



## BRISBANE BIRD & EXOTICS VETERINARY SERVICE

*Quality Care in Sickness and in Health*



### Consultation Hours:

Monday & Wednesday	9.00am to 1.00pm 3.00pm to 7.00pm
Tuesday, Thursday, Friday	9.00am to 12.00pm 3.00pm to 6.00pm
Saturday	9.00am to 1.00pm

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Welcome to our Brisbane Bird and Exotics Veterinary Service newsletter! In this edition, we cover bird diets and foraging toys. We also examine appropriate reptile husbandry. Our pet of the month is Naga, a Black Headed Python. The last page has some great promotions as well. So jump in and enjoy!

Looking back over the last 12 months, it has been a busy year for all of the staff of Brisbane Bird and Exotics Veterinary Service. Many of you wonder what our staff are involved with when they are not directly dealing with you and your pets. Let's look at the year of Deborah Monks, one of our veterinarians, to give you an idea of the additional involvement our staff have in the avian and exotic profession.

For the second year, Deborah is President of the Australasian Chapter of the Association of Avian Veterinarians (AAVACO). Last October, she also helped to organise the annual conference (in Brisbane), as well as presenting a review paper on avian psittacosis at the event. This year, she is again presenting a paper at the conference, which is being held in Adelaide. Last year's AAVAC conference was in conjunction with the Australian Veterinary Association Special Interest Group – The Unusual and Exotic Pet group, so Deborah attended that conference as well.

She is also on two committees with the European College of Avian Medicine and Surgery. As part of her responsibilities for one of the committees – the Examination Committee, she had to fly to Utrecht, The Netherlands in March to be a co-examiner for two diplomate candidates. This trip was combined with continuing education – the European Association of Avian Veterinarians biennial conference was combined with the European College of Avian Medicine and Surgery biennial conference and Deborah attended both. It was certainly a busy 3 weeks away from the practice in March!

On her return from Europe, Deborah spoke at the National Pheasant and Waterfowl Convention, which was held in Chermside this year. Her topics included 'Avian Form and Function – What does this mean for you as an owner' and an overview of the Great Bus-

tard Reintroduction Project in the United Kingdom.

Last week, Deborah was down at the Gold Coast examining candidates for the Membership Level Australian College of Veterinary Scientists in both Avian Health and Unusual and Exotic Pet Medicine. All 3 candidates passed, so we can welcome new practitioners to the field of treating the species that we all love!

Deborah is a reviewer for the Australian Veterinary Journal, and throughout the year she receives manuscripts in avian medicine for peer-review.

This year, quite a bit of time went into researching and purchasing new equipment. Brisbane Bird and Exotics Veterinary Service can now boast a digital x-ray machine, a more controlled patient warming system, and an additional fluid pump. This is on top of moving into new rooms within the hospital so that we now have a dedicated small mammal (mainly guinea pig) ward, and more avian wards as well. We've upgraded our reptile caging, so we now have more options for hospitalising these patients.

Currently, Deborah is working on two papers that she will be presenting in October – one at the avian conference in Adelaide, and the second at the Unusual and Exotic Pet conference in Sydney.

So, you can see that when not doing actual clinical work, we keep ourselves quite busy!



## Housing your Reptile Safely

One of the most important factors of reptile husbandry is enclosure safety. As our pet of the month has shown us, it is easy for our cold blooded friends to get themselves into trouble quickly. Prevention is always the best way to manage such problems and setting up your reptile's environment properly can go a long way toward ensuring that you and your reptile will be as safe as possible. You will need to make certain that the enclosure is



escape proof but can maintain a constant temperature gradient while being adequately ventilated. Protective heat light cages are essential if heating enclosures with heat bulbs. Serious burns can rapidly happen if bulbs are left unprotected. Another factor when it

comes to enclosure safety is choice of furnishing and substrates. Newspaper or paper towel is the most popular choice when it comes to substrates.



