

Veiled (Yemen) Chameleon (*Chamaeleo calypttratus*) Care Plan

Veiled chameleons are highly specialised arboreal reptiles, easily recognised by their high cranial casques, originating from Yemen and southern Saudi Arabia. They inhabit the humid coastal lowlands, mountain slopes and high plateaus of this region. Two subspecies are recognised – with the Northern race (*Chamaeleo calypttratus calcarifer*) males having lower casques than the Southern race males (*Chamaeleo calypttratus calypttratus*). The average adult body size is between 25 and 50cm (10” and 20”).

Suitability as Pets

Chameleons are not ‘pets’ in the traditional sense – they do not like being handled or played with and indeed this can be extremely stressful for them. They have specific husbandry requirements and should only be kept by those willing to adequately provide for their needs. However, chameleons are beautiful and fascinating animals and can be a challenge for the keeper. Captive bred animals should be purchased from a reputable dealer – wild caught specimens are more likely to be stressed and to carry internal parasites, and by buying these individuals you will be contributing to the importation of this vulnerable species from the wild.

Reproduction

Males are usually larger and have a larger head crest. This species has a rapid growth rate and can be very near to its adult size by around 8 months of age. Sexual maturity is usually attained at 4-8 months. The life span in captivity is 4-6 years for males and 2-3 years for females, although there have been reports of Veiled chameleons living for more than 10 years.

Adult chameleons should be housed individually and out of visual range of each other as they are solitary reptiles. Males can be extremely territorial.

Housing

Glass or plastic vivaria are not recommended as internal reflection may cause stress, and also they do not allow good ventilation. The ideal housing structure is made from mesh, provided it is situated in a draught free area.

An adult veiled chameleon should be housed in a vivarium measuring at least 90cm by 60cm by 90cm (3ft by 2ft by 3ft).

Lighting

An ultra-violet light source (5.0% UVB lamp) should also be provided. This should be left on for 8-12 hours a day and replaced every six months unless otherwise stated by the manufacturer. This will create a day and night time effect as well as give your chameleon sufficient levels of UV to allow vitamin D3 synthesis. Wire mesh guards should be fitted over all heat sources and used in order to prevent any thermal burns from occurring.

Heating/ Temperature

A heat source should be provided – these can be either reflector spot lights in green, blue or red, or ceramic bulbs. A thermostat is essential: the temperature at the basking area should be between 32C and 37C (90 and 100F), with a background temperature falling to around 26C (80F) at the coolest point. At night the temperature may be allowed to drop to around 22C (72F). Thermometers should be placed at each end of the vivarium.

Most chameleons do not require a severe heat drop at night (many are adversely affected if the temperature drops too much). The temperature should be allowed to drop by about 10 or 12 degrees at night.

A ceramic heater /can be used to provide overnight infra-red heating (needed in winter).

A protective mesh is required around both any spot light or ceramic heater to prevent the chameleon from burning itself (as it will try to climb on these).

The safest substrate is newspaper, although this does not hold humidity well. Sphagnum moss or bed-a-beast substrate can be used. Whichever substrate is used care should be taken to ensure that none is ingested during feeding.

Furniture (Climbing and shelter)

The cage should have a sturdy branch in it of a size suited to the chameleon's grasp. Plastic plants are ideal for shelter, to facilitate drinking and to create pockets of humidity

Hides are essential to prevent stress and allow privacy. Artificial plants, boxes, plant pots etc all make good hides. There should be easy access to water, food and basking sites.

Water /Humidity

A chameleon can easily die of dehydration if inadequate water provision is available.

Enclosure plants need to be "misted" with hot water from a plastic plant spray bottle every morning and every evening. The hot water turns cool as it leaves the bottle in a fine mist. This provides both necessary humidity and also drinking water.

Chameleons in general will not drink standing water and only rarely drink from containers, preferring instead to lick the dew of leaves in the early morning or catch drops of rain dripping down their faces.

Commercial drip feeds are available. Water dripping from dripper bottles will attract a chameleon's attention but this cannot be relied on as male panthers in particular often forget to drink and quickly become dehydrated.

It is important to give adult chameleons a good soaking once a week for about 10 minutes to ensure that they get sufficient water. Chameleons can be left in a shower with a fine spray of warm water on them but be careful that only a fine spray is used as they may panic or their eyes damaged by the force of an excessive jet.

Don't spray water directly onto very small baby chameleons it is easy to drown them.

A good way of ensuring an adult chameleon has enough water is to feed it a cricket or locust and then spray water down its throat just as it is finishing off the food. Be careful that this water is not aspirated.

Feeding

Veiled chameleons are primarily insectivorous and should be offered food from an opaque raised dish as this will enable the chameleon to catch the food as it climbs out. Young veiled chameleons should be fed daily, with small crickets. Babies can be fed small (2mm) crickets and wingless fruit flies, both of which can be bought at reptile shops. Fruit fly tubs last for about 5 weeks, producing several batches of flies over this period from the worms in the culture.

