

## Bearded Dragons Sick

### Can beetles that come in with the crickets harm my reptiles?

*By Margaret A. Wissman, DVM, DABVP*

I currently have two bearded dragons, but the problems started when we had three. We had two young beardies in a very large cage, and when they got to just under a year, I believe their cage became infested small black beetles that we discovered came in with the crickets. The beardies became very lethargic and almost stopped eating completely. We got rid of the beetles, but one of the beardies died shortly after.

The remaining youngster is still very lethargic, and she seems to have great difficulty moving her limbs. She doesn't move around much. Her throat is slightly enlarged. She has slight breathing trouble, as if something is stuck in her throat, but I cannot see anything in there.

The larger beardie is in a completely separate cage; his eating has dropped slightly too. I offered him a mouse a couple of days ago, and he refused to eat it, which he has never done before. His throat also looks slightly enlarged. He also has slight breathing difficulty at times. I thought his eating decline may be because he seems to hibernate during the winter. I was wondering if beardies do hibernate. He sleeps for like three or four days straight, then wakes up for a day but doesn't do much. He has done this for the last two years.

I know you will say we should go to a vet, but I live in Minnesota and cannot find a knowledgeable reptile vet. The vet I tried before didn't seem to know what he was talking about and took my advice instead. The lizard died a few days after. The larger beardie is still active and eats pretty well, but not as good as he used to. The smaller one doesn't seem to eat much and doesn't move much. She also doesn't seem to be growing anymore and is nowhere near her full size. Please contact me if you need anymore questions answered, and I hope you can help.

The first thing that I want to tell you is that the little larvae or beetles that are often found coexisting with crickets are usually a type of carrion beetle that consumes the dead crickets, and they are considered harmless. That said, they could carry some potentially dangerous bacteria, but many small lizards often consume them with no adverse affects. So, I don't think that your problems have anything to do with the bugs found with the crickets. I think it was coincidental.

My advice to anyone owning herps is to make sure to have any dead reptiles' necropsied (animal autopsy) and any appropriate tests performed. This is for the safety of the rest of the animals in the collection. Because we don't know why the first beardie died, we are lacking some vital information that could have helped us with the other lizards exhibiting the same signs.

You need to check the archives (of my online column) and make sure that you are maintaining them at the correct temperature gradient (with a focal hot spot of 110 degrees Fahrenheit). Do you have a full-spectrum light providing UVB, and do you change it as recommended by the manufacturer? All of these husbandry questions need to be addressed in order for me to provide you with a more thorough answer. I would suggest that you call some local pet stores and see who they use as a vet to care for their herps.

Once you find a vet who can help you, if he or she doesn't feel confident in their abilities, ask them to please take advantage of the free service offered by most of the large veterinary labs. They can call for a consultation to speak with an experienced herp veterinarian who can walk them through how to approach the diagnostics, offer suggestions on therapeutics and help with monitoring the case. By taking advantage of this service, even an inexperienced vet who is willing to learn, can provide top-notch veterinary care to a species that they are not familiar with. You must find a vet who is willing to help you and is willing to work with a veterinary consultant.

Please find a herp vet today and discuss this information with him or her. No vet should be stuck alone out there without the help of more experienced colleagues. That is why the larger diagnostic labs have provided this free service for their clients. I hope this helps!

Margaret A. Wissman, DVM, DABVP has been an avian/exotic/herp animal veterinarian since 1981. She is a regular contributor to REPTILES magazine.

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.