



Zoo, Avian, Aquatic and Unusual Pets
Veterinary Consultancy

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Shedding and your reptile

Why does my reptile shed it's skin?

Reptile skin has no elasticity. This essentially means that as they grow, their skin does not grow with them! They need to remove their old skin to make way for their new larger skin. That process is called ecdysis (the scientific name for shedding).

How does my reptile shed their skin?

Snakes will usually shed their skin all in one go. Leaving a perfect outline of their body behind- this includes their fused eyelid structure commonly termed as their spectacles. Lizards and Chelonia will shed in patches.

First a new layer of skin forms under the old one. When this new layer is complete a proteinaceous lymph fluid between the new layer of skin and the old one is formed. You will notice your reptiles skin become duller in colour in the areas of shedding, in snakes this is seen all over and often snakes will develop blue eyes. The lymph fluid forces the old outer layer of skin to separate from the new skin. Once separation is achieved the lymph fluid is reabsorbed. The old skin is then ready to come off-shed! Your reptile will start the shedding process by rubbing against an abrasive surface. In snakes this starts at the corners of it's mouth. The old skin will be rolled back and the snake will emerge head first from it's old skin.

What can I do to help?

The stimulus for a reptile to shed can depend on a number of factors. These include the time of year, their health status and their age.

Snakes



Shedding occurs in one go over a period of a few days to two weeks.

Provide an abrasive structure such as:

- **Drift wood**-clean/sterilise this by: if small enough bake in your oven for 20 minutes at 100°C or if larger soak in F10 solution or bleach for half an hour and then allow to dry for a minimum of 48 hours.
- **Branches** : always use safe branches such as Hazel, Willow or Fruit tree branches and clean these appropriately using the method mentioned above.



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- **Rocks:** ensure they do not have overly sharp edges and again clean these appropriately

Provide a water dish in your snakes enclosure which they can comfortably bathe their whole body in.

Lizards



Shedding occurs in patches and usually takes one to two weeks. As above provide an abrasive structure or a humidity hide.

Ensure your lizard has regular baths and access to clean water which is large enough for them to be able to bathe in should they want to. Ensure the water provided is shallow. Allowing them to submerge their feet and back end only. They may place their head in the water to drink however they should be able to stand comfortably without their head being submerged.

Chelonian



As above provide abrasive structures they can rub themselves against.

Regularly bath your chelonian. Provide a shallow clean water dish in their enclosure which they can comfortably bath in.

Aquatic Chelonia rarely have problems shedding.

Humidity

Ensure your enclosures humidity is correct for your species. You may have to achieve this with regular misting and providing a humidity hide. We recommend having a humidity monitor in all enclosures. Incorrect humidity can also lead to other health related problems.

Why might my reptile have problems shedding?

Dysecdysis (the scientific term for incorrect shedding) may occur for many reasons. This includes disease, dehydration, scars on their skin and a lack of an abrasive surface to help them remove their skin.

- Ensure your reptile is healthy by having regular check-ups with us. We recommend at least twice a year health checks, which includes checking their faeces for any parasites.



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We especially recommend pre- and post-hibernation if you have a reptile that hibernates.

- Ensure your reptile has regular baths, access to water and the correct humidity requirements for their species.
- Be aware that if your reptile has had previous wounds the skin will have scarred. These areas do not always shed their skin correctly which can lead to problems.
- Provide abrasive surfaces as mentioned above.

What should I monitor when my reptile sheds?

Monitor your reptile for any shed that becomes stuck. This most commonly occurs over the spectacle or eye for snakes and limbs or toes in lizards. Ensure you have provided everything discussed above for them to remove the shed naturally. If they are still having trouble after 24 hours please call us.

In snakes a retained spectacle will make the eye look greyish or blueish in colour. You can also check your snakes shed and you will notice there will be two holes where the eye shed (spectacle) should be. If this is not removed it can lead to infection and eyesight problems for your snake.

Shed that is retained on limbs or toes in lizards can eventually cut off the circulation to those areas and is painful for your reptile.

Please DO NOT remove shed yourself by pulling it off. The skin underneath may not be ready and you could cause infections, serious damage and pain to your reptile.

When to call us

If your reptile is having trouble shedding it could be caused by an underlying factor. Book your reptile in for a health check and a husbandry check. The vet can assess your reptiles set-up, provide advice if needed and carry out a full health check on your reptile.