Adults should be offered food every other day. Adults can be offered insect prey such as crickets, house flies, fruit flies, mealworms and wax worms. They should also be offered small amounts of salads and fruits.

Do not leave live food in the cage or it will start attacking the chameleon while it is asleep at night. Ideally provide a varied diet as chameleons can get bored with their food and just stop eating.

Food Dusting

In order to ensure that the diet has the correct calcium : phosphorus ratio, as chameleons in captivity are prone to developing metabolic bone disease, prey insects should be gut-loaded with a product such as Bug-Grub (Vetark) for 48 hours prior to feeding. They should also be regularly dusted (at every feed for juveniles, once weekly for males and 1-2 times per week for females) with a high calcium product such as Nutrobal (Vetark) before feeding.

Get a large container such as a peanut tub and tip in a little vitamin powder. Put this tub in either a much larger plastic container or in a sink with the plug in. Then ease off the edge of the cricket or fruitfly tub and add a few crickets or locusts or lots of fruit flies and swirl them around until they are dusted. Any escaping fruit-flies or crickets can be retrieved from the larger cage or the sink.

Do not do this more than twice a week or the chameleons will suffer from vitamin D3 toxicity. If the chameleons are out in the garden in the summer getting sufficient natural sunlight then the addition of the supplement should be cut back.

Grate up a carrot and put it in the cricket tubs. This provides moisture and also beta carotene which will be turned into vitamin A by the chameleons. Always have at least 2 tubs of crickets. There is nothing worse than suddenly finding that a whole tub has died off on Saturday evening.

Preventative Care & Disease Management

Always wash your hands (preferably with an antiseptic soap) before or after handling any reptile. For animals in veterinary environment we advise the use of disposable gloves (to control RAS).

Quarantine new reptiles for at least 3 months. During this time record normal patterns of eating, defaecating, weight gain and behaviour and have them examined by a vet.

It is a good idea to take along a fresh faecal sample so that the vet can check for the presence of gastrointestinal parasites. Veterinary advice should be sought if your chameleon is not eating or producing faeces, is inactive, has swellings, particularly around the eyes, is losing weight or has a discharge from its eyes, nose or mouth.

Further information on husbandry can be found at:

www.animalarkshelter.org/cin/ (Chameleon Information Network)
www.chameleonjournals.com/
www.adcham.com/
www.forum.kingsnake.com/
www.Reptiletrust.com

There are a number of Web sites that provide information on chameleons. Some better ones are:

www.adcham.com (the web site of advanced chameleon breeders).

Only advanced chameleon keepers may post to this website but it contains some excellent descriptions of different chameleon species, illnesses etc. There are very interesting discussions posted by the top vets in the field and this is where the world's chameleon experts meet.

www.chameleonjournals.com (Run by Kathy Kaiwi, this site has a wealth of information on chameleons and includes a Listserver that those with less experience in chameleon care can join and automatically receive email (a lot) about chameleon care.

www.animalarkshelter.org/cin/ (the Chameleon Information Network, CiN run by Ms Ardi Abate). You can become a member and for \$41 will get 4 magazines sent to you each year.

<http://home.att.net/~chameleons/>

Has a good "Information Center" on Care of chameleons and a "Resource Center" which shows the front covers of most of the books below.

Books on Chameleons

There are many books on chameleons. The first 3 below are the "bibles" for chameleon keepers. Necas' book is the best for experienced keepers with pages on every single species.

- Linda Davison (husband of Steve Davison, maker of Miner-All) has produced a book which has a lot about the care of chameleons.
- Martin & Wolfe have produced a hardback lovely book with beautiful pictures.
- The Essential Care of Chameleons is one of the smallest (and cheapest) books but is packed with essential information for those starting with a new chameleon.

Chameleons - Nature's Hidden Jewels (H/back) Necas

ISBN 3-930612-04-6

Chameleons - Their Care and Breeding (P/back) Linda J Davison

ISBN 0-88839-353-9 (about \$30)

Chameleons - Nature's Masters of Disguise (H/back) Martin & Wolfe

ISBN 0-7137-2339-4

The New Chameleon Handbook Francois Le Berre

ISBN 0-8120-1805-2 (£6.50)

Chameleons - (Volume I) Species Schmidt, Tamm, Wallikewitz

Chameleons - (Volume II) Care & Breeding Schmidt, Tamm, Wallikewitz

Care and Breeding of Panthers, Jacksons, Veiled Phillip de Vosjoli

and Parsons Chameleons

ISBN 1-882770-30-7

Essential Care of Chameleons Philip de Vosjoli

ISBN 1-882770-51-X (£7.95)

Chameleons RD Bartlett & Patricia P. Bartlett

ISBN 0-8120-9157-4 (£4.50)

The Guide to Owning a Chameleon Schmidt, Tamm, Wallikewitz

ISBN 079380285-7 (£6.95)