

The Herp Gazette

HOUSE OF REPTILES

11507 S.W. Pacific Highway
Tigard, Oregon

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Herping in Mexico

Although Tim and his wife, Shawn, were originally headed to Puerto Vallarta and north from there, Hurricane Rick had other ideas. Plans were changed and the two ended up in the Yucatan Peninsula – from Cancun to Tulum, Coba, Rio Lagartos and Chichen Itza. It was a fun trip, traveling over 800 miles in 10 days. There were lots of animals to see, and plenty of herps - Mexico has more species of reptiles than any country in the world! The herps that were identified on the trip included: American crocodiles, Morelet’s crocodiles, an indigo snake, green iguanas, black iguanas,

brown basilisks, a rainbow ameiva, house geckos, green anoles, brown anoles, silky anoles, sliders, green sea turtle babies (we watched them

being released) and several red-rump tarantulas. The trip was so much fun, we’re planning another trip to the original destination for 2010.



Staff Updates:

Since our last newsletter, the staff at **House of Reptiles** continue to be busy...

Marshall has been promoted to Assistant Manager because of his seniority at the store and his work ethic. He is working hard to get a handle on that position. Although he had gotten rid of all his tarantulas when he moved to his new apartment earlier this year, rumor has it that he’s begun collecting them again!

Paul has been promoted to Lead Animal Care Specialist because of his expertise with these kinds of animals and his seniority at the store.

He’s been having fun arranging and rearranging his herp room in his new house.

Kim is getting an opportunity to do more work with horses and she’s loving it. She and daughter, Morgan, provide horse care for Forward Stride, an organization that provides physical therapy for people with a variety of disabilities.

Liz is continuing her college work at George Fox and working part-time at the store. She’s begun creating her own little menagerie at her house which currently includes a

box turtle, a leopard gecko, two love birds, two cats and a dog.

Tim and wife, Shawn, went to Mexico as was discussed in the article on the front page. They are planning a trip to San Diego in March to visit some companies that the store has done business with and to see what is up at some herp stores in southern California.

Current volunteers include Hadley Rentz, Cara Sandels, John Czarnecki, Sydney Rubbert, Alena Zinck and Rebecca King.

Quarterly Care Sheet: Red-foot Tortoise (*Geochelone carbonaria*)



“There is also a dwarf variation called a “Cherry-Head” that only attains a length of 10 to 12 inches as an adult.”

SPECIES: RED-FOOT TORTOISE (*Geochelone carbonaria*). Other names include: Red-Footed Tortoise.

GENERAL DESCRIPTION: The Red-Foot Tortoise is native to Central and South America, from Panama and Columbia to Paraguay and Brazil. They can be found in a variety of habitats, including tropical rainforests and broken woodlands. These tortoises grow to around 14 inches in length, with occasional specimens reaching up to 16 inches. There is also a dwarf variation called a “Cherry-Head” that only attains a length of 10 to 12 inches as an adult. Male Red-Foot Tortoises tend to have a concave plastron (bottom shell) and a longer tail than do the females, and males are larger than females of the same age. These tortoises have a black carapace (top shell) with a yellow spot in the center of each scute. The plastron is also yellow and there are red scales on the head and legs, which is where these tortoises get their common name. While they reach sexual maturity at around 10 years of age, they aren’t considered full grown until they are 20 to 30 years old.

CAPTIVE CARE: Indoor enclosures for Red-Foot Tortoises should provide about two square feet of space per inch of shell length. Large Rubbermaid containers and homemade melamine enclosures are sometimes the best options for providing adequate space and ventilation for juveniles and subadults indoors. Outdoor housing for full-grown adults is probably best. Create the land area in the enclosure by using three to four inches of Jungle Mix or a premium quality plain, sterile potting soil (that does not contain perlite) - that much substrate allows the tortoises to burrow, which is something they frequently do in the wild. Cypress mulch can be added to the substrate to help increase the water retention - increased humidity levels are important in the care of these tortoises. A water area must be provided by placing a dish or pan in the enclosure that is large enough for the turtle to lie in and shallow enough for it to easily climb in and out of. The temperatures need to be 85 to 90 F on the warm end and 70 to 75 F (room temperature) on the cool end. The basking area can be provided using an overhead heat source such as a ceramic heater, or red or blue heat lamps. The heat source(s) should be left on 24 hours per day. Additionally, Red-Footed Tortoises require full-spectrum lighting which helps them metabolize vitamin D3. Full-spectrum bulbs, which emit ultraviolet-B (UV-B) light, come in incandescent and fluorescent options and they should only be left on for 12 to 14 hours per day. (NOTE: UV-B bulbs should be replaced every six months.) Some keepers prefer to combine heat and UV-B light in the same bulb by using one of the commercially available mercury vapor bulbs. Young tortoises should be fed daily and adults can be fed every other day. Their diet should consist primarily of greens (collard greens, mustard greens, dandelion leaves, clover, endive, romaine lettuce, green and red leaf lettuce, kale, cactus pods), fruits (strawberries, raspberries, cranberries, blackberries, prickly pear, mango, papaya, cherries, plums and cantaloupe - with the rind), vegetables (grated carrots, corn, green beans, peas, pumpkin, winter squash, zucchini) and flowers (dandelion flowers, nasturtium, hibiscus). Occasionally (once every week or two) they can also be fed animal protein sources such as baked chicken, earthworms, mealworms, crickets or even low-fat dog food. There are also commercially produced foods that can be used to supplement feedings, though it should not be the sole source of food. Dust all foods with a high quality vitamin/mineral supplement as directed by the manufacturer (we recommend Miner-All).

