

## Reptile Shedding Problems

### What do you do when your reptile doesn't fully shed or has shedding problems?

*By Margaret A. Wissman, DVM, DABVP*

1. I have an eastern kingsnake that has problems shedding. He sheds till he gets to his cloaca and then it just bunches up. I have tried soaking him, and that didn't work. Then I tried some a shedding product, rubbed it in and let him run through my hands. That seemed to work a little, and now he is about to shed again. I really don't want pull the skin off because that would probably be very uncomfortable for him. What should I try?
2. My uromastix has a shedding problem on his tail. I tried everything from soaking it in warm water to using a soft bristle brush. I used the shedding product on him, and nothing worked. Can you help?

You both wrote in about problems with reptiles shedding. This is technically called dysecdysis. If a herp has trouble shedding, it may get hung up on an area of scarred skin or recently injured skin. So, in both of these cases, I am suspicious of some sort of trauma or injury to the skin in the area where the skin is stuck. For both of you, my question would be if the shedding problems are new or if your reptiles have always had a problem with skin not shedding from this area. This would help me in determining why the skin is not shedding off normally.

While this is not a medical emergency, if there is no obvious reason why these herps cannot shed properly, then you should consider having them evaluated by a herp vet. In the meantime, you should examine them closely for any signs of external parasites such as mites or any scars or skin lesions that could explain the dysecdysis.

I would not recommend pulling the skin off as this can damage the delicate underlying tissue that is not ready to stand up to the rigors of covering and protecting the body. When I have a pet herp with dysecdysis, I up the humidity in the habitat and soak it for 15 minutes twice daily in warm water. In tough cases, I have used a lanolin skin lotion to soften up the skin and then used cotton-tipped applicators moistened with lotion to gently massage the area to loosen the skin. I have also used aloe directly from the plant to soften the skin in the same manner. However, you should not attempt to do this unless you feel very comfortable with the procedure. Instead, you might want to have your herp vet show you methods of loosening the retained skin, especially the first time. Also, this would allow the herp vet to examine the snake or lizard in order to ascertain why dysecdysis is occurring.

When in doubt, do not attempt to remove retained skin yourself. Have your vet examine your herp, and take it from there.

Margaret A. Wissman, DVM, DABVP has been an avian/exotic/herp animal veterinarian since 1981. She is a regular contributor to REPTILES magazine.

### 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.