

I Just Bought A _____.

What Do I Feed It?



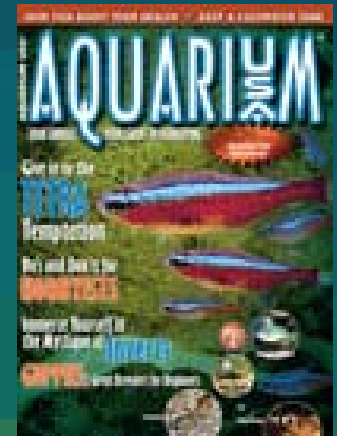
Cindy Voglewede, RVT, BS, Saralyn Sharp, RVT, BS
College of Veterinary Medicine
Purdue University, West Lafayette, IN

When You Get a New Pet...

- It is important to take them to a veterinarian to evaluate the health of the animal
- At this time, you can ask about proper care and what resources you can use to learn more.

There is a lot of good information out there, but there is a lot of incorrect information out there.

- Some of the older trade publications, magazines, and websites can have outdated or simply incorrect information.



Textbooks:



- *Small Animal Clinical Nutrition, 4th Edition,*
Hand, Thatcher, Remillard, Roudebush
- *Hand-rearing Wild and Domestic Mammals,*
Gage

Internet sources:

- www.anapsid.org
 - An excellent site for reptile/amphibian husbandry information
- www.oxbowhay.com
 - An excellent site for small mammal nutrition and husbandry information
- www.rocksolidherpetoculture.com
 - Susan Donoghue, VMD, one of the pioneers in research in herbivorous reptile diets is now consulting with RockSolid Herps
- www.roudybush.com



Evaluating Internet Sites



- Almost anyone can publish a web site, and no standards for truth/accuracy have been developed. Here are some issues to think about when evaluating for the accuracy of the information you are getting from of a website.

Accuracy

- How Accurate is the Information you're receiving from the site?
 - From where did the author obtain his information? Textbooks? Other websites? Does he cite his sources?
 - Do you recognize the sources of his information?
 - If the author cites personal experience, is there any documentation to verify that he would have personal experience in the subject covered? Does the author identify the methods used to gather this personal experience?



Authority



- Do you recognize the author's name?
- If you don't recognize the name, what type of information is given about the author?
 - Position?
 - Organizational affiliation?
 - E-mail address?
 - Biographical information?

Objectivity

- How did you come to this site?
Was the site referenced in a document or web site that you trust?
- What is the purpose of the web site:
 - Is it advertisement for a product or service?
 - Pet food manufacturer's site
 - Is it trying to sway public opinion on an issue?
 - Such as the appropriateness of the BARF diet
- Do you trust the author or organization providing the information?



Currency of Information



- Is the site dated?
 - Can you determine what the date refers to?
 - When the page was first written?
 - When the page was first posted on the Internet?
 - When the page was last revised or updated?
 - The copyright date?
 - Are the resources used and information provided by the author current?

The following slides have some basic tips for feeding a variety of pets...



Feeding Carnivorous Reptiles

- When feeding carnivorous reptiles, we recommend that our clients feed fresh frozen prey instead of live prey.
- This has several advantages:
 - No issues with prey injuring the reptile
 - No issues with availability of the item (buying in bulk is cheaper and no housing costs)
 - It helps reduce parasite load that may be transmitted to the reptile (especially if the item is frozen for at least 30 days but no more than 6 months).



Feeding Frozen Prey Items

- Thaw the prey items
 - It is best to thaw the prey item in a clean plastic bag in warm water. Only thaw the number of items that you will serve in one feeding.
 - Microwave thawing can thaw the item un-evenly or create hot spots in the prey that could cause problems during digestion.
 - Make sure that the prey is above room temperature.
 - Items that are too cold can interfere with digestion, chill the reptile and cause regurgitation
 - Warming also increases the prey's odor, making the reptile more likely to eat it.



Carnivorous Reptiles that aren't Eating...

