right time.

Any advice you could give me would be much appreciated. I'm going to be building her a nice big enclosure and look forward to having her around to enjoy it.

I'm including some pictures, but my digital camera does not work well.
Chris

I agree that your digital camera is not working very well. The photos were not very helpful, so I am not including them with this column. However, they did help somewhat for my identification.

Your basilisk has some sort of dermatitis, which means inflammation of the skin, but unfortunately, that does not provide a diagnosis as to what is causing the dermatitis. Please find a herp vet in your area and have your new lizard examined as soon as possible, as I am very concerned about it.

Because you rescued this lizard, we don't have any information as to how she was cared for prior to you acquiring her. It is my feeling that it was probably housed in less than optimal conditions. My guess would be that the lizard's environment was too wet and too cool, allowing some sort of organisms to invade the skin, which should be the first barrier against infection.

Infections in the skin can be caused by bacteria, fungi (including yeast) or rarely protozoa or viral agents. A qualified herp vet should be able to perform specific tests in an attempt to diagnose what is causing the skin redness and white spots. Bacterial and fungal cultures of the skin lesions, cytology and skin biopsy may be necessary in order to diagnose what is causing the skin problems. A complete blood count and plasma chemistry panel may also be helpful in figuring out exactly what is going on with your new lizard. These tests are necessary so that your herp vet can ascertain what would be the best course of treatment.

Because we don't know if your lizard has a bacterial or fungal infection (or perhaps a mixed infection of both), it would be bad medicine to just start it on a course of antibiotic without running appropriate diagnostics. Also, it may be advisable to treat it with both systemic medication (via injections or oral meds) and topical treatment.

It is vital that you house your lizard properly and feed it a nutritious, balanced diet. Please take the time to attempt identification of the species of basilisk that you have, so that you can provide it with the best, most suitable habitat. It was very kind of you to rescue this poor lizard, one that obviously requires a lot of medical care, which I hope you are willing to provide. I hope you are able to find a herp vet who will work with you and you can start to treat it once it has been diagnosed.

I have offered this advice before, but it is worth repeating. If you live in an area where there aren't any herp vets with experience, you can suggest that your herp vet make use of the consultation service that most of the larger veterinary diagnostic labs offer. Your vet can call in and request a consultation with an experienced herp veterinarian who can provide information regarding how to best perform the lab tests, how to interpret the test results and what treatment plan would be most effective. This is a free service offered to veterinarians who use the diagnostic lab for testing. This service is for veterinarians, not for owners, to discuss their pets with the herp vets employed by the lab.

This service is invaluable, as no vet out there is truly alone when it comes to dealing with unusual species. Help is just a



phone call away. I wish more vets seeing exotics would take advantage of this service, as by just making a phone call, any vet can tap into the vast experience and knowledge base provided by the consultant. So, if you are in an area where there aren't any experienced herp vets, please suggest that he or she take advantage of the consultation service.

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.