

## **Your New Water Dragon - 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 Water Dragon. Please read it carefully; if you have any further questions please ask a member of staff.

### **Species Name**

*Physignathus cocincinus*

### **Family Relationships**

Agamidae (agamid lizards): Sauria (lizards): Reptilia (reptiles).

### **Place of Origin**

SE Asia, normally tropical forest areas near or on water.

### **Housing**

Water dragons can live for 10-20 years and males usually reach 3 feet in size with females being a little smaller, therefore, a large, purpose-built reptile cage is an absolute must. 6ft by 2ft by 2ft is the minimum for a pair of dragons, and the more space (height, width and/or length) the better.

Cramped dragons will be stressed (which can lead to disease) and cause injury to themselves by running into the glass. Males will generally not tolerate other males.

The cage needs to be big enough to accommodate a receptacle of water large enough for a dragon to immerse itself in (and preferably swim – 20cm or better 30cm depth/height is ideal) and tall enough for it to climb.

Branches should be placed securely on a diagonal for climbing and horizontally for resting. The water container must be cleaned and disinfected daily. Hiding places also need to be provided, usually one for each animal, although some may share if happy with each other.

Suitable live plants include dragon plants (*Dracaena*), pothos (*Scindapsus aureus*), *Ficus benjamina* trees, *Monstera deliciosa* (philodendron) and staghorn ferns.

Water dragons are active during the day, so require reptile-specific ultraviolet lighting which must produce wavelengths in the 290-320 nm range. The light should be on for 12 hours a day to give them a correct day length. UV bulbs should be changed every 6-12 months as the spectrum changes over time.

Being from warm humid regions, they also need a steady source of heat. This is best done with a heat source at one end of the tank so as to create a thermal gradient. An under tank heat mat can be left on at night to provide background heat. Background daytime temperature should be 84-88 F, dropping to about 75-80 F at night. The basking area in the day should be 90 F at the warm end of the tank.

Avoid using commercial "hot rocks" as a heating source as these can cause burns. Humidity should be above 50%, ideally 80%. Use a thermometer at each end of the tank and also a hygrometer to measure humidity.

Having a large container of water in the cage will help keep humidity up as will misting the enclosure twice daily. An ideal substrate for the floor is a mixture of 2/3 peat soil (without additives) + 1/3 sand with areas of bark (avoid cedar and pine). Fake Astroturf can also be used.

Cage location should not be near a draught or next to a heat source e.g. radiator. It should be away from bright lights late at night as these will disturb the dragons. Some dragons will also be stressed by too much human movement around them.

### **Suggested Feeding Guidelines**

Juveniles can be fed 2-3 week old live crickets which have been previously gut-loaded. The crickets should be dusted with a supplement before being offered. Also offer finely chopped vegetables and fruits (10-15% of diet).

As the dragons grow, offer only slightly bigger crickets, and add in some mealworms and then baby ('pink') mice (pre-killed), and occasionally a wax worm (these are fattening and should only be a treat). Smaller food items are more nutritious and more efficiently digested than fewer bigger items. Feed every 2 days or more often if they look hungry.

Adults can be fed a balanced diet of small mice (pre-killed) (20-30% of diet – do not overfeed these), 4 week old crickets (40-50% of diet), mealworms or king mealworms (but these are less digestible and nutritionally valuable than crickets) (10-20% of diet) as well as plant matter (ideally 10-15% of diet but some dragons won't eat this!).

Feed every 2-3 days, more often if they look hungry. For plant matter, try chopped and grated vegetables or soft fruit. Avoid kale, spinach and broccoli. Too much banana can be fattening. A calcium supplement should be used to dust crickets and plant matter every 2nd feed and a vitamin supplement once weekly.

### **Handling**

Adult water dragons will allow themselves to be picked up and handled for a while, but this should not be overdone. Hold loosely cupped in your hand as they do not like to be clasped. Children under 5 should not be allowed to handle them. An upset water dragon will wriggle and probably try to bite and/or defaecate. Keep the dragons indoors, even in hot weather.

Always wash your hands thoroughly after handling any reptile.

### **Miscellaneous**

Water dragons are less demanding than green iguanas as they grow to smaller sizes, but are still challenging to keep owing to their need for space and water.

The snout of each animal should be regularly checked for injury, something the dragons are prone to in captivity until happy in their environment.

A good guide is "The General Care and Maintenance of Green Water Dragons, Sailfin Lizards and Basilisks" by Philippe de Vosjoli.

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### **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 water dragon 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 water dragon 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 Water Dragon'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.