Wellness Exams: What to Expect During Your Reptile or Amphibian Veterinary Appointment

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We all know that preventing disease or catching it in its early stages is far better than treating it once it has had time to progress to a more severe stage. Preventive health care on a regular basis will help you do just that, and save you and your pet needless suffering and a larger financial burden. Just as annual physical exams are recommended for humans, they are recommended for our pets as well.

Even our cars get regular tune-ups!

Each herp should be examined and their husbandry and diet reviewed by a veterinarian at least once a year. Juveniles, geriatric animals, and those showing signs of disease often need more frequent exams.

History

During the annual physical exam you should review these aspects of your herp's husbandry, diet, and health with your veterinarian:

- How long you've owned the animal
- Where you purchased the animal
- What other animals you have in your household; if they are cagemates; and what is their health status
- Housing, including cage size and type, bedding, cage furniture, and presence of cage plants; if and how often the herp leaves the cage; if the herp goes outside; cage hygiene
- Heat sources, locations of thermometers, and temperature gradients
- Light sources and frequency of bulb changes
- Relative humidity of the cage, and water/humidity sources
- Typical diet including brand names, if applicable; what and how much is offered and what and how much is eaten; feeding frequency
- Description of the herp's feces and urates - color, amount, and consistency
- Use of medications - type, brand name, and dose
- Use of nutritional supplements (vitamins, minerals, gut loading) - type, brand name, and dose
- Use of pesticides or any other treatments - type, brand name, and dose
- Exposure to other herps (at shows, boarding, traveling)
- Exposure to potential toxins (cleaning supplies, second hand smoke, heavy metals, pesticides)
- Reproductive history
- Any behavioral changes
- Shedding history
- Any medical problems noted (color changes, history of ingesting foreign objects, injuries, etc.)

Do not be surprised if your veterinarian spends more time talking with you than he/she does examining your herp. Most diseases in herps are related to husbandry and nutritional problems, so it is vital that these be reviewed with you carefully. During your discussions, be sure to ask any questions you may have regarding your herp's health and care. Now is the time to learn from your veterinarian's expertise.

Veterinary examination and testing

Usually the veterinary examination will include:

- Recording of the weight and length of the herp
- Observation of the animal's posture, movement, and attitude
- Physical examination including eyes, tympanic membranes (ears), nose, mouth, skin, limbs, vent, and tail
- Palpation of the abdomen and cloaca
- Ausculation of the heart and lungs
- Fecal examination for parasites
- Complete blood count (and chemistry profile, depending upon the age and species of herp)
- Radiographs (x-rays) if the herp laid eggs in the past year or a potential problem is identified

By providing your veterinarian with as much information as possible, and having your herp examined regularly, you can help your pet remain in top condition, healthy, and happy. Remember, prevention is key!

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