

Knowledgeable Herp Vets

Do reptiles get hemorrhoids?

By Margaret A. Wissman, DVM, DABVP

I took my 3-month-old blue-tongued skink to a herp vet because the lizard's vent was inflamed. When the blood work and the stool sample results came back, the vet said my skink had neither parasites nor infections. He said my skink had the equivalent of a hemorrhoid.

Next, the vet wanted to X-ray my lizard to see if it had any impacted eggs that could be causing it to strain. However, my lizard is only 3 months old, and blue-tongues don't lay eggs anyhow, so I am reluctant to spend even more money to find nothing wrong.

If it is just an inflammation, can I use something like Preparation H on the animal? How else can I treat this problem? Otherwise, this skink is doing just fine, as are his siblings, who I captive bred.

I certainly can understand your frustration regarding your blue-tongued skink. I am concerned with your herp vet's lack of knowledge regarding the genus *Tiliqua*. Any licensed veterinarian can say he or she is a "herp" vet, an "avian" vet or any other kind of vet. At this time, there is no specific examination for reptile specialists, but there are exams for other species. For example, veterinarians can qualify to take the avian examination, and if they pass it, they can say they are avian specialists. Any vet with an interest in reptile medicine can say he or she is a herp vet.

As far as I am concerned, vets working on a species unknown to them should spend some time – preferably before the appointment – learning about that species. That means learning the scientific name, dietary considerations, husbandry information and breeding behavior. I find it appalling that a herp vet seeing your lizard would not know that blue-tongued skinks are live-bearers and that a 3-month-old juvenile would not be pregnant. I am disappointed in my colleague's lack of knowledge.

If your vet knows so little about blue-tongues, are we certain that he knows for sure the blood work was "normal"? Did he have reference ranges (normals) for your skink? Did he confer with a more experienced herp vet, usually available through the larger veterinary diagnostic laboratories?

I think you should find another reputable herp veterinarian for a second opinion. Call a few local vets who don't treat herps, and ask them who they refer herp cases to. You can also call a few pet retailers and ask them who they use or recommend. Before having a second opinion performed, I would ask your first herp vet for a copy of your record, including the blood tests and fecal parasite examination. You are entitled to a copy of your file; however, you might be required to pay for the copies or even an administrative fee. You can also inform your vet that you are seeking a second opinion. Most vets are more than happy to refer a client (and patient) to a larger referral center or experienced herp vet for a second opinion. Ask him who he would refer you to for this service.

There is a problem with your skink's vent, and that requires a diagnosis. I would not recommend a hemorrhoid cream or any other type of over-the-counter medication because you won't know what medication works best. Your best bet would be to have a qualified herp vet examine your skink and evaluate the tests already performed, and then have this vet advise you on treatment, if necessary. Because your husbandry is most likely fine, as you have other healthy juvenile skinks, there may be some sort of developmental or genetic problem. Parasites also could be causing a problem, so it is worth having your skink tested more extensively.

Don't give up on herp veterinary medicine. Have a second opinion performed, and take it from there.

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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.