

# HOW TO KEEP YOUR VEILED CHAMELEON HEALTHY, HAPPY AND SAFE!

## How Should You House Your Veiled Chameleon?

- Provide a screened enclosure: 16"x16"x30" (40x40x76cm) for juveniles (up to 8 months old).
- For adults, the minimum screened enclosure size should be 24"x24"x48" (61x61x122cm). Glass aquariums are not suitable enclosures as they do not allow for enough ventilation and can predispose the chameleon to respiratory and skin infections.
- The enclosure should have no substrate, only plain plastic or glass as cage flooring. Cage floor can be lined with paper towels changed regularly to maintain good hygiene.
- It should be easy to clean with good ventilation.
- Provide branches for climbing and artificial or real plants for shelter. Make sure to allow enough foliage to provide shelter for the chameleon and to allow for adequate leaf surface for water droplets to form.
- Maintain a gradient of temperatures in the daytime, from 72-80° F (22-27 degrees Celsius) on the cool side and 85-100° F (29-38 degrees Celsius) on the warm side. The nighttime temperature can drop but must remain above 40-50° F (5-10 degrees Celsius)

## Other Tips For a Happy, Healthy Veiled Chameleon:

- Take a newly purchased veiled chameleon to an exotic animal veterinarian for a wellness examination and fecal check for parasites.
- Quarantine new chameleons in a separate area of the house for at least 30 days.
- Keep chameleons physically and visually separate from one another.
- Deliver water by misting the cage twice daily and by using a drip system.
- Provide heat with a basking light 10-12 hours a day.
- Include exposure to artificial UVB lighting or natural sunlight 10-12 hours a day.

## It is important for a veiled chameleon to avoid:

- housing together with another chameleon
- sharp edges in the enclosure
- free roam of the house
- cats, dogs or other predators
- direct contact with heating elements or light sources
- excessive handling
- being too close to or direct contact
- temperatures that are too hot or too cool



## Most Common Disorders of Veiled Chameleons:

- Malnutrition, including metabolic bone diseases and dehydration
- Reproductive disease, such as egg binding
- Toenail loss / foot infections
- Intestinal parasites
- Respiratory / sinus / ocular infections
- Stomatitis / periodontal disease
- Abscesses / cellulitis / osteomyelitis
- Hypovitaminosis A / ocular diseases
- Infections (Abscesses / cellulitis / osteomyelitis)
- Kidney disease
- Hemipene prolapse

Many diseases can be prevented with regular veterinary care, proper diet and housing. For these reasons, it is important to develop a relationship with a veterinarian who is experienced in reptile preventive care, medicine and surgery. For help in finding a reptile veterinarian in your area, contact the Association of Reptilian and Amphibian Veterinarians (ARAV) by visiting [ARAV.org](http://ARAV.org) and click on "Find a Vet" or contact the American Board of Veterinary Practitioners by visiting [ABVP.com/diplomate](http://ABVP.com/diplomate).

## Suggested reading:

- Essential Care of Chameleons (Herpetocultural Library) by Philippe De Vosjoli
- Care & Breeding of Chameleons (Herpetocultural Library) by Philippe De Vosjoli and Gary Ferguson

Text by Marc H. Kramer, DVM.

Text updated by Angela M. Lennox, DVM, Dipl ABVP (Avian), Dipl ABVP (ECM), 2013.

Text edited by Louisa Asseo, DVM, Dipl. ABVP (Canine/Feline) and Anneliese Strunk, DVM, Dipl. ABVP (Avian), 2017.

Published by



## VEILED CHAMELEON

Veiled chameleons (*Chamaeleo calyptratus*) are large, colorful and robust lizards indigenous to coastal regions of Yemen and Saudi Arabia. They are now well established in captivity. While all chameleons can be challenging to keep, veiled chameleons may be the most widely recommended for the novice reptile keeper. Veiled chameleons are solitary and should be kept singly.

A characteristic feature of this species is the impressively high casque on the head. Adult males have a higher casque than females. Some authorities have suggested that the casque may serve to collect and channel water, such as morning dew drops or fog, into the mouth. Others believe that it functions to dissipate heat. A more recent hypothesis suggests that it may amplify a low frequency "buzzing" used by this species to communicate with one another.

Veiled chameleons also possess prehensile tails, long whiplike tongues, independently moving eyes, zygodactyl feet and a spectacular array of changing colors.

## What to Expect from Your Veiled Chameleon

Chameleons are unique, attractive and fascinating lizards with challenging care requirements. Providing proper care demands dedication and preparation. Veiled chameleons are among the largest, most resilient and most popular chameleons in the pet marketplace. They are well known for their beauty, extreme territoriality and aggressive behavior. Veiled chameleons can tolerate moderate handling by their owners, but in general are considered display animals that do not fare well with excessive handling.

