

Blind and Deaf Savannah Monitor

My lizard won't eat and stumbles around. What's wrong with it?

By Margaret A. Wissman, DVM, DABVP

A few months ago we rescued two savannah monitors. They both seemed to be in very good health — no external parasites, no obvious deformities, etc. We quarantined both animals once we got home. Both of them had insanely large appetites, although we restricted their food intake. At the first feeding, each of them caught and consumed four mice each. As time progressed, we started feeding them turkey and other prepared foods. We made a determined effort to gradually remove them from live mice.

Now we have a problem. The larger of the two, who is a male, has stopped eating. He is showing all the signs of blindness and being deaf. He spends his days aimlessly walking around the enclosure scratching at the substrate, food and water dishes, or anything he comes in contact with. This scratching activity has been going on for a few weeks and does not seem to be letting up. The same goes for the lack of appetite. We even unsuccessfully attempted to feed him live mice again. He has no reaction to audio or visual stimulation. The other monitor is fine. Neither of them has brumated before, so I don't think that is part of the problem. Any ideas?

Once again, I have no husbandry data to assess here. Are you housing them separately or together? What is their daytime temperature range? What about their humidity range? You say that you are feeding turkey, but I am not sure if you mean cooked, raw, just meat, or ground up meat, bones, internal organs, etc.

Their daytime temperature range should be 84 to 88 degrees Fahrenheit and at night, 74 to 78 degrees. For a winter cool-down (brumination), keep them at 66 to 70 degrees. I don't understand why you felt compelled to convert the monitors from mice to turkey and other prepared foods (I wish I knew what these were). I also don't know how long it has been since you changed their diet. So, I don't know if the dietary changes might have something to do with the abnormalities you are seeing in your larger monitor.

Whatever caused the problems, you certainly need to find a herp vet who can help you with your lizard. His condition is very serious, and I am very concerned about him. Please don't hesitate to find a herp vet and make an appointment today!

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. Look for DVMs who appear to maintain actual veterinary offices that you could contact.