

## ***The Inland Bearded Dragon***

The inland bearded dragon (*Pogona vitticeps*, formerly classified in the genus *Amphibolurus*) is one of *Pogona* species native to Australia. The bearded dragons live in arid rocky semi-desert and the bordering open forest areas. Adept at climbing, the dragon spends time both in trees and bushes, on fenceposts, and on the ground. After spending the early morning hours basking on rocks, fenceposts or exposed branches, these omnivorous dragons begin to hunt for invertebrates and a wide range of small vertebrates. They also forage for soft plant matter, especially fruits and flowers. Although they are diurnal reptiles, they will spend the hottest part of the day in deep, cool burrows in the warmer parts of their range. Bearded dragons range in size from four to five inches when hatched to just short of two feet snout-tail length (STL). The color of their bodies range from browns, greys and reddish orange with lighter spots along their sides. When threatened, their color can darken considerably, especially the throat pouch. Bearded dragons reach reproductive age at one to two years of age. Older females lay up to sixteen eggs in the early summer in a shallow "nest" she has dug in sandy soil. Juveniles, which may weigh as little as 2.1 grams at hatching, are often banded and may have an orange strip near their eyes on the side of their head. As they age, the patterns become less distinct. When mature, the beard on the males darkens somewhat. During breeding season, the beards turn black. Males can further be differentiated from females by their preanal and femoral pores. The bearded dragon's blunt arrow-shaped head is typical of their agamid relatives. The scales along the skin of the throat and the side of the head have specialized into spiny points. The scales along the sides of their bodies also carry these pointy extensions. When threatened, the dragon flattens out its body to make it look wider, and, by using its hyoid bone, flares out the throat pouch. The threatening vision it projects is often further enhanced by a gaping mouth. In captivity, these social lizards adapt well to their human caretakers so much so that they generally stop giving threat displays, signalling their displeasure only by flattening their bodies.

Dragons are social animals which is one of the reasons they are so engaging and interested in their surroundings in captivity. They frequently become very secure in their environment, and so soon stop displaying their "beard." They perform a very distinctive "wave" which is a way of communicating non-aggression and, similar to iguanas, signal their recognition of other beings in their environment by flicking out their tongues.

### **HOUSING**

Hatchlings should be housed individually as they sometimes will nip others housed with them. Adult beardeds have been known to eat young beardeds, so young must be housed separately from adults as well. Beardeds can be very quick, making an enclosure which opens at the top a better choice; this will also reduce the chance of crickets escaping. Enclosures must be well ventilated; screen-topped tanks, and chameleon tanks (half of each side and the top is a screen which can be opened).

### **SUBSTRATE**

Astroturf (trim loose threads), butcher paper, unprinted newsprint or paper towels all make serviceable and easily cleaned substrates. Do not use shavings, sand, corn cob or food pellets due to the dangers if ingested and the respiratory problems caused by the dust. Gravel is difficult to clean and disinfect properly, and beardie enclosures need to be cleaned frequently.

## FURNISHINGS

Beardededs need basking and hiding areas. They also need branches for climbing and basking. A branch can be angled up toward the basking light, making that side of the tank the warmest. A hide log or box should be positioned in the cool side.

## HEAT

The temperature gradient during the day should ranged from 76-86 degrees, with a basking zone ranging from 90-105 degrees. Nighttime temps can drop no lower than the mid to high seventies. Use a subtank heating pad under the warma side, and 75 - 100 watt light bulbs as needed to boost the temps during the day. If you have to use a lightbulb to keep temps up at night, use a blue or green bulb, not white.

## LIGHT

As with other diurnal lizards, beardededs require at least 12 hours a day under a full-spectrum/uv light.

## FOOD

Beardededs are omnivorous lizards, and so require a varied diet of prey and plant foods. The plant foods (60-65% of diet) include all of the ingredients used in the iguana diet. Prey (35-40% of diet) include appropriately sized crickets, mealworms, king worms, mouse pinks and hissing cockroaches. If your dragon goes after the prey and ignores the plant food, feed the salad an hour or so before you offer the prey. Be sure to nutrient-load the prey (except pinks) for several days before feeding out. Young dragons should be fed five days a week, adults three to four times a week.

## WATER

Always have an easily accessible bowl of fresh water available.

## FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

The Advanced Vivarium Series has recently published a book on the care and maintenance of bearded dragons. In addition, articles on the beardededs have been published in some of the reptile magazines:

Christie, B. (1993) Captive husbandry and reproduction of the Inland BeardedDragon at the Indianapolis Zoo. *Captive Breeding* 1(2): 20 4pp  
Fogel, D. (1992) The central bearded dragon (*Pogona vitticeps*). *Rep & Amphib* Nov/Dec 1992: 2 3pp

\_\_\_\_\_ (1993) The inland bearded dragon (*Pogona vitticeps*). *The Vivarium* 4(5): 15 3pp