

## Lizard Foot Lump

### **My grandson's reptile has a lump on his foot and wants to know what it might be?**

*By Margaret A. Wissman, DVM, DABVP*

I have a grandson in Hawaii who has a chameleon and takes really good care of him. He just emailed me and said that his pet has a lump on his foot and wants to know what it might be. Could you suggest some things? Also is there a reptile vet on Oahu?

The most common reason for swelling on the foot of a chameleon is from pulling it off the cage wire or branches, resulting in damage to the nail. This can result in infection or in severe cases, fracture to the tip of the digit or even avulsion (removal of) the nail entirely. Other reasons for a lump on the foot (and it would have been more helpful if you could have provided me with a more succinct description or even photos of the foot) could include a localized abscess, cellulitis, edema, trauma from a burn or other type of injury, parasitic lesion, gout or retained skin from not shedding completely.

If your grandson's chameleon does have a torn toenail and secondary infection, then it is imperative that you recommend that they find a herp vet in their area who is willing to see this lizard. These infections can be quite serious, especially if the bacteria find their way into the bone. This type of infection is called osteomyelitis, and is usually very dangerous and needs to be treated promptly and aggressively. Usually, radiographs (X-rays) may be needed; blood work is usually drawn to assess organ function; a CBC (complete blood count) is evaluated; and bacterial culture and sensitivity is taken, to determine the species of bacteria present and which antibiotics are best to use. Sometimes, a Gram's stain is also performed to assess the types of organisms in the lump, or cytology may be useful to evaluate of the types of cells found in the mass.

Because there are other types of problems that can result in a lump on the foot of a chameleon, and they require different treatments, you can see that this serious condition requires the expertise of a herp veterinarian who will be best able to assess and treat the lizard.

I am not able to recommend or refer readers to specific herp veterinarians, but you can offer your grandson several ways to find a qualified herp vet. First, you can visit the Association of Reptile and Amphibian Veterinarians (ARAV) website and locate a member herp vet in their area. Your grandson or his parents can call local herp breeders or pet retailers to inquire as to whom they recommend as a herp veterinarian. You can also suggest that they call a few local veterinarians who don't treat herps and ask whom they refer their exotics cases to.

If your grandson and family locate a veterinarian who is willing to see the chameleon, but he or she is either new to herp medicine or does not have much experience, you can recommend that they ask their veterinarian to take advantage of the consultation service offered by most of the larger veterinary diagnostic labs. This is usually a free service offered to veterinarians who use the lab, to allow them to consult with experienced herp vets. This can be very helpful for inexperienced herp vets or those just wishing to get a second opinion on a case.

Please pass this information on to your grandson, so that they can get the ball rolling regarding an appointment with a qualified herp veterinarian. It is very nice that you have taken an interest in your grandson's pet chameleon. Thanks for writing.

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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.