

Tortoise With Possible Prolapse

How do you treat a turtle or tortoise prolapse?

By Margaret A. Wissman, DVM, DABVP

I have a 6 to 8-year-old sulcata tortoise. Whenever I pick him up, or while he is in the water, and sometimes just while walking, what I think is his penis emerges. Is this a defense, an intestinal prolapse or elapsing penis? Can you help?

If your tortoise is prolapsing his penis, you should have him evaluated by a herp veterinarian, as this is not normal and can be a sign of several medical problems. This may occur as a result of infection, forced separation during copulation, constipation problems or neurological problems.

First, it should be ascertained as to what exactly is prolapsing. The urinary bladder may prolapse, the colon may prolapse or the penis may prolapse (in females, the shell gland may also prolapse). It sounds as if you think it is the penis that is prolapsing, and if it is, it will appear as a solid tissue mass that protrudes from the vent. If this is a male that is actively trying to copulate with a female or females, there may have been some damage to the organ, the vent or the nerves and muscles that cause retraction of the organ.

It sounds as if a trip to your herp veterinarian is in order, to try to figure out why he is prolapsing this copulatory organ (if it is truly the penis). This is not a normal situation, and it deserves medical attention to prevent possible damage to the organ. If possible, bring in a fresh fecal specimen in to your vet so that it can be examined for intestinal parasites, to try to determine if any parasite problems may be contributing to the prolapse.

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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.