

## **Your New Chameleon - A Guide to it's Care**

By Rachel Maier MRCVS  
Parkvets Veterinary Hospital

Congratulations on the new addition to your family. This is an exciting time for everyone and we hope that you will have many happy years together. This handout covers some of the basic facts about keeping a chameleon. Please read it carefully; if you have any further questions please ask a member of staff.

### **Species Name**

Chamaeleo calyptratus

### **Family Relationships**

Chamaelonidae (chameleons): Sauria (lizards): Reptilia (reptiles).

### **Place of Origin**

Mountain slopes and river habitats of Yemen and Saudi Arabia.

### **Housing**

Although not very active, Yemen chameleons/Veiled Chameleons like to climb and hide in trees or shrubs and require very large and very tall cages relative to their size (4 foot high, 3 foot long and 3 foot deep as a minimum). The bigger the enclosure the better.

A good circulation of fresh air is important so a screen cage is needed (the back wall and bottom can be solid) with lights fitted 2-3 inches above the cage (to avoid the chameleon touching the light and getting burnt). Chameleons get stressed by reflections in glass so this should be avoided.

The cage should be well planted with branches (slightly large in diameter than the chameleon's grip to allow it to balance) and if possible live plants. The branches should be placed kris-crossing each other so the chameleon can walk around. The arrangement should allow for climbing and basking branches. Substrate is not necessary as these animals spend no time on the floor and ingestion of some substrates can be harmful.

Veiled chameleons are active during the day. They require full spectrum reptile-specific ultraviolet lighting to prevent metabolic bone disease. UV bulbs should be changed every 6-12 months as the spectrum changes over time. The lights should be on for 12 –14 hours daily. Use a timer for this as irregular lighting can cause anorexia.

A separate basking bulb will be needed to provide heat for the basking spot. Temperature at the basking end of the tank should be 95-105F, and 70-80F background temperature. The temperature should drop to 70-80F at night. Use a thermometer at each end of the tank and also a hygrometer to measure humidity (which should be 30-50%). A reptile thermostat will allow proper control of temperature.

Chameleons will not drink from a bowl and need to lick water droplets. To allow the chameleons to lick water drops off leaves, either the cage should be sprayed twice a day or else a drip system can be incorporated. This can be simply a water tank on top of the cage that regularly drips water into it or a waterfall set-up (avoid standing water as chameleons drown easily).

Adult chameleons are fairly intolerant of others, and should be kept singly.

Cage location should not be near a draught or right next to a heat source such as a radiator. Also it should be away from bright lights late at night. Chameleons are easily stressed by too much movement around them, so the cage is best placed in a quiet location.

### **Suggested Feeding Guidelines**

Veiled Chameleons are insectivorous (insect-eaters) and will also take a reasonable amount of plant matter, and absolutely require variety in their diet. They should be fed daily.

Crickets should be the main food, supplemented with mealworms, super worms, wax worms, butter worms. Butter worms should be fed regularly due to their high calcium content. Crickets should be "gut loaded" with very nutritious food prior to feeding e.g. spinach, carrots, lime, and processed cricket food. Only offer insects which are smaller than the width of the chameleon's mouth to prevent choking.

It is essential that chameleons are offered a variety of food or they lose interest in food and decline in health. For this reason it is important to experiment with other available insect foods. Fruit flies, houseflies, king mealworms, locusts and South American cockroaches can all be purchased commercially. In addition, green leafy vegetables can be cut up and offered such as collard and mustard greens. All insects should be dusted with calcium and vitamin supplements every other day before being offered to the chameleon.

Collard greens, red leaf lettuce, green leaf lettuce, mustard greens, turnip greens, and dandelion greens can be offered. Avoid iceberg lettuce, large amounts of kale, cabbage, or spinach. Also, carrots, squash, sweet potatoes, peas, corn, and fruits can be offered in small amounts. Dandelion flowers and hibiscus flowers are often a favourite. Offer greens daily using different combinations of ingredients.

### **Handling**

Veiled Chameleons may tolerate some handling, but primarily should be regarded as display animals and only handled when absolutely necessary.

Always wash your hands thoroughly after handling any reptile.

### **Miscellaneous**

Veiled Chameleons are more challenging to keep than most other lizards and are not a beginner's pet. If you are just starting out, consider whether a gecko or bearded dragon might be an easier and better choice for you.

Recommended books are "Chameleons" by R D and Patricia Bartlett and "The Lizard-Keeper's Handbook" by Philippe de Vosjoli. [ISBN-10: 0764128639](#)

### **Emergency Service**

Parkvets has a vet on duty 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. In the event of an emergency, day or night, you should always telephone your usual Parkvets clinic and you will be given the appropriate information on what to do. Alternatively, call the emergency number 020 8300 8111

### **And Finally**

We hope that you will have lots of fun and pleasure from your chameleon over the coming years. We trust he or she will enjoy good health and hope we can help you to achieve this.

Should you need further advice about the health or welfare of your chameleon then please contact us at the practice.

### **Special Offer for Ruxley Manor Garden Centre Customers**

For your peace of mind Parkvets have teamed up with Ruxley Manor Garden Centre to offer you a 10% discount on your chameleon's first health check up. Visit our website at [www.parkvets.com](http://www.parkvets.com)

to find a Parkvets clinic near you.

You should obtain a voucher from Ruxley Manor Garden Centre and present it plus your receipt to Parkvets to claim your discount.