

Lizard with Swollen Leg and Abnormal Spine

My vet mentioned that she saw an abnormality in my reptile's spine in the pelvic region, but dismissed it as an old injury. But now I wonder if it has to do with my herp's leg problem. Can you help?

By Margaret A. Wissman, DVM, DABVP

My iguana is 8 years old and a big male named JenJen. I keep him well-heated, well-fed and make sure he gets his fluids. He developed a swelling in his left foreleg/arm, and I went to the vet. They did an X-ray, a blood panel and a fecal. He was put on Baytril (enrofloxacin), as his white blood cell count was elevated.

The swelling in his arm is a lot better, but now his right leg is swollen and painful. Could it be another infection? The vet mentioned that she saw an abnormality in his spine in the pelvic region, but dismissed it as an old injury. But now I wonder if it has to do with his leg. It seems that the vet does not know what to look for. We are at a loss here. Your thoughts, please.

It's obvious that you really care about your iguana. I am concerned, as you are, about the new swelling that has occurred in the leg. You didn't say how long ago the swelling in the front leg occurred, in relation to this new symptom, so it is difficult for me to judge exactly what is going on currently.

But, with the limited information that I have, I can offer you several options. First, you can ask your vet to refer you to a referral hospital or veterinary university for a second opinion. If she feels that she is unable to help you with JenJen, then she should be able to provide you with a referral to a more experienced herp veterinarian.

Another option would be to send the radiographs off to a board-certified radiologist who has a special interest in herps, for a thorough evaluation. Radiologists charge a fee for this, but it might be worth it to try to get to the bottom of JenJen's problems.

You can also request that your current vet set up a consultation with one of the veterinary consultants at the diagnostic lab that she uses for her herp blood work. Most large diagnostic labs offer a free consultation service for veterinarians who use their lab, to help with cases such as this. This service is vet to vet only, and not set up for pet owners to speak with a consultant regarding their herps. If your current vet is unsure of the diagnosis and would like some help with JenJen, this consultation service could be just the ticket!

Sometimes it really helps to have another, perhaps more experienced herp vet, help out with a difficult case. For example, I work for Antech Diagnostic Labs eight hours a day, doing phone consultations with vets asking for help with strange and unusual cases, or for vets who just want to get another opinion from another vet who might have more experience with a particular species. There are vets whom I speak with every week, just because they feel better about running their exotics cases by a colleague, one with perhaps more experience than they have. It is not shameful or embarrassing (or it shouldn't be) for a veterinarian to call and request a consult! Actually, I am always impressed when a vet feels that he or she could use some help with a case or just wants another opinion on a case. Sharing knowledge with colleagues through a consultation service is a very good thing!

I wish that I could tell you what is going on with your iguana, but I don't really have enough information to even venture a guess. So, please talk over your options with your current veterinarian and come up with a plan for attempting to figure out why a second limb has swollen at this time. I suspect that your lizard may be in some pain, so at least, you can ask your vet to prescribe something for pain in the way of a nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory, such as meloxicam. Perhaps also have a look through the archives of my column and also check back issues of REPTILES magazine, to go over the guidelines for iguana husbandry and diet, to make sure that you are within the recommended parameters. If you seek a second opinion or follow up with your current vet, be sure to inform everyone about your iguana's habitat temperature and humidity ranges, and the food items that JenJen consumes regularly, so that the husbandry can be evaluated by professionals.

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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.