Another safe option for substrate is Astro Turf (fake grass), ensuring though that the whole section is cleaned and sterilised when your routine cleaning is carried out. Pellet form kitty litters can cause serious problems if swallowed and ingested. Pine bark



can cause respiratory difficulties due to spores which can be retained within the pine bark chips. For burrowing species, you can also use recycled paper kitty litter. Newspaper and paper towel is the also the easiest option when it comes to maintaining enclosure hygiene and cleanliness. Removing the reptile from the enclosure at feeding times ensures that sand impaction in the gastrointestinal tract is avoided.

There are numerous commercially available reptile enclosures from pet shop retailers. Discuss your options of enclosure set up with experienced pet store attendants, or with us, and you should get good advice of the best enclosure for the species that you wish to keep. Spending the extra money on a good enclosure will have save you time and possible emergency vet trips in the future. The worst feeling is finding that your newly purchased pet reptile has escaped or been seriously injured in an unsuitable enclosure.

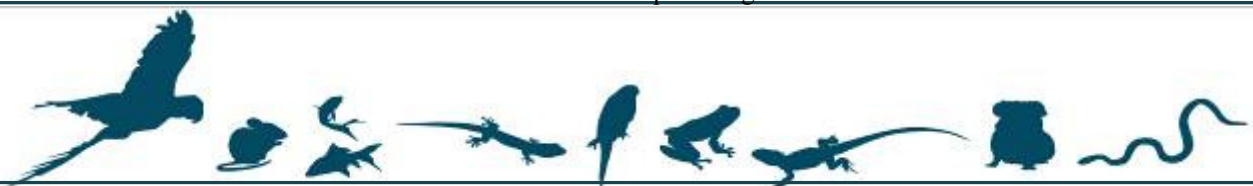
## Ooops! I don't seem to fit here!!

Naga the 3 year old male Black headed python came to see us for a rather unusual reason! He had been moved out of his girlfriend's tank 3 days prior and perhaps was getting a little lonely. He was rushed into the practice, and we were met with quite a tricky situation. He had managed to get himself stuck through the metal light fitting of his tank in a valiant effort to escape. His head had made it through the small hole but unfortunately for him, the rest of his body had not. We were presented with a snake that had a 1/5<sup>th</sup> of his body stuck through a piece of metal. He was very lethargic and not able to put up much of a fight. The only way to remove it was to cut through it with a dremel ( hand held cutting tool) which was done VERY slowly and carefully! His head and body in front of the constriction were very swollen so we had to be sure not to cut him trying to free him! Once removed, he oddly felt a whole lot better! He was bandaged for the night, given pain relief, anti-

biotics and housed in a nice warm reptile cage to recover from the day's excitement as the following day he would be having surgery to fix his wounds. Overnight he kindly removed his bandages for us so



was clearly feeling much better in himself. Once he was anaesthetised, the full extent of his injuries was revealed. He had two wounds on his underside and two on his back that were through the skin and into the muscle. These were lavaged, debrided and carefully sutured closed. He recovered very well from the anaesthetic and was back to his normal feisty self by the next day. He was even striking at us! He was sent home with antibiotics on the third day feeling whole lot happier. His owner assures us that now there are absolutely no gaps of any size he might possibly try to escape through!



## Foraging—Nobody Gets a Free Lunch!

In the wild, birds would spend several hours each day looking for food. They fly from tree to tree, area to area, and then, when they finally find food, they often have to work quite hard to extract it from the seed pod, branch, ground etc.

Compare that to our pet birds, who have their food plonked down in front of them. Foraging for food, which would take a wild bird 6-10 hours every single day, takes our pet birds less than 1 hour. No wonder our birds get bored with their caged lives! Harnessing these foraging instincts of our feathered friends will exercise them both physically and mentally and can often help to reduce or extinguish unwanted behavioural problems in parrots.



