



maintain your herp's oral health

Many oral diseases in reptiles and amphibians can be prevented through proper management. Poor husbandry leads to stress, which suppresses the body's immune system and makes the animal more susceptible to disease. By paying careful attention to the following aspects of your herp's care, you can help maintain his oral health.

Nutrition: Chronic poor nutrition, resulting in malnutrition, makes animals more prone to infections. Young crocodylians that are malnourished are more apt to have loose teeth that fall out easily. Mineral deficiencies can result in abnormal formations of the jaw, which expose the moist membranes of the mouth making them more vulnerable to trauma and infection. In chameleons, low blood levels of calcium can result in paralysis of the tongue, and in extreme cases, necessitate its amputation. Scurvy (Vitamin C deficiency) affects the soft tissues of the mouth and can lead to bleeding from the gums and loose teeth.



Animal density: Overcrowding can lead to stress, and makes it more difficult to provide a clean environment and unpolluted food and water. Competition for food could result in trauma or malnutrition in those animals that may be smaller or weaker. Animals that are overcrowded may also make more attempts at escape, increasing the possibility of trauma to the nose or head. Lizards may be more apt to bite or chew at the cage, possibly fracturing teeth.

Sanitation: Large numbers of bacteria and fungal organisms in the environment can increase the risk of infections, especially in animals that are stressed from other causes. Cages and cage furniture should be cleaned and disinfected on a routine basis. Poor water quality is a common cause of oral problems in some species.

Temperature: Environmental temperatures that are too cool can suppress the immune system, and also make it more difficult for a herp to digest his food. So even if a diet is optimal, if the herp cannot digest it, nutritional problems and increased susceptibility to disease can occur.

Ventilation: Poor air circulation, especially if there are other husbandry problems, can lead to overgrowth of bacteria and fungi in the environment.

Nontraumatic environment: Trauma related to nose rubbing on the cage, screen, or landscaping can predispose to oral problems. Routinely check the environment for sharp edges or abrasive surfaces. Correct any overcrowding or positioning of the cage that would increase escape attempts with resulting trauma.

Prevention of other diseases: Other diseases can be causes of stress and predispose an animal to oral problems. For example, mite infestations can cause anemia,



spread bacteria, and be irritating, causing the animal to rub the areas where they are attached.

To prevent the transmission of disease, quarantine any additions to your herp collection for at least 30 days to prevent the spread of herpes and pox-like viruses and other organisms that can cause oral disease.

Regular exams: By regularly checking the head and mouth of your herp, you can help spot problems early, hopefully while they can be successfully treated without causing permanent damage. If you see a lesion or abnormality, have your pet examined by your veterinarian.

By reducing stress, maintaining the proper environment, providing good nutrition, and monitoring your herp regularly, you are well on your way to providing good oral care.