ADDITIONAL NOTES: Under optimal conditions, Red-Foot Tortoises live 40 to 50 years in captivity.

Native Herp Spotlight: Western Painted Turtle (*Chrysemys picta brellii*)

There are four species of painted turtle in the United States, but only the Western Painted Turtle is found in the Pacific Northwest. This chelonian is largely aquatic, preferring to live in and around marshes, slow rivers, ponds and lakes. It is a beautiful turtle – the carapace (top shell) is usually uniformly colored in olive green. The neck and legs have thin yellow stripes. The plastron (bottom shell) is colored predominantly in bright red. Because of their vivid plastral coloration, the Western Painted Turtle looks remarkably different than our other native turtle, the Western Pond Turtle.

Western Painted Turtles can be found throughout much of the Columbia River Gorge and in the

Willamette Valley south to near Salem. In the waterways that they inhabit, they are commonly seen basking on logs, branches or aquatic vegetation. They quickly dive into the water when humans approach.

Western Painted Turtles reach carapace lengths of

up to nine inches. Males are usually smaller than females. Males can be distinguished from females by their concave plastron and longer front claws.

Favorite foods include crayfish, earthworms, small fish, insects, tadpoles, carrion and the many aquatic plants that make up

the majority of its diet. Females can lay four to 20 eggs per clutch, once each year.



“Pet” Peeves: Commercial Packaging

Over the years our customers have brought us many different problems to help them solve. Most are not new, although a few are quite unique and keep it interesting and challenging for us. In attempting to help solve the problems our customers bring us, we always need to ask folks questions about what they are using in their setups and, sometimes, why they are using that particular product. In response to those questions, we often hear something like, “I thought it would be okay because it said so on the package.” Uh oh!

We hate to burst your bubble, but many manufacturers will put just about anything on

their packages to get you to buy their products. For instance, the packaging on one brand of ground English walnut shells states that it is “ideal for bearded dragons, monitors, skinks, uromastix” – but walnut shells have been implicated in more gut impactions than any other substrate we know of.

The packaging for another product, a compact fluorescent UVB bulb, describes it as a “Self ballasted compact fluorescent lamp for all desert and basking reptiles” – but compact fluorescent bulbs emit less UVB than do any of the three options for UVB bulbs and they are the LEAST appropriate UVB bulb for a desert reptile.

Manufacturers make lots of claims on the packaging of herp foods, but there is precious little science regarding the nutritional needs of reptiles and amphibians in captivity. Much of what is currently believed to be true regarding reptile diets comes from the experience of herpetoculturists, not science. Many commercially made foods state that they are “a complete diet” for the species being marketed to, but what a complete diet consists of is still not known with any certainty.

Photographs are also employed to indicate or imply a connection

between the product and its potential use. Seeing a picture of a particular species on the package of a product implies that it is appropriate for that species – an implication that is not always true.

The guiding principle should probably always be “Buyer beware!” Especially when it comes to caring for live animals, it really does pay off to understand what you’re doing, what products you’re using and why. It also pays off to trust who you get your information from.

Ask The Vet

This is a new feature to our newsletter, where we ask one of our favorite veterinarians to answer a question about herp-related illnesses, their causes and/or treatments.

