

Lizard Toe and Claw Injury

Should I be worried about my chameleon's abnormal claw?

By Margaret A. Wissman, DVM, DABVP

I just purchased an adult male veiled chameleon, and I noticed that he has a tiny hole on the top of one front toe, and the claw on that toe is abnormal. Otherwise, he looks perfect. Should I be worried about this?

From the description and photos, it appears that this is an old, healed injury. It looks like one scale is missing on the top of the toe, and thus, the little hole there. Likewise, the claw also appears to be deformed as a result of an old injury.

It is unfortunate that many chameleons end up with injured claws, toes and feet as a result of being grabbed and pulled off of a branch that it is holding onto. This can actually tear the claw from the foot, leaving the poor injured creature susceptible to bacterial infections that begin in the toe and can ascend up through the foot. This can result in a joint infection or a bacterial infection that spreads through the bloodstream.

I think your adult chameleon most likely suffered a damaged claw when he was much younger, resulting in the abnormalities that you are seeing today. He is lucky to have apparently completely recovered, left with the missing scale and deformed claw.

I don't see that this will be a problem for him in the future, but if you are at all concerned, you can have blood work performed on him and perhaps radiographs (X-rays) of the foot and leg, to ensure that there are no signs of active infection.

I hope this eases your mind.

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.