

## Chameleon Foot Swollen

**Half of my chameleon's foot is swollen, and sometimes he can't close it all the way. Can you tell me if there is anything wrong with him?**

*By Margaret A. Wissman, DVM, DABVP*

I have a 6- to 7-month-old veiled chameleon. His front right paw looks swollen. Only half of the foot is swollen, but he cannot sometimes close it all the way. I just noticed it yesterday. Can you tell me if there is anything wrong with him?

Foot problems are common in chameleons. Often, this is the consequence of someone forcibly removing a chameleon from a branch, resulting in a toenail being either ripped off or incompletely torn or in some way damaged. Either way, this often causes open wound that is likely to become infected.

An infected digit or foot is very serious and can result in infection spreading throughout the body. Because the claw (toenail) is attached to bone, the injury often leaves the foot open to an infection in the bone, which is always very dangerous.

Since you just noticed this and it appears to be a recent problem, you have a better chance of treating and hopefully curing this by taking the chameleon to a herp vet as soon as possible. Sometimes other things can cause a swollen foot other than having an infected toe from an injury, so it is important to have it examined as soon as you can. I am not trying to blame you for your lizard's problem, so don't feel guilty about perhaps having caused the injury. It happens.

Whatever the cause, the most important thing is to get your chameleon to a herp vet as soon as possible for diagnosis and treatment. This may involve blood tests, bacterial culture, cytology and perhaps even radiographs (X-rays). This can become expensive, but is necessary for your vet to try to figure out what the problem is and how best to treat it. Please do not try any over-the-counter antibiotic treatments as these foot problems are very serious, and time is of the essence when it comes to dealing with these. Chameleons are very prone to stress, so don't handle your chameleon at this time. Make an appointment with a herp vet in your area and let the receptionist know that your chameleon has a potentially serious problem, so you want to have it seen as soon as possible.

When you take your chameleon in, make sure that you have all your husbandry information with you (high and low temperature ranges in the habitat, humidity range, normal diet, any supplements that you offer and the water delivery system). This will help your vet greatly when assessing the problem. It is my opinion that these types of foot problems are often painful, so if your vet doesn't recommend or prescribe pain medication, it is not unreasonable to ask for a prescription to help make your chameleon more comfortable until it is diagnosed and treated. A nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory, such as meloxicam, can be very good for painful herps.

I hope this information helps and I have stressed to you the importance of having your lizard examined as soon as possible. Good luck, and I hope it all turns out alright for you and your chameleon.

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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.