

Blind Snake

Could this be reptile inclusion body disease?

By Margaret A. Wissman, DVM, DABVP

I have purchased a ball python from a pet store about 5 months ago. I was worried that it could have inclusion body disease. I was looking at all the symptoms and the only one I noticed was the heightened reflex responses. When I touch his head, he will jerk it away, and my other ball python that I recently bought about 1 month ago will slither up to him, and he would do the same: hiss and jerk away. So far he's fine and I don't think that anything is wrong. Could he just be blind, and that's why he overreacts?

Although ball pythons are generally recognized to be gentle, even-tempered snakes, each snake is an individual, and that means some will be shy, most will appear docile and some can even be aggressive.

You should have your snake evaluated by a qualified herp veterinarian since you are concerned that he might have vision problems. The most common reason for impaired vision is due to retained eye caps, and that is something your herp vet can easily identify if it's present. So, for peace of mind, please consider having a veterinarian examine your snake, perform any necessary tests and treat him, if necessary.

What you are describing does not sound like classic inclusion body disease (IBD); however, IBD does cause neurological signs as well as respiratory problems in some cases.

Because you have another snake (and I don't recommend you house them together), it is doubly important that you have your ball python examined. IBD is caused by a virus and is therefore contagious to your other snake.

In the future, I would recommend that if you acquire any new snakes (or other herps, for that matter), you should learn about quarantine procedures and quarantine any new acquisitions -- as directed by your herp vet -- prior to introducing them to any established reptiles. This will minimize the risk of transmission of any infectious diseases, including viruses, bacteria, protozoa or some pathogenic fungi.

I hope it turns out that your snake is just shy and afraid of contact, but you won't know for sure until you have him checked out by a herp vet.

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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.