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REPTILE ENCLOSURE REQUIREMENTS

A reptile's enclosure is the most important single factor in a captive reptile's health and well being. A properly set up enclosure must cater to the following requirements of any cold blooded animal.

1) A temperature gradient and stable ambient air temperature.

A reptile in the wild has the ability to move from area to area to maintain it's body temperature. During the course of a day the animal may cover many hundreds of square metres moving from hot basking areas to cooler shaded areas to control it's temperature. Obviously not many people have the space for an enclosure that is a couple of hundred square metres; but you still have to provide an environment that will give the temperature ranges that are the most suitable for the animal involved. This can be achieved by a number of methods, but by far the best way is to thermostatically control the temperature. A thermostat can be used to control devices like high power heat mats, ceramic heat emitters, light globes etc. The method of heating your enclosure should not only give a hot basking area, but also raise the ambient air temperature of the enclosure. The heat sources should all be concentrated at one end of the enclosure, so that one end will be hotter than the other. This gives your animal the ability to move closer to, or away from the peak heat area.

Glass fish tanks are less than ideal for the purpose of a reptile enclosure because the heat that you are trying to generate inside the enclosure radiates through glass very easily. A glass tank is possible to set up as a suitable cage, but it takes many modifications. Using a bare glass tank with a low power heat mat or a heat rock as the sole source of heat will result in plunging overnight temperatures as the heat from the low power units are not designed to heat the whole enclosure. These sort of items are designed for a bit of "Belly Warmth" for animals and should only be used in conjunction with a method of maintaining the air temperature within the enclosure.

Failure to provide the right temperature ranges for your animal will at best result in a decreased desire to eat, and at worst can result in death. If an animal eats a large meal while the ambient temperature is high and then the temperature drops dramatically, digestion stops. When this happens, the meal sits in the animal's stomach and begins to rot. While you wouldn't knowingly feed rotting food to your animals, you may unintentionally end up doing just that. Rotting food in the animal's stomach and intestines can cause death. This isn't just a maybe, we've seen it happen.

2) A suitable environment.

This one may seem a bit obvious, but an enclosure should be suitable for the animal from the point of view of size. An animal needs room to move around, but the amount of room required is variable for different animals. An active boisterous lizard will obviously need a lot more space than a snake. The other thing to consider is that animals have a tendency to grow. Allowing for the growth of the animal now, can save you money later. (you won't have to buy a larger enclosure later if you get the right size one first time.) Decorate the enclosure in a way that at least comes close to fulfilling the animal's psychological requirements. An animal that needs to climb, and comes from a scrub or dense bush environment will not be happy in a Spartan enclosure with one small rock in it

3) Ultra Violet Light.

U.V. light is what allows all animals to process vitamin D in the body. No exposure to U.V. causes a disease called Rickets in humans and this condition is known as Metabolic Bone Disorder when referring to reptiles. When we send men & women up into space, we send with them, sun lamps so that they can expose themselves to U.V. While your animal is living inside it's enclosure it is akin to being in a space capsule. Ultra Violet light does not penetrate through normal glass, so the animal needs to have a U.V. light source **INSIDE** the enclosure, or above the enclosure shining through fly wire mesh or something similar. Aquarium tubes like BIO LUX tubes give off no usable U.V. light. Remember that we said U.V. doesn't go through normal glass, and normal tubes are made out of normal glass. A reptile tube is made with a special glass that allows the U.V. to pass through it. This special glass makes the tubes more expensive to produce, and that is why they are expensive to buy. They **ARE essential** for the health of your animal. A reptile U.V. tube will have a name such

as Repti-Glo or Repti-Sun. A lack of exposure to U.V. can cause some or all of the following symptoms: Paralysis: (usually of the back legs first) Spasms and fits: Calcification of joints causing symptoms similar to arthritis and resulting in twisting of the spine and joints. These sort of symptoms do not appear immediately, in fact they can take many many months to show themselves. The only problem is that by the time you notice the symptoms, it is usually already too late. By the time that the animal begins to suffer the more extreme symptoms that tend to get the attention of a beginning keeper, the animal is already in line for some expensive veterinary work. Worst still, it may already have gone past the point of no return. A vet's consultation will cost you on average about \$45 for the basic visit, and then add the cost of vitamin injections and possibly x-rays, anti-biotics, or even in some cases surgical procedures. These are the good options: The bad option is that the animal that you have been caring for for the last 12 months or more, and has become "one of the family" will have to be destroyed. **Something to think about isn't it.**

Where we are going with this, is basically your animal will be totally YOUR responsibility when you buy it. YOU will be responsible for it's health, happiness and it's care. The animal may be an expensive, rare specimen or it may be a common, relatively cheap animal. It does not matter. All animals have the right to live to a healthy, happy ripe old age.

