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Chinese Water Dragon Care

Water dragons are native to Southeast Asia and Australia. They typically live 10-15 years and can grow up to three feet long (counting the tail). Males have larger heads, prominent jowls, and a larger crest on the back of the neck than females. Water dragons are diurnal (active during the day) and semi-arboreal. Water dragons are mature when 2 feet long and about 2 years old.

Housing:

Dragons are very active and need lots of space. Also, water dragons tend to try to run through the glass to get what they see on the other side. This can lead to repeated trauma to the nose and cause infections. To discourage this behavior, use a terrarium with mesh sides or place an aquarium background along the sides of the tank. The terrarium should be at least 6 ft long, 3 ft wide, and 4 ft tall. These lizards are high in energy and enjoy climbing and swimming in water. Branches, vines, and plants are great for climbing. Provide a large water bowl that your dragon can fit at least 50% of his body into. Water dragons are messy so be sure to change the water daily. For substrate, reptile carpet and wet cypress mulch are good choices.

Lighting:

Temperatures in the cage need to range from 80 degrees to 88 degrees Fahrenheit, with a basking spot of 90 degrees. Place the mercury vapor bulb at one end of the terrarium, which will create a thermal gradient across the tank. Nighttime temperatures should not be below 75F.

The most efficient light source is the Exo Terra Solar Glo. It is a mercury vapor bulb that emits heat, UVB, and UVA. UV light has multiple benefits, including calcium metabolism and improved appetite and activity. Proper calcium metabolism helps protect against metabolic bone disease. Carefully follow the bulb manufacturer's directions for installation. Use a clamp lamp with a ceramic fixture to prevent melting. The fixture should be carefully secured to avoid being bumped and breaking the filament or starting a fire. Make sure to replace the bulb yearly and remember that glass and plastic blocks UV light. If needed, a red bulb can be added for nighttime temperature drops.

Humidity:

Humidity needs to be 60-80%. Higher humidity can lead to skin and respiratory diseases while lower humidity can lead to shedding problems. A large water bowl will help increase humidity as will spraying the sides of the terrarium a couple of times daily. To increase the humidity in top screened enclosures, cover the top of the cage to attain an appropriate humidity with Plexiglas or cellophane wrap.

Diet:

Water dragons are omnivores. The staples of their diet are crickets. Waxworms and mealworms can be given on occasion for variety. Gut load all crickets for at least three days prior to feeding. Offer a small amount of finely chopped veggies and dark leafy greens twice weekly. Not all dragons will readily eat each veggie or greens. If your lizard is not interested in the veggies and greens, then feed them the insects you feed your dragon. Adults can be fed every 2- 3 days. Feed juvenile dragons small crickets daily that are smaller than the width of their head. While they are growing, sprinkle a calcium powder (no vitamin D) on the crickets twice weekly.

Common Diseases:

Abscesses
Stomatitis ('Mouth Rot')
Intestinal Parasites
Metabolic Bone Disease