Bearded Dragon

Drs. Foster & Smith Educational Staff

Bearded Dragons originate in Australia. The most common species in the pet industry is the Inland Bearded Dragon, *Pogona vitticeps*, which was formerly called *Am*, *Amphibolurus vitticeps*. The Inland Bearded Dragon is sometimes referred to as the Central, or Yellow-headed Bearded Dragon. Other members of the Pogon genus include:

- *Pogona barbata* - Common Bearded
- *P. henrylawsoni* - Rankin's
- *P. minima* - Western
- *P. minor* - Dwarf
- *P. mitchelli* - Northwest Bearded
- *P. nullarbor* - Nullarbor
- *P. microlepitoda*

Natural environment

The Inland Bearded Dragon lives in the arid woodlands and deserts of central Australia. It spends much of its waking hours in bushes and trees, and is also found basking on rocks. When it is extremely hot, the bearded dragon will burrow underground. The bearded dragon is diurnal - active during the day. It is also an omnivore, meaning that it will eat plants and flesh. It forages for food such as insects, small lizards and mammals, fruit, flowers, and other plant material during the day time.

Physical characteristics

The Bearded Dragon is tan to yellow in color. It is called "bearded" because of its ability to flare out the skin in the throat region when it is threatened or defending its territory. Its body has a flattened appearance, which becomes even more pronounced when the dragon is alarmed. There are spines on the throat, sides of the head, and sides of the body. The head is wedge-shaped, and the Bearded Dragon has a tail that is almost as long as its body.

It is difficult to distinguish males from females among hatchlings and juveniles. When they become adults, sexual differences become more apparent. The males generally have larger heads and larger, darker beards. The femoral pores of males also help to distinguish them from females.

Temperament and handling

Bearded Dragons tend to be mellow and docile, even in the wild. Although hatchlings and juveniles may be skittish, the adults will often appear to enjoy

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human company, making Bearded Dragons one of the better reptilian pets. Bearded Dragons tend to be curious, and will enjoy exploring, so if you can, provide a safe, large enclosure.

To pick up a Bearded Dragon, place your hand under its abdomen and gently scoop it up. As the dragon lays on your palm, gently curve your fingers around its abdomen.

Behavior and body language

To better relate to your Bearded Dragon, you need to understand what various behaviors and body positions mean. During breeding season, to display dominance, or if startled or threatened, a dragon may puff out its beard. Both males and females will display this behavior. To appear even more menacing, the Bearded Dragon may also "gape," or open his mouth very wide. This can certainly make him look more aggressive, since his mouth is quite large. Another way Dragons show dominance is to bob their heads. To show submission, a dragon will hold up one front leg and may slowly wave it.

Reproduction

Bearded Dragons reach sexual maturity and start to breed between 8 and 18 months. The female will generally lay 20 eggs in a clutch. If fertile, the eggs will hatch in 55-75 days. Unmated females may also lay eggs. Bearded Dragons have a life expectancy of approximately 10 years.

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