This question was posed to Dr. Gabriella Flacke at the Murrayhill Veterinary Hospital: What are some of the primary conditions that you see in the reptiles you treat and what are the contributing factors of which pet owners should be aware? Dr. Flacke's answer: "The majority of sick reptiles I see at the veterinary hospital are ill due to inappropriate husbandry issues. Unlike most of the mammals kept as pets, we overall know very little about the husbandry requirements of most reptile species. Dogs and cats have been domesticated for thousands of years, and there is a cornucopia of published research identifying their dietary and physiological needs. Even small mammals, such as ferrets, rabbits, hamsters, guinea pigs, etc., are much better understood as far as their husbandry needs than is the average reptile.

There are literally hundreds upon hundreds of species of reptiles kept as pets, and all of them are very unique and different. Just because it's a chameleon does not mean that a veiled, a Jackson's, and a Parson's all have the same biology, physiology or husbandry requirements. A snake is a snake is not a snake – how can one claim that the needs of a corn snake, a ball python, and a

kingsnake are all the same? A Greek tortoise and a box turtle, a leopard tortoise and a red-eared slider are all chelonians, but they are about as different from each other as an elephant and a ferret.

We try our best to mimic a reptile's natural environmental conditions when deciding on "appropriate" husbandry in captivity. Humidity, temperature and temperature range, light cycle, diet, and UVA/UVB requirements are the most important husbandry variables that we try to match as closely as possible to that of the reptile's 'wild' counterpart. However, the truth is that the normal or 'wild' counterparts are often not well researched or understood for many species. And even when there is data and information regarding these variable, often there is some small difference that we cannot mimic in captivity (e.g., a commensal parasite that helps the animal with normal digestive processes and exist in the natural habitat) and animals will still get sick despite our best efforts to do everything right.

That said, there is a lot of information we do have about reptile husbandry that helps us offer these unique creatures a fairly normal life in captivity. Some of the most common disease processes seen in captivity s the result of husbandry issues include the following:

1. Nutritional secondary hyperparathyroidism, more commonly known as metabolic bone disease, is an imbalance of the minerals calcium and phosphorus resulting from either inadequate dietary intake of calcium or lack of appropriate UVA/UVB light,

which is essential in calcium and Vitamin D metabolism. If chronic, this disease leads to thin bone structure, curvature of bones, 'rubbery' bones and pathological features. This disease is easily prevented in most reptiles by providing adequate levels of calcium supplementation and (when appropriate to the species) a good quality source of UVA/UVB.

2. Dysecdysis, or lack of appropriate skin shedding, can result from many complex factors, but is usually a result of a humidity problem (not enough of it). Retained skin sheds, especially on the tail tip and digits, can cause a pressure-necrosis type injury where normal blood flow is impeded and the tissue dies – like putting a tight rubber band on your finger and leaving it there. Retained spectacle in snakes can cause them to stop eating and can damage the new spectacle and potentially the eye itself. Providing a reptile with short lukewarm water soaks and a rough surface for rubbing (e.g., a

shedding rock) can help reduce the incidence of dysecdysis.

3. Respiratory infections, especially in snakes, are often the result of low ambient environmental temperature. All reptiles are dependent on environmental temperature for appropriate physiological function, everything ranging from digestion to metabolism to reproduction to immune system function. Thus, when the temperature drops even a few degrees below the low end of the optimum temperature range for a species, even if it's only for a short period of time, the reptile becomes much more susceptible to secondary infections. The most common secondary infections affect the respiratory system, but affect the respiratory system, but infections of the skin, bone and internal organs can occur as well.



Dr. Gabriella Flacke with Pago the Argentine tegu at [House of Reptiles](#).

House of Reptiles Store News

If you haven't heard, we now have THREE small alligators in the store. The first ("Toad") was left in a cardboard box in front of a pet store in The Dalles. We've had him since September 2008. The second ("D.B. Cooper") was the infamous gator that eluded the authorities for several days before it was captured in Salmon Creek in Vancouver, WA. We got that one in September 2009. That

same month a third one was brought in by someone who lived in Portland and knew that he wasn't supposed to have it within the city limits. The big tub is VERY full at this point. We even got roped into having a crate built and shipping a FOURTH gator to a new home in Texas. This gator belonged to someone who lived in southern Oregon and who was being evicted and could no longer care for it.

Rumor has it that another gator is on its way to us. This one was recently found in a dumpster in Battleground, Washington.

One of our newest residents is "Buster" the 4.5 foot long black-throated monitor. He was rescued from the Southwest Washington Humane Society and he's a real kick. He appears to be a good condition,

which is unusual in the case of a rescued monitor lizard.

Continued thanks to Natasha and Gabe Buel, and Chris Karr for their generous donations of vegetables, fruits, dandelion greens and edible flowers.

