

An Experienced Vet is Worth the Search

Establishing a good working relationship with a veterinarian can be a challenge for any pet owner, but is a special challenge for the exotic pet owner. The exotic pet owner must find a vet who is willing to see their pet, knows something about their pet, and has the facilities, equipment and materials to treat their pet.

An interest in exotics doesn't necessarily equal proficiency in treating them. I say this from experience, as although I am fascinated with exotic pets, I have no special training in treating them medically. When I was practicing as a veterinarian, except for very routine care, I generally referred exotics to a specialist nearby. Thing may have changed a bit since I went to school, but during my training, exposure to exotics was still very imited even though I sought out extra exposure to exotic pets in my choice of clinical rotations. If at all possible, try to locate a vet who specializes in exotics and has taken specialized training (e.g. a residency in exotic animal medicine, or one who is board certified in an exotics specialty).

Such specialists can be hard to come by, so the next best is someone who has lots of experience treating exotic pets. Ask a potential veterinarian about their training, credentials, and memberships in specialty organizations such as the Association of Avian Veterinarians (AAV) or the Association of Reptile and Amphibian Veterinarians (ARAV). At the very least, choose a veterinarian with a real interest in exotic species and who is willing to learn about them and who will consult with a specialist when needed.

Personal recommendation or word of mouth is probably the most efficient way of finding a veterinarian. Friends, breeders, or organizations (e.g. the local herpetological society, other clubs) are good starting points. Other places to locate veterinarians include the yellow pages/phone directories (look for clinics that specifically advertise that they treat exotics), the state/provincial veterinary association directory, or even web pages that have veterinary directories (including the AAV and ARAV sites mentioned above). Several species specific web pages have sections where readers can submit contact information for veterinarians they have used.

Most importantly, do not wait until an emergency to find a vet. If your pet should get sick, a veterinarian with whom you feel comfortable and who is comfortable dealing with your pet will make the situation less stressful. An initial check up is well advised for any new pet and this is a good chance to see how a veterinarian handles your pet and how comfortable they are with your pet, and also to see if you and the veterinarian make a good match - sometimes there is a personality clash and you won't develop a good rapport with a certain veterinarian.

A veterinarian familiar with exotics will spend a good deal of time discussing the care and husbandry of a particular pet, as many problems with exotic pets are related to improper diet or husbandry. The veterinarian should also appear

confident handling your pet.

There are several criteria which can be used to evaluate a practice in general and the following web pages discuss these in detail:

- How to Find a Veterinarian - advice from About's Guide to Veterinary Medicine on finding and evaluating a vet, with a link to some online vet finder directories.
- How to Find an Avian Veterinarian - helpful tips for finding a veterinarian-g geared toward bird owners but also applicable to any exotic species.

For exotics there are more specific considerations, including:

- special training or continuing education related to exotic pet medicine
- how often exotic species are seen in their practice
- special facilities or equipment to handle exotic pets
- experience (personal or professional) and familiarity with the husbandry and medicine of a particular species

Finding the right vet can be a challenge and may not seem that important when your pet is healthy, but the effort will be well worth it if your pet should fall ill!