

**KEEPING ADVICE SHEET**

# Dragons

## Western Bearded Dragon *Pogona minor minor*



**Western Bearded Dragon** (*Pogona minor minor*) – Maximum length 41 cm. Category 2.

**Western Netted Dragon** (*Ctenophorus reticulatus*) – Maximum length 28 cm. Category 3.

**NATURAL HABITS:** Western Bearded Dragon occurs in most habitats including coastal dunes, woodlands and sandplains throughout most of the southwest. Western Netted Dragon especially likes stone-strewn floodways and disturbed areas from the Pilbara south to the central wheatbelt and east over the Nullarbor.

Most dragons are diurnal, although both these species have been seen active at night.

**CAUTION:** Large dragons can deliver a painful bite.

**HOUSING:** An adult pair of the larger Western Bearded Dragon will require a top-ventilated, 100 x 50 cm indoor vivarium, while a pair of Western Netted Dragons will need a floor area of at least 75 x 40 cm. An aquarium or purpose built, glass fronted wooden cage is ideal to house your pets. Wire fronted cages are unsuitable for dragons. Enclosures must be secure and escape proof.

**CAPTIVE ENVIRONMENT:** Cage furnishings should include perching logs and branches to climb on, bask on and sleep on at night. They will also spend a lot of their time on the ground, so provide suitable hiding places such as pieces of bark. Use a shallow layer of coarse sand or gravel on the floor and, for ease of cleaning, include a 10 cm deep removable container of sand to give your dragons a place to dig.

**TEMPERATURE & LIGHTING:** Dragons require heating during the day with an overhead spotlight providing a basking area. It is very important to position the lamp at one end of vivarium to obtain a temperature

gradient with a hot spot of about 35°C. The dragons can then seek a cooler area at the other end of the cage when they need to. A full spectrum UV fluorescent tube should be used for at least 8 hours each day. This needs to be replaced every six months or so to maintain its effectiveness. Failure to do this will result in decreased bone density in your dragon.

**OUTDOOR HOUSING:** You can also house your dragons outdoors during the warmer months in a smooth walled enclosure, with the walls extending at least 60 cm below the ground and 100 cm high. An aviary-like cover with shade cloth or bird netting is required to exclude predators. Position the enclosure so it receives 6 - 8 hours of sun each day, but always have a well-shaded area too.

**WATER:** Fresh water should be provided at all times in a shallow, non-spillable container. Lightly spray the interior of enclosure periodically as dragons often like licking up the droplets.

**FOOD:** Can be fed a variety of insects such as mealworms, crickets, grasshoppers and beetles. Ensure that no poisons or fertilisers have been used if you harvest any insects from the wild. Live food is best as it stimulates hunting activity, which is good dragon exercise. Provide a variety of insects at any one feed and periodically offer other food like minced meat, pinky mice, diced fruits and dandelion flowers. Netted dragons like termites as well. All food should periodically be coated with a calcium/vitamin supplement. Feed every 2-3 days.

**CAPTIVE BEHAVIOUR/BREEDING:** Initially dragons may be nervous, but will eventually become trusting of their keeper. In time, the adults become used to being handled and appear happy to just sit on a hand. Generally

male dragons are more brightly coloured during the breeding season. Females deposit eggs in late spring through to mid-summer, with two clutches in the one season being quite common. Breeding is improved by allowing a cooling off period for a month or so in winter. It is not advisable to keep adult male dragons together because they may fight causing injuries to each other. Aggression or bullying between different dragons may occur. If this happens it may be necessary to separate smaller dragons from larger ones.

**DISEASES:** A clean artificial reptile environment with the appropriate husbandry mentioned above will usually result in your pets remaining healthy. Quarantine newly acquired animals for at least a month before introducing them to those already being kept.

**REPTILE MITES:** Reptile mites are the scourge of many keepers. They can rapidly multiply and quickly kill a reptile. If an infestation is found, it is imperative that you take immediate action to eradicate it. Although small (a large female may be one-third the size of a pin head) they will be obvious on white paper as miniature black tick-like animals. If you find you have an infestation, it is important to kill it *in situ*. This can be achieved by placing a Sureguard Ministrip™ within the respective cage for at least 8 hours before cleaning. Then follow-up with two 8-hour cycles two days apart. DO NOT expose your pet to the pest strip for any longer or you may kill it.

**FURTHER READING:** *Care of Australian Reptiles in Captivity* – John Weigel. Reptile Keepers Association, Gosford, NSW.

*Keeping Bearded Dragons* – Darren Green & Ty Larson. Australian Reptile Keeper Publications, Melbourne, Victoria.