



Water Dragons

www.exoticpetvet.co.uk

Water dragons naturally live in tropical rainforest habitat where they can often be seen basking on branches by water. The most commonly kept water dragon is the Chinese, Thai or Green Water dragon (*Physignathus cocincinus*). Other closely related lizards include the Australian or Eastern water dragon (*P. lesueurii*), and the Southeast Asian Water dragon (*P. temporalis*). Similar to some other lizards, it can shed its tail as a defence mechanism (autotomy), so care should be taken when handling.

Scientific Classification

Water dragons belong to the Order Squamata, Suborder Sauria/Lacertilia, Family Agamidae, Genus Physignathus.

General care

A wooden/chipboard vivarium with sliding glass doors makes the most appropriate setup for dragons, being easy to clean, insulate and keep secure. The minimum recommended size for an adult dragon would be 1.2m long x 60cm deep x 1.2m high, but obviously these lizards will enjoy as large an enclosure as it is practical to keep. These lizards can be kept alone or preferably in groups of one male and several females, but owners should be aware that two males will often fight.

Inside the vivarium, a hiding place should be provided which may be half a log, a purpose built cave or even just an empty box with a hole cut in the side. Branches of different lengths and diameter should also be placed around the vivarium to allow dragons to climb up and bask as they would in the wild. As their name would imply, water is another essential requirement for these dragons, and there should be enough available for them to submerge and swim comfortably.

Hygiene

A vivarium should be "spot-cleaned" daily to remove any droppings, dead insects or uneaten greens. Once a week, the whole vivarium can be cleaned with a disinfectant suitable for reptiles (further details of suitable disinfectants can be obtained from your vet). It is important to always wash your hands thoroughly after handling reptiles as they can carry Salmonella.

Substrate

It is important to use a substrate that is easy to keep clean and replace, and is not going to cause a problem if accidentally eaten. Newspaper therefore makes the ideal substrate, but another alternative, more suitable for humid conditions would be cocoa fibre.

Temperature

Reptiles are not capable of regulating their own temperature so it is very important to keep their environment at an appropriate temperature at all times. A temperature gradient should therefore be provided, giving your reptile a hot end where they can bask and a cooler end to which they can retreat.

There are several types of heat sources available for vivariums including ceramic heaters (infra red light bulbs), tube heaters, reflector bulbs (incandescent spot lights) and heat mats. Incandescent spot lights will provide the ideal basking spot for your dragon, but should not be used as the sole heating source whereas heat mats are more useful in providing a background heat for the whole vivarium.

It is important whichever form of heating is chosen, to always use some form of thermostat so that temperature can be accurately controlled. Heat sources should also be protected with a wire mesh guard or similar safety device if they are within a dragon's reach.



Barrier Animal Care Clinic LLP

Registered in England Partnership No. OC303416

Members: B Spolander BVSc MRCVS & S Rennie BA VetMB MRCVS
Tel: 020 8293 6580 Fax: 020 8858 5609 Email: wellpetclinic@btconnect.com

www.wellpetclinic.co.uk
VAT Reg: 691 3368 16





The ideal temperature range at which to keep a water dragon would be **25-29°C (77-84°F)** in the daytime, with a basking spot of **32-35°C (89-95°F)**, and temperatures falling no lower than **21°C (69°F)** at night.

Humidity

This should ideally be measured with a hygrometer and kept fairly high (80-90%) for dragons that are used to a rainforest environment. This humidity can be achieved by frequent misting of the vivarium with water.

Lighting

Dragons need to have access to both UVA and UVB rays, which many supposedly “full spectrum” reptile bulbs do not supply, so it is important to check this before purchasing a bulb. UVB rays are very important to allow a reptile to produce Vitamin D, which is essential for the absorption and use of calcium. Without this lizards are at risk of developing Metabolic Bone Disease, which can often be fatal.

Various different types of UVB lights are available. It is important to check the percentage of UV supplied by the bulb. Lizards such as dragons require at least 5% UV output. UV lights should be left on for 10-14 hours daily and replaced every 6 months.

Diet

Water dragons eat some plants but are mainly insectivores in the wild. Suggested insects and plants are listed on the attached diet sheet. Fresh food and water should be supplied once daily. It is important that the appropriate sized insects are fed, as dragons are prone to having problems with constipation. A general guideline is that the insect should never be bigger than the distance between your reptile's eyes.

Lifespan

Water dragons generally live between 10-15 years

Signs of Health

A healthy dragon will be bright and alert with clear open eyes and nostrils and a clean vent. Skin should be undamaged with no sign of parasites, and shedding should occur regularly. Your dragon should also be keen to eat, and pass faeces at least every 2-3 days. It is important to become familiar with your dragon's normal appearance, movement and behaviour, in order that signs of illness can be noticed at an early stage.

It is advisable to take your dragon to a vet who routinely deals with reptiles for a general health check and faecal sample at least once a year.

Signs of Illness

Reptiles will often not show obvious signs of illness until they are very sick, but you should look out for any changes in appetite or faeces passed, as well as changes in weight, behaviour, skin colouration or breathing. Other signs of illness include discharges from the eyes, nose or mouth or problems with shedding.

If you have any concerns, do not hesitate to contact a reptile vet as soon as possible.

This caresheet is only intended as a general guideline, so please ask for further information.

Written and researched by Joanna Hedley BVM&S MRCVS



Barrier Animal Care Clinic LLP
Registered in England Partnership No. OC303416
Members: B Spolander BVSc MRCVS & S Rennie BA VetMB MRCVS
Tel: 020 8293 6580 Fax: 020 8858 5609 Email: wellpetclinic@btconnect.com
www.wellpetclinic.co.uk
VAT Reg: 691 3368 16

