

Common Diseases and Disorders of Iguanas

A PowerPage Presented By



The green iguana (*Iguana iguana*) has become the most common of all reptile pets in the United States. Most disorders and diseases of reptiles are related to improper husbandry. This PowerPage reviews the common diseases of iguanas. A separate PowerPage covers the most important features of iguana physiology and husbandry.

Iguanas as a Reservoir of Zoonotic Disease

- Estimated up to 90% of pet iguanas harbor intestinal Salmonella
 - Often implicated as an asymptomatic, zoonotic disease reservoir
 - Assume that all iguanas are potential sources of infection
- Young, old, and immunocompromised individuals are at greater risk for infection
- Proper hygiene for handling iguanas includes:
 - Washing hands before and after handling
 - Maintain clean cages
 - Immediate and safe removal of feces
- May harbor other important fecal-oral organisms capable of causing zoonotic enteritis:
 - Bacteria
 - Campylobacter
 - Klebsiella
 - Aeromonas
 - Protozoa
 - Cryptosporidia

General Signs of Disease in Iguanas

- Sick iguanas often show signs of:
 - Decreased activity
 - Inappetance
 - Heat seeking
 - Isolation
 - Subtle skin color changes (dull or dark)
 - Abnormal shedding (dysecdysis)
 - Changes in color of feces and urates

Specific Diseases of Iguanas

Metabolic bone disease

- A number of disorders related to imbalance of vitamin D3, calcium, and phosphorous.
 - These substances are needed for bone growth and maintenance, and blood coagulation
- Causes of nutritional metabolic bone disease (NMBD)
 - Improper diet
 - **Inadequate lighting**
- Renal metabolic bone disease can also occur due to chronic kidney disease
- Clinical signs
 - Bony protuberances in long bones

- Vertebral column of the back and tail
 - Lower jaw
- Softening of these bones is also possible
 - Leads to pathologic fractures
- Muscle weakness, lethargy and reluctance to move
- Diagnosis
 - Usually based on clinical appearance and investigation of husbandry practices
- Treatment
 - Provide proper diet
 - Provide calcium supplementation
 - Provide optimal temperatures
 - Provide appropriate UV light

Ulcerative stomatitis “mouth rot”

- More common in snakes and chelonians than iguanas
- In iguanas, usually due to poor husbandry
- Chronic trauma/excoriations to rostrum from persistent rubbing on caging materials
- Secondary bacterial infection results in inflammation, ulceration, or abscessation
- Clinical signs
 - Plaque formation
 - Erythema of gingiva
 - Increased salivation
 - May progress to septicemia and pneumonia
- Treatment
 - Local debridement
 - Systemic antibiotics
 - Improving patient’s environment

Dysecdysis

- Term for difficult or abnormal shedding
- Iguanas normally shed skin in pieces (in contrast to snakes which shed in one piece)
- Clinical appearance
 - Dry, flakey patches of dead skin
- Treatment
 - Review husbandry practices
 - Most common cause of dysecdysis is improper humidity

Dystocia (Egg binding)

- A relatively common disorder in iguanas
- Etiology is not always known and is likely multifactorial
- Most commonly seen in
 - First-time breeding females
 - Females who have previously retained eggs
 - Females bearing infertile clutches
- Possible reasons include
 - Reproductive tract obstruction
 - Abnormal egg shape
 - Malformed pelvic canal
- Possible contributing factors may include
 - Poor husbandry
 - Malnutrition



- Improper nesting site
- Absence of opposite sex (iguanas and lizards can produce and lay eggs without mating)
- Lack of exercise
- Poor physical condition of the female
- Clinical signs
 - Depression
 - Weakness
 - Evidence of straining
 - Prolapse of cloacal or reproductive tissues
- Treatment
 - Rule out obstruction of the oviduct first
 - Several options including:
 - Increasing environmental temperature and humidity may be helpful
 - Physical manipulation
 - Hormone treatment
 - Oxytocine or arginine vasotocin
 - Aspiration of egg contents followed by physical removal
 - Abdominal surgery

References

References:

1. Jacobson, E.R. 2003. *Biology, Husbandry and Medicine of the Green Iguana*. Krieger Publishing Co., Malabar, FL.
2. Kaplan, M. 2000. *Iguanas For Dummies*. Wiley Publishing, Inc., Hoboken, NJ.
3. Mader, D.R. 2006. *Reptile Medicine and Surgery*. Second edition. Elsevier Inc., St. Louis, MO.

