

Lizard Eye Problems With Redness and Cloudiness

Could my reptile have cataracts, or is it an infection in the eye?

By Margaret A. Wissman, DVM, DABVP

My female inland bearded dragon has recently been keeping her left eye firmly shut. When I look at the eye, the pupil seems cloudy and there is an unusually large amount of red around the pupil. However, there is no discharge or swelling. We have taken her to the veterinarian, but they are not sure what is wrong. She is eating well, but is having a hard time seeing her food. Is it cataracts, or could she possibly have an internal infection?

Did your vet draw blood to check a complete blood count and chemistry panel? This can often help us to figure out if there is an infection in the body. Also, it is common to have the eye stained with fluorescein to determine if there are any ulcers present on the cornea. You didn't say if that was done either.

That said, veterinarians are trained in general medicine, the different species and also organ systems (musculoskeletal, gastrointestinal, skin, eyes, etc.). So, we do have some training about the eye and its diseases, but there are veterinarians who are also board certified ophthalmologists (eye doctors), with extra training in ophthalmology. Veterinary ophthalmologists have additional training in the eye and the diseases of the eye for all different kinds of species of animal. However, not every veterinary ophthalmologist sees birds, herps and other nontraditional pets.

I would suggest that you ask your herp vet for a recommendation to either a referral veterinary center, a herp vet with perhaps more experience or a veterinary ophthalmologist willing to see herps.

There are a myriad of things that can cause your lizard to have the symptoms that you have described. Because your vet already said that he or she couldn't help you, you should ask for a referral at this time. But, it doesn't sound like a cataract. I hope you can find a vet who is willing to help you with your beardie.

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