

## Reptile Cloudy Eyes

### Why are my lizard's eyes cloudy and is this reversible?

*By Margaret A. Wissman, DVM, DABVP*

My adult male water dragon's eyes started getting cloudy at the bottom. At the same time, he quit eating. Now he keeps his eyes closed all the time. He only opens them when I pick him up and move him. Now, a week later, his eyes are all the way cloudy.

He seems to be very healthy. He keeps his outstanding bright colors. To get him to eat, I touch the food item to his mouth, and he takes it ravenously. He is misted with water daily, and he drinks every few days. He defecates normally. He is housed outside in a naturalistic setting; the cage is 7 feet long, half in the sun, half shade; and the temperature gradient is 95 to 70 degrees Fahrenheit. He is brought indoors at night. Do you know why his eyes got cloudy and if it's reversible? Thank you for any help you can offer.

I am lacking one pertinent piece of information from you. Do you think that the cloudiness is on the outer surface of the eyes (which is the cornea), or does it appear that the cloudiness is behind the iris (you would see this through the pupil)? The only other possibility is that the third eyelid (also called membrana nictitans) is remaining covering the eyes, and not retracting as usually occurs when the eyes open.

There are several different possibilities depending on where the cloudiness is occurring. If the cloudiness is on the cornea, this could mean that your water dragon has a bacterial conjunctivitis. Foreign bodies, trauma, nutritional deficiencies or excesses, corneal ulcers or parasites can also result in corneal clouding.

Corneal opacities involving cholesterol deposits have been diagnosed in chelonians (turtles and tortoises). In other cases, post-hibernation, some reptiles will show corneal opacities, as well. Obviously, that is not the case with your lizard.

You didn't say if your water dragon has a permanent area for swimming, and I hope it does, as misting it daily isn't enough. They love to swim and it is vital to their good health. I don't know if drying out the corneas could be a potential problem.

If the cloudiness is behind the iris (the colored portion of the eye), behind the pupil, then chances are that your dragon could be suffering from cataracts. The cloudiness is usually not homogeneous in appearance. Cataracts are seen with some frequency in herps, and may occur as juvenile cataracts or senile cataracts in older lizards.

Another condition that occurs behind the iris is called hypopyon. This means that there is pus behind the iris in the anterior chamber of the eye. This can occur with uveitis. Bacterial infections, such as those causing bacterial pneumonia, may result in hypopyon.

As you can see, any of these conditions causing clouding of the eyes can be quite serious and require immediate veterinary care. You also didn't tell me about your dragon's diet, so I cannot evaluate it to ensure that it is balanced and correct for the species. So, we have a lot of unanswered questions, and these matters are best discussed with your herp vet when you take your dragon in to have its eyes examined. It is a good thing that its color is still bright, and it will eat when you present it with food, but obviously, the sooner you can have it examined and treated, the better. Your water dragon may be permanently blind, or it might be that its condition is reversible. But, you won't know until you get it checked out and tested.

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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.