

# Smooth & scaly pets

Western Australia was the last State to allow people to own reptiles and amphibians. Now, people may obtain a licence designed to promote responsible ownership of a limited number of species as pets.



by Verna Costello

For many people, the desire to own a pet gecko or snake, frog or tortoise is sparked by the wish to learn more about the animal or, quite simply, the sheer novelty of doing so. And there is no doubt that frequent contact with and observation of such animals can fulfil both wishes.

Before rushing off for a licence from the Department of Conservation and Land Management (CALM), take a look at the list of reptiles and amphibians that can be kept as pets, plus a special list of reptiles and amphibians suitable for beginners. To ensure the animal's welfare, not to mention avoiding disappointment and wasting money, it is strongly advised to start with an animal whose requirements are simple and easily met—such as bluetongues, bobtails or tree frogs.

A licence system has been developed by CALM, in consultation with the WA Society of Amateur Herpetologists. Animals are classed in five categories, based on their rarity, required level of care, difficulty to manage and the level of experience required by their owner. This licensing system has been designed to promote responsible ownership and avoid situations where would-be owners bite off more than they can chew.

### Diet and other demands

Caring for such animals places big demands on one's time and requires a dedicated sense of responsibility. Some reptiles and amphibians are reasonably long-lived, surviving 10 to 20 years or more, so you would be making a long-term commitment. Like most types of pets, reptile and amphibian species vary from being relatively easy to look after to those that are quite demanding. Meeting the animal's nutritional needs, for example, can range from providing readily available canned pet food and fruit and vegetables to dead mice or rats, or even live crickets, flies and termites. Definitely not for the squeamish!

In nature, most animals have a varied diet that provides the full range of nutrients they need. In captivity, this may have to be achieved by administering nutritional supplements such as extra calcium and vitamins. This is less critical with animals that



Left facing page

The western bluetongue is a delightful native reptile that is relatively easy to look after.

Photo - Marie Lochman

**Top** Keeping reptiles such as this flat-shelled turtle (*Chelodina steindachneri*) can teach people about native species and help to promote their conservation.

**Above** The western bearded dragon is also suitable for beginners but, as with other listed reptiles and amphibians, first you must apply for a licence.

Photos - Jiri Lochman

consume whole mammals such as mice or rats (are you still game?).

Having decided which species you would like to learn about and care for, remember that taking and keeping reptiles and amphibians from the wild for any purpose, except under a Taker's Licence, is illegal, so as to protect wild populations and their habitat. The

### List of approved reptiles and amphibians as pets

- tree-dwelling geckoes
- bluetongues and bobtails
- dragons
- long-necked tortoises
- monitors
- pythons
- crevice and king skinks
- terrestrial geckoes
- tree frogs
- venomous snakes

### Species recommended for beginners:

- northern green tree frog (*Litoria caerulea*)
- western green tree frog (*Litoria moorei*)
- Binoe's gecko (*Heteronotia binoei*)
- northern spiny-tailed gecko (*Strophurus ciliaris*)
- south-west spiny-tailed gecko (*Strophurus spinigerus*)
- variegated or tree dtella (*Gehyra variegata*)
- western bearded dragon (*Pogona minor minor*)
- south-western crevice egernia (*Egernia napoleonis*)
- centralian bluetongue (*Tiliqua multifasciata*)
- western bluetongue (*Tiliqua occipitalis*)
- bobtail skink (*Tiliqua rugosa rugosa*)



**Top** The lethal frog fungus is widespread in wild populations of frogs such as this green tree frog—one of the reasons you should always purchase frogs from a reputable pet shop.  
*Photo – Jiri Lochman*

**Above** Marbled velvet gecko.  
*Photo – Marie Lochman*

**Right** Keeping a venomous mulga snake is not recommended for a novice.  
*Photo – Jiri Lochman*

lethal frog fungus (*Batrachochytrium dendrobatidis*) is widespread in the wild, so it is important to purchase frogs from reputable pet shops to ensure your pet is healthy.

### Sources of information

Further research on your chosen animal is highly recommended. There is a wealth of downloadable information on CALM's NatureBase website ([www.naturebase.net/plants\\_](http://www.naturebase.net/plants_)

[animals/reptiles/index.html](http://animals/reptiles/index.html)). Here, you will find answers to questions such as: what should I feed my pet reptile/amphibian; what do I do when my pet gets sick; what kind of housing, space, water, heating, ventilation, cleaning, security is required; and can I release my pet reptile or frog?

If you don't have access to the internet, you may phone CALM's Wildlife Branch on (08) 9334 0455 or fax (08) 9334 0278 and ask for information to be posted or faxed to you.

The study of reptiles and amphibians is called herpetology, and those interested in learning in greater

depth should try their local library. Accessing reptile or amphibian-related websites on the internet will also reveal a rich haul of information. You could also join a herpetological society, where learning from its experienced members can prove to be highly rewarding and reap huge benefits for you and your pet.

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