Customer & Pet Profile – Amber Rush and Mark Escobar

Our customer and pet profile for this quarter is the duo of Amber and Mark. Having been together for three years, they share a love of reptiles. Mark got his first reptiles, an Asian water dragon and a bearded dragon, before the two met. Since Amber had always wanted to be a herpetologist,

Mark's critters suited her fine. Once the two decided to live together, the mini-zoo really took off. Over the next two years, they acquired an Australian water dragon, a green basilisk, a Berber skink, a savannah monitor, a Vietnamese mossy frog and a Pacific tree frog.

Amber and Mark prefer their reptiles over furry pets because they are beautiful, fascinating animals that don't shed. If it was up to Amber they'd also have some snakes, but rumor has it that Mark isn't crazy about snakes.



Amber and her green basilisk.

Know Your Herp Laws

We are often asked about the laws in our area that affect reptile and amphibian ownership. There are different federal, state, county and city laws that may apply. Federal laws prohibit keeping any animals that are protected by the Endangered Species Act. Those laws and related topics can be found at: <http://www.fws.gov/endangered/>.

It is also a violation of federal law to sell any turtle that is less than four inches long, unless it is sold for scientific or educational purposes only. The list of animals that are

prohibited, non-controlled, controlled, and protected at the state level in Oregon can be found at: <http://www.dfw.state.or.us/OARs/56.pdf>.

There's another set of Oregon laws pertaining to dangerous and exotic animals that, as of January 2010, includes the limitation of crocodylians. That statute can be found at: http://www.oregon.gov/ODA/pub_regs_animals.shtml#Exotic_animal_permit.

Each county and city can also have its own regulations and statutes. For instance, Multnomah County's rules are in their

"Dangerous or Exotic Animal" section and those rules prohibit any venomous or poisonous reptile, as well as any reptile of the order Crocodylia (crocodiles, alligators and caimans), or any snake of the family Pythonidae or Boinae capable of obtaining eight feet or more

in length. Those rules can be found at: <http://www.co.multnomah.or.us/dbcs/pets/guide.shtml>.

Portland's rules mirror Multnomah County's rules.



House of Reptiles

Purpose Statement:

To offer healthy animals, quality products, accurate information and on-going customer support in a friendly, clean environment.

We strive to be the Best in the Northwest!

ADDRESS:

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(503) 722-1992

STORE HOURS:

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10am to 7pm
Saturday:
10am to 6pm
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We're on the Web!

See us at:

www.house-of-reptiles.com

Product Spotlight: Rheostats and Thermostats

Although these are not new products, they are very useful in the precise management of basking temperatures in reptile enclosures.

A rheostat is a type of "potentiometer" that controls the voltage flow from one place to another (e.g., the volume control on a stereo, the dimmer

switch for a light, etc.). In this case, the rheostat allows you to manually adjust and control the amount of heat that is generated by the heating device that is plugged into it.

A thermostat is, essentially, the same thing except that it performs the same function automatically. A probe is placed in a specific area in the cage and the thermostat

is dialed to a specific temperature. The thermostat automatically adjusts the heat, in one of a couple ways, to keep the amount of heat in the area of the probe within the range that has been pre-determined.

Both these devices can be very handy in helping to maintain consistent temperatures in cage basking areas.

Marshall's Herp Challenge for the Quarter

Last quarter we asked if you could tell us the name of the large, toxin-containing gland found just behind the eyes on many toads, frogs and some salamanders. The answer could actually be found in an article in that particular newsletter. That gland is called the "parotoid" (puh-ROH-toid) gland, which means "near the ear".

This month our herp challenge has to do with the Western Pond Turtle (*Actinemys marmorata*). The Western Pond Turtle generally only grows to around six to eight inches in length and is the sole member of its genus. Its diet consists of a wide range of animal and plant matter. Its prey includes fish, frogs, insects and other invertebrates, as well as carrion when available.

Preferred plant matter includes algae, lily pads, and cattail roots. The Western Pond Turtle may still be found in four western states. It formerly ranged into Canada but was considered extinct there as of May 2002. Your challenge is: Which U.S. state is the Western Pond Turtle currently listed as "endangered"? Good luck!

About Our Organization...

House of Reptiles is owned and operated by Tim Criswell, who has over 22 years of adult experience in keeping and

breeding reptiles and amphibians. Assisting Tim are his wife, Shawn, employees Marshall Brooks, Paul Hoffman,

Kim Hamblin and Liz Otis, and a few volunteers who are mentioned above in the "Meet The Staff" section.

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