

Desert Lizards: Captive Husbandry and Propagation

R L Gray (2003). Published by Krieger Publishing Company, P O Box 9542, Melbourne, FL 32902-9542, USA. 144 pp. Hardback (ISBN 1 57524 160 9). Price \$27.50.

The preface for this book contains the author's statement: "It is my objective and sincere hope that herpetoculturists will gain ideas from this book that will ensure the survival of the lizards they have brought into their homes." This I found somewhat worrying, since 'survival' would seem to be a rather low standard to aim for, rather than 'acceptable quality of life' or indeed simply 'welfare'. Similarly, in many areas of this publication, the aims of reproduction and aesthetic appearance are stressed and 'safety for the animal' mentioned but with little direct consideration of welfare. Having said that, the book does address many basic husbandry issues associated with the keeping of reptiles, and some of the suggestions — for example, the clear recommendation to set up the vivarium and establish and confirm appropriate temperature, lighting and humidity parameters well before acquiring the lizard — undoubtedly are positive steps towards alleviating the all-too-common husbandry-related disease and welfare problems.

The book is aimed at prospective keepers of reptiles from a range of species classed as 'desert lizards', including some which are becoming common in captivity, such as spiny-tailed lizards (*Uromastix* sp.), collared lizards (*Crotaphytus* sp.) and various desert-living geckos. The other species described — the chuckwallahs (*Sauromalus* sp.), desert iguanas (*Dipsosaurus* sp.) and horned lizards (*Phrynosoma* sp.) — are much less widely available in the pet trade, especially outside their native USA. I had expected to find some of the bearded dragon (*Pogona*) species and perhaps even some monitors (*Varanus* sp.) included, but assume that the author does not consider these to be true desert lizards.

I have some concerns over the 'dumbing-down' of some areas of the book (eg "Biologists use three terms to describe the feeding behaviour of animals") and also in places over apparent inconsistencies: there is a discussion of natural behavioural thermoregulation strategies, such as angling the body towards the sun at hot times of the day to reduce sunlight exposure and burrowing into the substrate which is cooler than the desert surface, and yet in other places the use of under-floor heat mats is recommended rather than stressing the benefits of a single-point overhead light and heat source.

Overall, though, I found this to be a well-written, interesting and easy-to-read book, which starts by discussing various aspects of desert environments and progresses through some general aspects of husbandry, practical feeding and propagation before discussing each of the six species groups in more detail. There are excellent illustrations of desert habitats, of the individual animals and of some breeding establishments and yet there is unfortunately no picture of a suitable pet vivarium set-up. There were a few areas where I would have liked more detailed information but this probably reflects the current state of herpetological and herpetocultural knowledge of these species rather than any deficiency on the part of the authors, and there is a list of 50 references if further reading should seem necessary.

I would certainly recommend to prospective owners of desert lizards that they buy and read this book, amongst others, and I would indeed hope that they could gain ideas and information that would have positive welfare benefits for their charges.

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