- This can be for a myriad of reasons:
 - Reptile has never eaten fresh frozen prey
 - Reptile is uncomfortable in surroundings
 - Rodents are not this particular reptile's preferred prey item
 - Some reptiles are sensitive to color/past traumatic events

Fresh Frozen Prey is a Novel Item...

- If the reptile is reluctant to feed on pre-killed frozen prey, you can increase its interest by dangling the prey from tongs, creating movement to entice the reptile.
 - ***Never use your hands to handle the prey around the reptile or handle the reptile after handling prey items.***
 - There are several forms of vibrating food dishes that cause enough movement in dead rodents and insects to stimulate feeding behavior in many reptiles.
- If this is not effective, try feeding a small, stunned prey, followed by a fresh killed prey, then the thawed frozen prey.
- Multiple smaller prey items are healthier than one large prey item.

Reptile is uncomfortable in surroundings...

- Some reptiles will prefer a hide spot in which to devour their prey
 - This can be as simple as a cardboard box that is turned over and has a hole cut in it just big enough for the reptile to get through
 - Cardboard boxes should be discarded when soiled
 - Overturned flowerpots are effective hide spots for snakes
 - Make sure the reptile has a hidebox at both ends of the temperature gradient in its enclosure

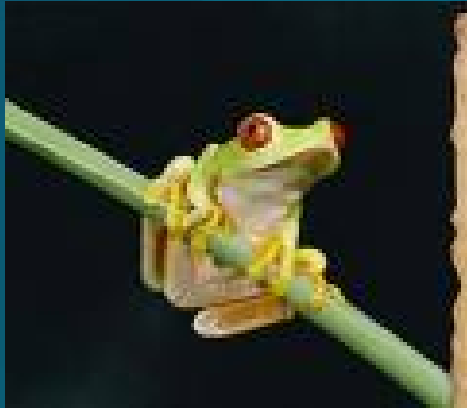


Rodents are not this particular reptile's preferred prey item

- Some snakes are not natural rodent eaters.
 - It is best to get captive raised reptiles that are already eating rodents.
- Try dip the thawed rodent in warm chicken broth.
- Chicks and quail are available fresh frozen also.
- For reptile/amphibian-eating snakes, rubbing the dead rodent against a live, or thawed frozen reptile/amphibian can transfer enough scent to entice the snake to eat.



Some reptiles are sensitive to color/past traumatic events



- If the reptile refuses a white mouse, for example, try a brown or parti-colored mouse instead.
 - This can be due to natural prey choices, or past traumatic events a reptile might have with a prey item of that color
 - Try a gerbil or hamster instead of a mouse
- For those insectivorous reptiles that have a preference for green insects...
 - Try feeding your crickets spirulina or alfalfa powder in their diet to shade them green and make them more acceptable.

“You are What You Eat”

- This holds true for reptiles as well.
- If their prey items are not fed correctly, then the reptile is starved as well.
- This especially holds true for insect eating reptiles.
 - To guarantee their diet we recommend that buy your crickets as “pinheads” and feed them yourselves.



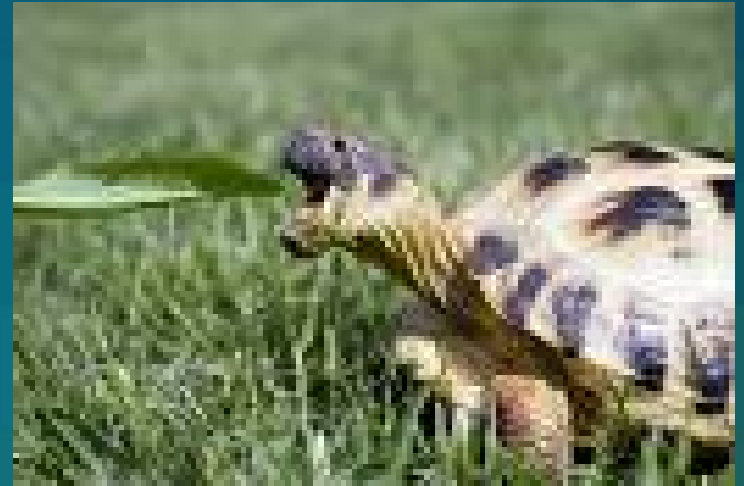
What about a pre-formulated diet?



