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Colorado Reptile Humane Society's Guide to the Care and Feeding of Bugs

General Information

CoRHS encourages a varied diet of crickets, zoophoba (commonly called “superworms”), waxworms, and mealworms for insect-eating lizards such as leopard geckos and bearded dragons. These bugs can be purchased from your local pet store. Use care in harvesting bugs from outside and ensure they are pesticide-free. Don't offer lightning bugs, fireflies, or boxelder bugs as these can be lethal, even in small quantities.

Habitat

Crickets and zoophoba need to be kept dry and well aerated. House them in a 5-10 gallon tank with a screen top or in a plastic critter-keeper. A large pickle jar with holes in the lid will work for small quantities of bugs. Cover the bottom of the habitat with a mixture of oat flakes and alfalfa hay. Include some torn-up sections of egg carton or toilet paper rolls when housing crickets.

Use a shallow lid for a water dish and fill with stones so the bugs won't drown. Change the water and thoroughly wash the lid and stones daily. There are also drown-proof commercial products available for hydration that are safe for feeder insects.

Waxworms and mealworms should be kept refrigerated (to avoid them entering the pupa stage) and brought to room temperature just prior to feeding. Most pet stores sell them in small containers with aerated lids. Add a teaspoon of the basic recipe shown below to the container. Zoophoba should not be refrigerated; they will die in the cold temperature. Zoophoba will not pupate out if housed in groups at room temperature.

Diet

To increase the nutritional value of insects, it is best to feed them (also called “gut-loading”) at least 24 hours before feeding to insect-eating lizards. Commercial gut-load food is available, or a homemade diet can be used. Fresh vegetables with a piece of fruit or potato should be offered daily.

Here is a basic recipe, which can be adapted according to available ingredients:

- 1 cup dry rice baby cereal
- 3/4 cup dry milk powder
- 1/4 cup sunflower seeds
- 1/4 cup wheat germ
- 1/4 cup dried alfalfa flakes
- 2 T. Spirulina powder or Spirulina algae fish food flakes
- 2 T. dried sea kelp
- 2 T. low-protein dry dog or cat food
- 2 t. raw bee pollen

Grind everything together into a powder. An old coffee bean grinder works well. This recipe will fill a large plastic margarine tub. Store the powder in the refrigerator for up to two months or freeze for longer storage.

Serve in a small lid for crickets; sprinkle over the bedding for worms.

For Further Reading

Melissa Kaplan's Herp Care Collection
<http://www.anapsid.org/feedingbugs.html>

*This guide was updated in November 2009.
Please contact info@corhs.org for more information.*

