

Annual Examinations: Why Are They So Important?

Many pet owners know how important it is to take their dog or cat to the veterinarian for a yearly examination. But did you know that an annual examination is even more important for pet birds? Birds hide signs of illness. As prey rather than predator species, they have learned that showing weakness can attract predators. While this is an adaptive behavior in the wild, it becomes problematic in the safety of our living rooms. When your pet hides symptoms of illness, you remain unaware of the problem until it has become very severe.

Annual examinations are very important for birds. Regular check-ups will allow your veterinarian to identify and manage problems early on, before they become life-threatening. During the examination your veterinarian can screen your bird for changes in weight, abnormal posture or attitude, and breathing difficulties. An experienced avian veterinarian will also be able to note abnormalities in the feathers, skin, beak, eyes, ears, mouth, bones, muscles, abdomen, and vent. Depending on your bird's age and history, and the results of the physical examination, your veterinarian may suggest that some additional testing be performed. We recommend that most birds receive preventative screening blood work and gram stains yearly.

Safely Heating your Reptiles in Winter

Most reptiles kept as pets originate from warm climates, and supplemental heating is a necessity as the weather outside cools down. Multiple heat sources are usually required to adequately heat an enclosure. Heating your pet's cage from below using only a heat pad or hot rock is often inadequate, and can lead to severe burns as the pet huddles for warmth. Adding heat from above with a ceramic heat emitter or a heat light will help keep your pet's cage in the proper temperature range. Make sure your pet is unable to come into direct contact with the heat source. All reptile owners should learn what temperature range is right for their species of pet, and monitor the cage temperature with thermometers. For those reptiles which tolerate cooler temperatures at night, a heating pad under an insulated enclosure may be adequate to maintain the proper temperature level.

Some reptiles, such as desert tortoises, box turtles, and red-eared sliders, hibernate in the wild during the winter. In captivity these species can either be hibernated or kept awake and warm as during the rest of the year. Hibernating is not usually necessary, and can be harmful. If you would like to hibernate your pet, make sure to schedule an appointment with your veterinarian for a thorough physical examination and blood tests. Hibernation needs to be done with care, and hibernating a sick animal can be harmful or even fatal.

Myxomatosis in Rabbits

Myxomatosis is a devastating viral disease of domestic rabbits. Wild rabbits are carriers of this virus, which can be transmitted to pet bunnies by insects such as mosquitoes, ticks, and fleas. The disease can also spread by contact with an infected animal.

Affected rabbits develop a severe, overwhelming illness which is usually fatal. Early symptoms include swelling of the eyelids, loss of appetite, and fever. If you see any of these symptoms in your pet, make sure to isolate him from other rabbits and then call your veterinarian immediately.

The best way to prevent myxomatosis is to control external parasites such as mosquitoes, fleas, and mites. To this end, it is best to keep your pet indoors and to apply appropriate flea control as needed. If, however, your rabbit must remain outdoors, his hutch should be carefully enclosed with mosquito screens. Make sure that your rabbit is either indoors or behind mosquito netting during the highest mosquito activity time periods, dawn and dusk.