## Is Your Veiled Chameleon a Male or Female?

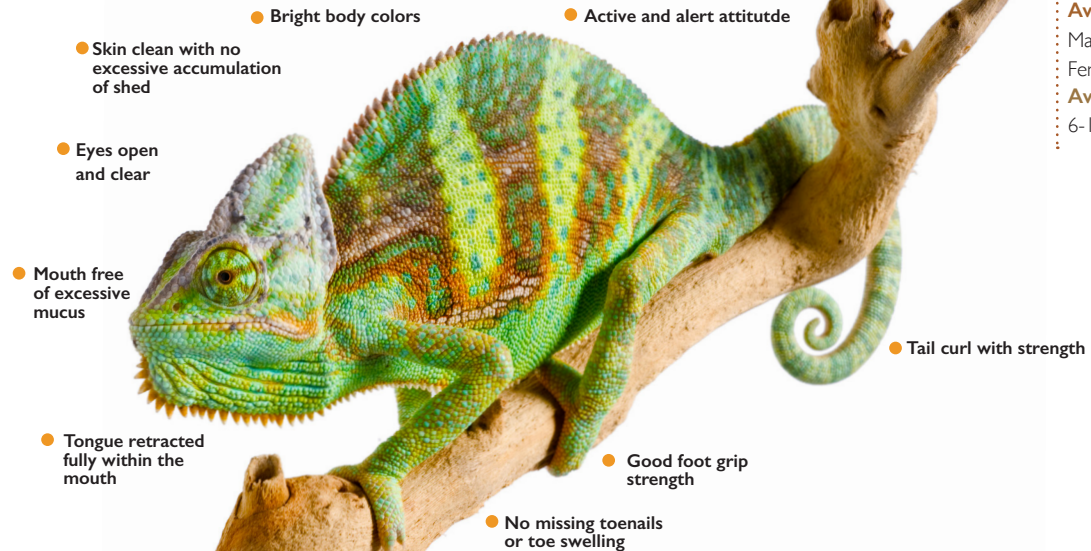
The easiest way to sex a veiled chameleon of any age is to look for a small "tarsal spur" on the back of the hind leg. These are present in males and are absent in females. Additionally, males possess a larger casque height than females and have a greater total body length. Males and females display distinctively different color patterns.

## What Should You Feed Your Chameleon?

Veiled chameleons feed primarily on live, moving insect prey. Vegetation is consumed by some veiled chameleons and may also be part of their captive diet.

- The insect portion of the diet can consist of commercially-raised crickets, silkworms, roaches, mealworms, superworms, waxworms and other live insects. Wild-collected insects are also beneficial, as long as they are collected from a pesticide-free area.
- Prey items should be fed a high quality diet ("gut-loaded") for at least 48 hours before feeding them out.
- Larger chameleons might take occasional snails and small lizards.

# WHAT YOUR VETERINARIAN LOOKS FOR IN A HEALTHY VEILED CHAMELEON



**NOTE: Most, if not all, reptiles carry Salmonella bacteria in their intestinal tract and intermittently or continuously shed these bacteria in their feces, so they are unsuitable pets for very young children and those with compromised immune systems. Good hygiene must always be practiced around all reptiles, including box turtles. For more information, please see the handout, Salmonella Information for Reptile Owners at [ARAV.org/special-topics/](http://ARAV.org/special-topics/).**

## Vital Statistics

- **Total length:**  
Males 17-24 in (43-61 cm)  
Females 10-18 in (25-33 cm)
- **Body weight:**  
Males 100-200 g  
Females 90-120 g
- **Average life span:**  
Males: 4-8 years  
Females: 2-4 years
- **Average sexual maturity:**  
6-10 months

- Live prey may be offered either in deep containers or allowed to free roam. Be aware that hungry freeroaming insects can chew on chameleons and will sometimes cause injury. Chameleons need to be conditioned to eat from a container, but once accomplished, this will reduce insect dispersal in the enclosure.
- Prey items should be offered once to twice a day for juveniles and every other day to adults. Prey items should not be longer than the width of the chameleon's head.
- For vegetation, try offering a shallow bowl with mixed greens and assorted chopped vegetables and fruits, hibiscus flowers or ficus plants.

## Water and Supplementation

- Free-ranging chameleons drink the dew from leaves and other wet surfaces. In captivity, they generally will not drink from a bowl. Their enclosure should be misted once to twice daily so that they drink from wet surfaces as they do in the wild. Water should also be provided by a "drip system," which can range from simple drip cups and melting ice cubes to more elaborate automatic drip line systems. Chameleons that do not consume enough water are susceptible to dehydration, which can lead to severe illness.
- Dusting prey items with calcium and vitamin supplements should be done immediately prior to feeding these items to chameleons. Discuss a plan for supplementation with your veterinarian. General guidelines are to provide calcium carbonate (without Vitamin D3) daily in juveniles and every other day in adults. Vitamins with a good source of preformed Vitamin A should be supplemented weekly to both juveniles and adults.

