

Lizard Limb Injury

My herp was bleeding from his right back leg like he scraped it and he has humps in his back kind of like he fell. What should I do?

By Margaret A. Wissman, DVM, DABVP

My brother has a bearded dragon that is a couple months old. Yesterday he was bleeding from his right back leg like he scraped it and he has humps in his back kind of like he fell. I really can't afford to take him to the vet, so what can I do to help him?

Unfortunately, you're not going to like my advice, as I would suggest that you find a qualified herp veterinarian and make an appointment to have the bearded dragon examined and treated as soon as possible.

Here is an overview of the appropriate husbandry for a bearded dragon. Please make sure that your brother's beardie is being maintained and fed properly.

One adult beardie or one breeding pair can be housed in a cage that is 2.5 feet by 3 feet by 3 feet, as a minimum size. However, using a larger habitat is never a bad idea for adults, but babies do well in 10- to 30-gallon aquariums. Sand can be used as a cage substrate in the bottom, and you should provide hiding areas and climbing branches, as well as a focal hot spot that reaches up to 110 degrees Fahrenheit. A temperature of 110 F should be on the surface, not the air temperature under the light. The hot spot can have a nice branch or rock for the beardie to sit on while basking. When a beardie reaches his happy high temperature, he may open his mouth in a gape. This is normal behavior during basking. Keep the hot spot on one side of the enclosure so the other end can be somewhat cooler.

The bearded dragon habitat should have several different thermometers/hygrometers in the enclosure to ensure that it is being maintained at the correct range. The cooler side of the habitat should be around 75-85 F. At night, the cage temperature can drop into the 60s. Under-the-tank heat strips or pads can be utilized to keep the cooler end of the enclosure from becoming too cool.

It is vital that bearded dragons are provided with appropriate ultraviolet light (UVB) by using a bulb designed for herps, making sure that there is no plastic or glass between the light and the lizard, and also ensuring that the bulb is at the correct distance as listed on the label for the bulb. UVB lighting is vital to proper growth and health, so make sure that you replace the bulbs when recommended by the manufacturer. You will still be seeing visible light, so you won't be able to tell when the ultraviolet range begins to dissipate. If possible, a beardie should be allowed to bask in natural sunlight, not filtered through glass or plastic, when outdoor conditions permit (always making sure that the lizard has the means to get out of the sun and into the shade to prevent overheating).

Set all lights on an appliance timer so that the lights are on for 14 hours per day, and the lizard is in darkness for 10 hours per night. They require a regular, uninterrupted night cycle for their health and well-being.

Your brother should provide this desert creature with a bowl of water, or he can spray water on the dragon daily for moisture. They also get some of their daily water requirement met by consuming their veggies. Beardies are omnivores, and will consume live prey (crickets, waxworms, mealworms, moths and bugs caught around the house, as well as vegetables, and it is a good idea to provide a portion of the diet as commercial bearded dragon pellets, which most readily consume.

I don't know if the bumps that you are reporting on the back are a result of the lizard being injured or if he is showing signs of metabolic bone disease (which you can read up on in back issues of REPTILES magazine or in archived questions in my online column). If he has not been receiving an appropriate diet or if he has not been given full-spectrum lighting or natural sunlight, then there is a good chance that he may have developmental abnormalities from not being able to properly utilize calcium. This results in some bones spontaneously fracturing (breaking) or developing fractures from normal movement or weight-bearing.

Any of the problems that I have discussed will require evaluation by a herp veterinarian as well as diagnostics and treatment. Owning a pet requires responsibility and that means that, at times, taking it to a veterinarian for medical care. I hope that you can find a way to procure the money necessary for a veterinary visit. If your family has true financial problems, it might be possible to contact your local humane society, animal services or other animal welfare groups, who might be able to assist you with the veterinary bills. Some vets also can set up payment plans. So, please see what kind of assistance is available to you and your brother, and make an appointment with a qualified herp veterinarian as soon as

possible so that the lizard can receive appropriate care.

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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.