Depending on your bird, there are some easy ideas that can be used at home to enrich your pet's day. Toilet rolls with food inside them are perfect for small birds to creep inside or roll around. Fruit skewers hanging in slightly difficult to access areas test their gymnastic ability. Moving the food bowls every day to a new location or covering them with tissue to be broken through before getting your food can be exciting - as long as they know that's where the food will be! Remember that the bird needs to be trained to forage for food. Otherwise, an unplanned diet may result!



A foraging pit rather than dishes can be useful for some, using food in a tray with recycled paper kitty litter (Breeders Choice brand) will encourage digging to find food. Hanging items, artificial or real, that have holes can have treats placed inside to be worked out over the day. Even a boring looking branch with leaves and bark still attached can provide hours of joy as they chew, rip and destroy the new object in their home.

It doesn't take much on our behalf to make their days enjoyable and fun. And fun is not always meant to be clean and tidy! In fact, the more of a mess they seem to be able to create, the more enjoyment your bird will receive from the toy.

For the more 'intellectual' bird, there are toys designed to make them really think and work for treats. As the pictures show, there are some maze type toys where the bird must manipulate the object to get the treats to run through. Others which require sections to be turned and moved to allow treats to drop down into each new section before dropping out the bottom of the toy. These more advanced toys are designed for the larger and stronger parrots as they can require some effort for the parrots to hold and maneuver. We supply a brand called Foragewise. Their website is [www.NaturesInstinct.com](http://www.NaturesInstinct.com)

We also supply a selection of 'natural toys and perches' which are all made from tree and plant pieces and are made with the idea that they will be chewed and stripped of the bark and nut pieces are eaten. These come from a supplier who is local and also runs a rescue centre for parrots. The range of stock has therefore been developed with behaviour issues in mind.

Both toy ranges have the full backing of Jim Mckendry—our bird behaviorist ([www.pbec.com.au](http://www.pbec.com.au)). He uses them on many of his own birds and will often recommend a particular item in conjunction with a behaviour modification program with his clients.



## The Right Diet for Your Parrot

Do you ever really think about how much your bird's life is different to that of its wild born relatives? The space restriction? The limited exercise? And most importantly, how its natural diet is now so different to what it would get in the wild? It's our job as their owners to try and provide this as best we can while still having our feathered friends content and happy.

Any wild bird has to spend its day foraging for the food it requires rather than getting a dish full of seed in the same convenient spot every day.



They also only receive certain seeds/fruits/berries/grasses and the time of year they are in season and available, not all year round as the store provides. That is the key to balancing their diet.

Any bird given a dish of seed will go straight for the millet and/or sunflower seeds. These are the highest in fat and therefore the most tasty. The majority of pet birds will only eat these despite having a bowl of varied seed. Seed is also deficient in 32 different vitamins and minerals that birds require daily. That is the equivalent of a human living solely on McDonalds and mars bars! Not a healthy thought.

We can get around this by converting birds to a pelleted diet. This takes all the nutrients that they require, crushes them together and produces a pellet. This way they can not pick and choose which items they will or won't eat. Pellets are lower in fat and are contain all the essential vitamins and minerals they require. They do however have to be carefully converted onto a pelleted food as birds are very cautious with new things, and incorrectly changing the diet may cause serious problems. Cockatiels must also stay on a 50/50 pellet/seed diet as they can be prone to kidney problems on a fully pellet diet.

Daily offerings of fresh fruit and vegetables is also a way to supplement their diet. Most things we eat are fine. Leafy greens, beans, peas, apple, pear, celery, melons, corn. Use a variety to encourage a healthy diet. Absolutely never feed avocado, garlic, onion or rhubarb. These are very toxic to birds and can kill.

Feel free to discuss a diet change with any of our staff!!



**Harrison's Bird Food- Starter Packs—A 454g bag of Harrison's Bird Food, complete with a booklet, a personally tailored Pellet Conversion Program and a Mirrored Shelf. All this, with a 10% discount!**