- Currently, we are wary about recommending pre-formulated diets for carnivorous exotic pets.
- It is important to require that companies making formulated diets for small/exotic pets adhere to the same research and feeding trials to prove their diets as cat and dog food manufacturers.
- Although some breeders/owners can be a source of good husbandry information, much of their information is anecdotal, and not critically examined.
 - Sometimes the animals lived in spite of the husbandry rather than because of it.

What about Herbivorous Pets?

- Although the nutritional requirements for cats and dogs have been extensively studied, this is not true for most exotic pets.
- Therefore, we recommend that they be fed diets that most resemble the pet's wild counter-part's diet.



What about our Avian friends?

- No one knows the specific nutrient information as it applies to each species.



- The current nutritional research is mainly coming out of the University of Hannover, and these studies cover fewer than thirty birds from six species.
- Information that may be obtained from Blue-fronted Amazons, for example, may not directly translate to Orange-wings or Yellow-napes -- each group is different.

There is a lot of controversy over feeding birds pelleted diets versus a variety of fresh grains, vegetables, and fruits.

- “The best diet for your bird is one that provides a reliable and consistent source of balanced nutrition. It's also a diet your bird will like to eat and will give him an enjoyable eating experience, while preventing obesity and other nutritionally related diseases.”
 - Quoted from [Feed Your Bird a Healthier Diet for a Longer Life](#), Zupreem

Pelleted Diet Positives...

- The biggest positive is consistent nutrition in every bite.
- Guarantees that your pet consumes all the nutrition available in the food.
- Easy storage, easy feeding, easy clean-up.



Pelleted Diet Negatives...



- The research does not exist for diet requirements for different bird species – feeding trials done on cockatiels don't translate to Amazon parrots, etc.
- If you are using a varied diet as a form of environmental enrichment, pellets aren't very effective.

Conclusion:

- Until further research is done, we recommend a combination of a pelleted diet and fresh foods mainly in an 75%:25% mixture.
 - As always, we recommend that fresh food be left in an enclosure a minimum amount of time to insure freshness.



To finish, we have a few thoughts on our recommendations to dog and cat owners...



Manufacturers that have the research and feeding trials to back up their diets are best for all species.

- There are many diets out there that make lots of claims regarding their food.



- Call the company and ask for their feeding trial research. What scientific research do they have on their product?
- Never rely on anecdotal information -- this information is highly prone to prejudice.

If you want to feed BARF (Bones and Raw Food or Biologically Appropriate Raw Food) diets...

- We recommend you contact a veterinary nutritionist to help them create a recipe for a diet that is specific for that particular pet.
 - We also stress that it is important to revise the recipe with the nutritionist as the pet ages and as its health status changes.
- It is also extremely important to follow the diet as it is written.
 - Be very careful with substitutions as these can quickly unbalance a diet.



A reminder for clients feeding BARF...



- Although dogs and cats seem to be resistant to salmonella and e. coli and other food-borne pathogens, remember that humans are not.
- If you are preparing raw food for your pets be sure to either do it in a separate area from where you prepare your own food, or clean the area well with a good antibacterial soap after preparing the pet's diet.

Some sources to consider when discussing canine/feline diets..

- Textbooks:
- *Canine/Feline Nutrition,*
 - *Case, Carey, Hirakawa, Daristotle*

- Internet sources:

- www.petdiets.com
- www.aavn.org
- www.balanceit.com
- www.vet.osu.edu/nssvet.htm



We hope this helps you find information on what to feed your pets. Good nutrition is vital to maintaining good health. Remember these are only guidelines, each pet is an individual with specific needs. Please consult your veterinarian to find out what is best for your pet!

