

Care Cards

Collared Lizards



The black collars that encircle their necks easily identify collared lizards, of the genus *Crotaphytus*. Although the collars vary in size and shape between individual species, all members of the genus have them. Collared lizards possess very large rear limbs when compared to their front ones. Occasionally, when frightened, they will actually run without their front legs touching the ground, using their tails for balance. Collared lizards are some of the most colorful reptiles in North America. Along with their bright coloration, collared lizards are popular pets because they are relatively tame when compared to other lizard species. Additionally, collared lizards spend much of their time basking and moving about their enclosure unlike the sedentary lifestyle of most reptiles. In some parts of the country, collared lizards are also known as “mountain boomers” because they were thought to emit a loud vocalization.

Collared lizards are divided into two groups; *collaris* and *insularis*. The *collaris* group is characterized by a blunt nose and rounded tail. Males of this group have a blue-green to turquoise coloration. The oral mucosal lining of these lizards contains a black melanin pigment. This is easily observed when displaying an open-mouthed defensive response. The *insularis* group has a longer nose and a blunt tail. Males have less coloration but they do have inguinal patches. The lizards in this group also lack the black oral pigmentation.

Cage set up for captive collared lizards should mimic their natural environment as much as possible. Because of their terrestrial nature, the length of the enclosure is more critical than the height; the enclosure should be as large as possible. Remember, unlike other captive reptiles, collared lizards are active within their enclosure. Male lizards will be fully grown by three years of age. Females will continue growing slowly throughout their entire life. The preferred cage substrate for collared lizards is either child's play sand or crushed walnut. Care should be taken with either one when feeding the reptile, as both items are small enough to be accidentally ingested during feeding. Several rock piles will be necessary for normal activity as well as basking. A hide box will help the lizard adjust to its new home.

Collared lizards like their environment hot. The daytime temperature should be between 85-95 degrees Fahrenheit with a basking site around 100 degrees Fahrenheit. A cool area, with a hide box, should also be provided to allow the lizard to thermoregulate during the day. Full-spectrum ultraviolet lighting is necessary for proper vitamin D synthesis. Whenever possible the lizards should be exposed to direct, unfiltered sunlight. Most collared lizards will readily accept water from a bowl. For more stubborn lizards I recommend spraying the cage rocks with water. Many lizards will drink from the pooled water within the rock crevices and grooves.

Collared lizards have hearty appetites and should be fed daily during the spring and summer. They will accept a wide variety of insects including crickets, mealworms, grasshoppers, roaches and spiders. In captivity some adult collared lizards have also fed on other lizards and pinky mice. Caution should always be taken when feeding wild insects to prevent accidental pesticide



toxicity. Additionally, wild caught lizards may transmit parasites when used as food items. As summer ends, the lizard will decrease its feeding in preparation for hibernation.

Following winter hibernation, collared lizards are ready for breeding. Female collared lizards will begin follicular development by April. Females will develop orange spots on their neck and sides signaling the males that they are ready to mate. Males should be kept separated during this time to prevent territorial fighting. Young male collared lizards will have orange spots or bars on their back similar to breeding females. The purpose of this is to prevent adult male aggression so they can find their own territory.

The male usually initiates courtship. Following a series of head bobs, the male will grab the female by the back of the neck. If the female is receptive, she will be submissive to the male's advances and breeding will occur. If the female is not receptive for any reason, she will twist

and roll her body away from the male. Some females will even climb on the male's back to signal their non-receptive phase. Normally the collared lizard breeding cycle lasts until June.

In the wild, female collared lizards will deposit their eggs in a nest under a rock. In captivity a nest box filled with about 1 inch of damp sphagnum moss and a small hole for access will do fine. The female should be watched carefully for a sudden decrease in overall body size, indicating egg deposition. Following this event the female will return to her normal coloration. Female collared lizards will actively defend their eggs. Most females will have between two to four clutches during each cycle. The average clutch size is six eggs.

If possible, the eggs should be retrieved and placed in an incubator. A mixture of vermiculite and water at a ratio of 50:50 by weight is suggested. The temperature should be between 76-86 degrees Fahrenheit. By allowing the temperature to fluctuate between day and night, you will increase the potential for hatchlings of both sexes. Hatching occurs in 40-55 days. New hatchlings will have their yolk sacs attached for the first couple of days. Once the yolk sac has been absorbed, the newborns will start feeding. The newborn lizards should be fed small crickets dusted with a high-quality vitamin and mineral supplement. New hatchlings should not hibernate the first year. While the adults are hibernating, the young will have less competition for food.

Collared lizards are one of the most interesting and colorful of our native lizards. Although they are aggressive when first acquired, they calm down quickly and remain docile pets. Because of the potential for aggressive behavior, collared lizards are not recommended for young children.

