



## BEFORE YOU BUY A LIVE ANIMAL

1) Learn the animal's full technical name. This will help you research important information you will need to care for your animal. Find out the life-expectancy of the animal. Any animal purchase is a long-term commitment to care for, protect, and provide for an animal from now until it passes away. For many exotic animals, that could be 20 to 50 years.

2) Research its proper care requirements, including:

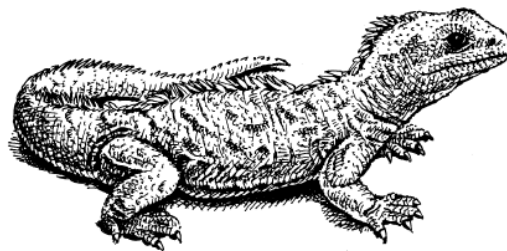
- a) Cage size/type requirements and specialized substrate requirements.
- b) Internal cage design requirements: Some herps require a desert-like terrarium, some an arboreal plant-filled terrarium, and some an aquarium. Some need only a small water bowl: others a large soaking pan. True chameleons do best in screen cages, whereas most other herps will do ok with more solid sides. All need some sort of hideaway area, and many need a localized moist area within an otherwise dry vivarium.
- c) Temperature requirements and how to meet them: Many reptiles will require supplemental heat during the winter while others require hibernation. Many salamanders will require supplemental cooling in the summer. Commercial "hot rocks" are to be avoided, due to possible burns. Some herps do better with under tank heaters than with lights, but not arboreal herps who need lights or a room heater.
- d) Humidity requirements: Some herps must be kept very dry; others must be misted several times a day.
- e) Light requirements: Many diurnal lizards and most turtles and tortoises do best under wide spectrum lighting, such as Vita-liteR or natural sunlight. Be aware that many herps have specific UVB (sun equivalent) requirements and must have special UVB rated light bulbs to maintain bone growth and health.
- f) Food requirements: Learn what to feed them, how to give vitamin/mineral supplements and where to acquire specialized foods.
- g) Socialization requirements: Some species do best in groups; other species tend to fight, especially males with males.

3) Learn what to expect when it grows up: Burmese, reticulated and African rock pythons, anacondas, boa constrictors, African spur-thighed tortoises, Iguanas, and many monitor species will all rapidly grow from cute little juveniles into huge adults with special management problems. Are you truly ready for a 15 foot snake that should never be handled alone or an 80 pound tortoise that has to be carried in every night or might like to ram people?

4) Learn the typical behaviors of the species: Some species tend to be very docile: others quite nasty. Some species are very hardy and easily cared for: while others are extremely delicate and will need a lot of attentive care to keep them healthy.

5) Calculate in the cost: In addition to the purchase price, consider the feeding requirements, the cost of habitat accessories and maintenance, upgrades to larger habitats as the animal grows, and regular annual veterinary check-ups. Plus the possible costs of emergency veterinary care. This should all be planned for before you buy.

DO NOT ACQUIRE A LIVE ANIMAL UNLESS YOU CAN MEET ALL OF ITS CARE REQUIREMENTS IMMEDIATELY AND FOR DECADES INTO THE FUTURE.



Prepared by: **SAN DIEGO HERPETOLOGICAL SOCIETY**

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