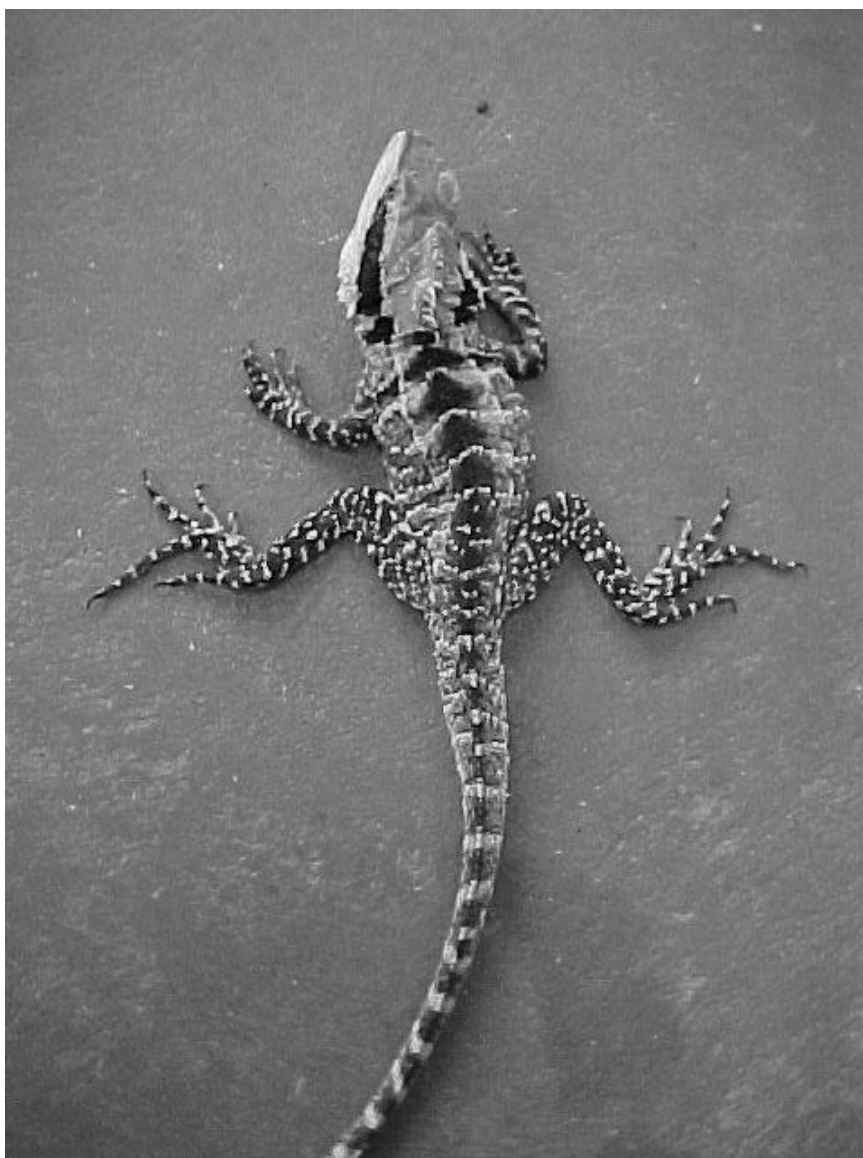
Cutting corners on your animal's care is NOT an option. If you can't afford to provide the right environment, enclosure, diet or care for the animal then DON'T BUY THE ANIMAL!

In summary.

Sure, a fully set up enclosure can seem expensive when compared to a "cheap" animal.

A glass tank with a low powered heat mat and an aquarium flouro is not a suitable environment for a reptile. Reptile keepers around the world have spent a lot of time and effort to research the right environments to keep animals in. Use that knowledge!

Research your animal's care requirements, read any book on reptile care and you will see that what we are saying is true.



Cutting corners on a reptile's enclosure can result in dire consequences for your animals. An example is pictured to the left.

This animal came to us unable to support its own weight, with paralysed rear legs, twisted spine and soft rubbery jaw bones. Even after 3 vet visits & numerous attempts to help the animal, an otherwise beautiful animal succumbed to neglect.