

## Cold, Lethargic Chinese Water Dragon

### Can you rehabilitate a sick Chinese water dragon?

*By Margaret A. Wissman, DVM, DABVP*

I work for a junk removal company and the other day we got a job cleaning a house where the tenants had been evicted. Apparently, the tenants left behind a Chinese water dragon.

When I found him, he was lying in ice-cold water and was barely moving. I picked him up and put him on a log underneath the heat lamp and he slowly became more active. I couldn't just leave him there so I brought him home and put him in a 50-gallon tank where he has more than enough room to move around.

He seems to be very inactive. He sits in one spot and rarely moves around. I'm hoping he isn't sick and if he is I would like to know what would be the best treatment for him. He also seems to have a shedding problem because there are flakes of hard dried skin on his back and tail. Any help would be great. Thanks in advance.

Aaron

It is so good of you to rescue and adopt this lizard that has been so mistreated and neglected.

You are going to require the assistance of a qualified herp vet as soon as possible to try to save him. I think that we can assume that he was left without heat and food for quite some time, and that is all very bad for his immune system. Water dragons need lots of fresh, warm water for swimming and exercise (and drinking) and they require adequate heat for proper digestion of food and for the immune system to function properly. While you can provide him with TLC and an appropriate environment and habitat, I think he is going to require more than you can give him at this time.

Because he was kept in such abysmal conditions for an unknown length of time, and you're telling me that he hardly ever moves around, it seems that he is already quite ill.

I won't sugarcoat this for you...your dragon may be beyond saving, but I always say that where there is life, there is hope. So, please try to find a qualified herp vet in your area who is willing to work with you to try to save him. He probably needs blood tests, deworming, fluid therapy, antibiotics (and maybe even antifungal medicine) as well as hospitalization initially to try to get him on the road to recovery. He may initially need to be fed through a feeding tube, as well. He might have a skin infection, as you have described incomplete shedding, called dysecdysis. Considering his condition when you found him, I'm not surprised that he has skin problems.

I hope that you are able to make an appointment with a herp vet as soon as possible. This is going to require a financial commitment on your part, as well as extra time to care for and treat him once he is released from the veterinary hospital. If you don't think that you can handle all of these commitments, then perhaps you can look into turning him over to a herp rescue group or animal shelter that is equipped to care for reptiles. That is always an option if you feel that you have gotten in over your head with this little guy.

#### 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) website at [www.arav.com](http://www.arav.com). Look for DVMs who appear to maintain actual veterinary offices that you could contact. Or, check out the state by state ReptileChannel Vet Listings.