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This handout is intended to provide only very general guidelines. Consult with your veterinarian about other aspects of advanced care that can be considered to ensure adequate health.

General Information

Uromastyx, also known as spiny-tailed lizards, are native to Asia and Africa. There are a total of 18 species of uromastyx that range from many regions, but they are primarily arid, steppe habitats. Most species of uromastyx are between 10 and 18 inches in length, except for the Egyptian uromastyx, which can exceed 30 inches in length. This caresheet serves as a general guideline for most species seen in captivity, but some species may have differences in husbandry.

<u>Lifespan</u>

With adequate husbandry and care, the average lifespan is 15-20 years.

Sexing

If you look at the underside of the tail just past the vent, males should have two bulges side by side where the hemipenes (reproductive organs) sit in the base of the tail. The absence of these bulges indicates a female. Males also tend to have larger femoral pores as adults that can fill with a waxy substance (normally used for marking their scent on rocks). This substance is normal, however, if you notice any redness or swelling in any of these pores, they may require treatment by your veterinarian.

Housing

Uromastyx need large enclosures, 40 gallon tank or larger is recommended. They do best when kept individually. Multiple hides should be available in different areas of the cage to allow for thermoregulation. Stacked rocks (stable so they can't fall), logs, PVC pipes, etc. make great hides and encourage natural behaviors.

Substrate

The ideal substrate for uromastyx is heavily debated. While many keepers are able to use sand successfully, there have been cases of sand impactions in uromastyx. With excellent nutrition, calcium supplementation, and temperature regulation the risk of sand impaction decreases. Millet seed still allows burrowing behavior without being as much of a risk of impaction, but it can still happen. Reptile carpet or newspaper is still the safest substrate to use if ample hides/climbing rocks are provided.

Lighting and temperature

Uromastyx need a warm place to bask (**110-120 degrees**) on one side of the cage in order digest food properly. The other side of the cage should be cooler (**80-85 degrees**) so they can appropriately thermoregulate. A thermometer should be placed at both ends of the cage or a laser thermometer may be used to measure temperatures. Lights should be on for 10-12 hours each day and total darkness is recommended at night- a ceramic heat lamp may be used to keep the enclosure warmer if needed but avoid nighttime infrared bulbs. Night temperatures should be greater than or equal to 65 degrees.

Uromastyx MUST have UVB light to survive and a lack of UVB will lead to Metabolic Bone Disease, severe deformation, and even death. A commercially available UVB bulb is necessary as UVB does not penetrate glass or plastic so having the cage

near a window does not work. Look for UVB listed specifically on retail packaging before buying. T5 UVB bulbs provide better zones of UVB than compact fluorescents. After about 6 months of use, most bulbs will stop emitting adequate levels of UVB, even though they are still shining, so it's important to change the bulb every 6 months.

Humidity

Humidity should be quite low (30% or less) to simulate the arid environment they're native to and should be measured by a hygrometer.

<u>Diet</u>

Uromastyx are herbivores and require a variety of high quality vegetables. Uneaten food should be removed after 24 hours. The following is a short list of commonly used food based on nutritional value. Greens should be chopped/torn into pieces and offered in a shallow bowl. Gutloaded insects can be offered occasionally but studies on wild uromastyx indicate insects make up less than 5% of their diet as adults.



Supplementation

Lightly dust all food items with a calcium carbonate or calcium gluconate supplement (without phosphorus or vitamin D3, as this can lead to toxicity) 1-2 times weekly. A reptile multi-vitamin may be used once monthly.

Water

Having a water source in the cage is also a subject of debate as elevated humidity can cause respiratory infections and other health problems. However, it is a huge misconception that they do not need water as a desert animal. Having a small bowl of water in the cage will not raise humidity significantly. Furthermore, in the wild uromastyx do inhabit humid burrows. Decreasing the availability of water can cause chronic low-level dehydration which causes kidney disease that we are seeing more and more frequently in captive reptiles as they age. It is best to spray water on their food with each feeding to encourage hydration in addition to always having fresh water available in the case they choose to use it.

Common medical conditions

Metabolic bone disease

- This is caused by a deficiency of calcium, ultraviolet light, and/or vitamin D3 that can lead to numerous problems including poor bone quality and pathologic fractures.
- Neonatal and juvenile reptiles, as well as reproductively active females have a higher demand for calcium and are more vulnerable to this condition.

Reproductive disease

- Egg binding/dystocia eggs become too large or misshapen and are unable to be delivered
- Coelomitis a ruptured egg releases yolk into the body cavity resulting in a severe bacterial infection
- Follicular stasis egg development stops and inactive follicles take up space in the body cavity
- Females should be provided with a laying or nest box filled with loose substrate to mimic natural behaviors of laying eggs under the soil to avoid reproductive issues

Obesity

- This happens when they are fed a diet too high in fat or they are not provided with sufficient space for exercise.
- Obesity can lead to diseases of the heart, liver and joints. Monitors are particularly prone to a condition called hepatic lipidosis which is where fat is mobilized and stored in the liver which left untreated can result in liver dysfunction or even failure.

Retained shed (dysecdysis)

- If humidity or temperatures are inappropriate, this can lead to pieces of retained shed
- If left untreated, retained shed can restrict blood flow and cause loss of the tips of their toes

References

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