

HerpVet Information Services

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Herptile record keeping

This information sheet is concerned with keeping records about your herptiles. It describes a (very idealised) record keeping system; not all items can be feasibly recorded in most situations, but it gives you an idea what to aim for.

Memory on its own, unless you have an exceptional memory, is simply not good enough – you may have an impression that the animal has been a bit quiet for a while, but you will often want to be far more precise than that.

Reasons for keeping records

There are many excellent reasons for keeping good records. These include:

Getting to know your pet/spotting abnormalities - with any pet, it is vital that you get to know it as well as possible. The better you do, the better care you will be able to provide it, and the sooner you are likely to spot any problems/potential problems

Investigation of any problem - If a problem does occur, good records can help a lot in getting to the bottom of it.

Development of good management - Both for yourself specifically and, in some cases, for general care of uncommon species. Simply observing that the animal spends all its time in the very hottest part of the vivarium, for example, suggests that the temperature is generally too low (though other factors may be involved). More generally, recording exactly what factors might be involved in triggering breeding can make a real contribution to conservation – very little is known about many less common reptiles.

What records should be kept: Environment

General layout, substrate and furnishings Useful when describing your set-up to others (notably including your vet, for example), and may allow you to notice if, for example, an extra hiding box makes all the difference to a shy species (sketches or photographs can be helpful here).

Temperature - Ideally maximum and minimum thermometer(s) should be used, at either extremes of the enclosure (and possibly even more sites in larger enclosures). Keeping weekly max and minima can be useful – the temperature may be more affected by central heating than you think, for example.

Water quality - In largely or wholly aquatic set-ups, water quality parameters can be vital. Nitrogenous waste products (nitrite, ammonia and nitrate) are very important. Depending on species of animal, acidity/alkalinity (pH), hardness, dissolved oxygen and even trace elements may also be important.

Humidity - Humidity may be worth recording, although it is very subject to local variation within enclosures so is difficult to assess properly.

What records should be kept: Animal factors

Background information on the animal should be recorded when it is obtained

- Species/subspecies if recognised
- Date of birth (actual/estimated)
- Sex (if known – the technique used to determine it may also be relevant)
- Weight/length
- Date and source obtained
- Husbandry at source – provided it is adequate, the closer you can reproduce this the easier it will be for the animal to adjust.

Ongoing records may include the following

Weight It is strongly recommended that good weight records are kept. For adults monthly is generally reasonable, while growing animals should generally be weighed more frequently. Bear in mind that a large meal or drink can add 10% or more to the weight of a herpetile, and similarly going to the toilet can take 10%+ off the weight.

Length is far less important than weight generally, but may be useful, especially in chelonia.

Feeding When, what and how much. How it is presented may also be important. Changes in an established feeding pattern are usually significant in some way.

Drinking Often difficult/impractical to record, but valuable if you can – many health problems can involve increased drinking.

Faeces/urine Again may be difficult to record, but can be very important – any changes in appearance are likely to be significant.

General activity level
Useful background information.

Anything else Any reproductive, medical or other activity should be noted.

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