Aurora ANIMAL + HOSPITAL
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Chinese Water Dragon Caresheet

Please note these care sheets are intended for the average reptile owner to ensure that your pet is receiving basic care needed to have a healthy life and there are other aspects of advanced care that can be considered for healthy pets.

Brief Description

Chinese water dragons *(Physignathus cocincinus)* originate from Southeast Asia like south China, Cambodia, Thailand, etc., where they live in tropical rainforest environments. They grow to be 2-3 feet in length including the tail. They can be relatively docile reptiles, however they are difficult to maintain in captivity due to their size and habitat needs.



Lifespan

With proper care expected lifespan is 10-15 years on average.

Sexing

Males can be distinguished from females by their larger size, larger and more colorful heads, and hemipenes bulges at the bottom base of the tail.

Caging

Due to their size Chinese Water Dragons need large cages at least 5-6 feet tall and 5 feet long. As they are arboreal reptiles height is more important than width but the cage should be at least 3 feet wide to allow them to turn around easily. This generally necessitates a custom made cage to accommodate size and should be made from glass/plexiglass to help retain humidity. Originating from a tropical climate high humidity is very important to maintain.

Large branches should be available at multiple levels to allow climbing and the basking spot should be placed at the top of the cage. Shelves can also be added to allow resting areas. Live or artificial plants and leafy green foliage throughout the enclosure provide shelter and will make your water dragon feel more secure in its environment. If you choose to use live plants you might try Dracaena, Schefflera arboricola (umbrella plant), hibiscus, ficus bushes, Pothos, and spider plant.

Water

Water dragons are so named due to their affinity to soak and swim in water on a daily basis, therefore a pool at least 2 feet long should always be provided. It is recommended that water be provided in the form of a removable tub to allow for easier cleaning but can designed as part of the enclosure itself as long as a filtering system is incorporated. Most dragons defecate in their water as well as soaking so it will need to be cleaned daily.

Substrate

A good substrate to use is a combination of coco fiber, play sand and organic potting soil with about a 2-inch depth. This substrate holds humidity well and is not dusty. Other substrates that could be used include pure cypress mulch or a commercial forest bedding. Reptile carpet is also an appropriate substrate choice that is easy to maintain and keep clean. Avoid cedar/pine/aspen mulches, all sand, carefresh bedding, or alfalfa pellets.

Lighting and Temperature

Chinese Water Dragons need a warm place to bask (**90-95 degrees**) on one side of the cage in order digest food and nutrients properly. The other side of the cage should be cooler (**75-80 degrees**) so they don't overheat. A thermometer should be placed at the same level of the pet in the basking area to accurately measure temperatures. Lights should be on for 10-12 hours each day and then total darkness at night. Night temperatures can safely drop to 65 degrees so a night time heat source is not necessary in most homes.

Dragons MUST have UVB light to survive and a lack of UVB will lead to Metabolic Bone Disease, severe illness, and death. A bulb that specifically provides UVB is necessary as UVB does not penetrate glass or plastic, so having the cage near a window is not adequate. T5 or T8 Zoo Med Reptisun 10.0 or Arcadia 12% are the preferred high quality brands. After about 6 months of use the bulbs will stop emitting adequate levels of UVB, even though they are still shining, so it's important to change the bulb every 6 months.

Humidity
Humidity in the cage should be 70-80% at all times, which is admittedly difficult to maintain in our dry Colorado climate. An automatic misting system is often necessary to raise humidity multiple times a day. Open sided cages (screen, bars, etc.) will not maintain proper levels so a solid sided cage (wood, plexiglass, glass, etc) is recommended. Humidity should be monitored by a digital hygrometer.

Food
Chinese Water Dragons eat a combination of live insects and vegetables every day when young, and every other day as adults. The best insects to use are crickets, dubia roaches, and superworms, which should all be gutloaded. Other live insects that can be included in your dragon's diet are hornworms, earthworms, butterworms, and silkworms. Wax worms and mealworms should only be given as a treat because of the high fat content and low digestibility. Vegetables should be offered as part of a water dragon's diet but generally make up only about 10-20%. See the list below of vegetables to use.

Gutloading
Gutloading is the process of feeding crickets, superworms, and dubia roaches a nutritious diet so they can ultimately provide your reptile with the proper nutrients it requires as it would in nature. Supplementing with a calcium and multivitamin powder is important, but not sufficient alone.

Creating a well-rounded gutload at home can seem daunting but can actually be fairly inexpensive and easy to make! Each time you go to the store get one or two staple vegetables on the list above, then rotate them for something else next time. Make sure you wash all produce to eliminate pesticide residues and cut off the peel of fruits and vegetables as they have waxes and pesticides you can't wash off. The time from feeding insects, to your reptile eating those insects, should be 6-24 hours, and gutloading must be done before every feeding to be successful.

Staple Ingredients for Dragons and Insect Gutloading (Highest in calcium and other nutrients)					
					
Collard Greens	Turnip Greens	Mustard Greens	Escarole	Endive	Dandelion

Supplemental Insect Gutloading Ingredients (Use in minority ratio to staples listed above)					
					
Sweet Potato	Papaya	Kale	Butternut Squash	Berries	Mango
Commercial gutloads: Repashy Superload, Cricket Crack, Super Chow					

Avoid These Ingredients (Low in calcium and/or high in phosphorus, oxalates, goitrogens)
Idaho potatoes, cabbage, iceberg lettuce, spinach, broccoli, tomatoes, corn, grains, beans, bread, cereal, meat, eggs, dog food, cat food, fish food, canned or dried insects, vertebrates (pinkies, lizards). While convenient, some commercially available gutloads (Farms Orange Cubes, Fluker Farms High Calcium Cricket Diet, Nature Zone Cricket Bites) are low in calcium, imbalanced and/or insufficient for good nutrition.

Supplementation
A powdered calcium supplement like Repashy Calcium Plus should be used to lightly coat the crickets 3-4 times weekly until 2 years of age and then 1-2 times weekly after that. A multivitamin can be used less frequently (once or twice a month) if desired but with good nutrition this is not always necessary.