

Central Bearded Dragon

Pogona vitticeps

Class: Reptilia **Order:** Squamata **Family:** Agamidae

Other names: inland bearded dragon

Other Subspecies:

Other Relatives: There are 8 species of lizard in the genus *Pogona*, all native to Australia.

Zoo Bearded Dragon

'Irwin' 0.1 – female

DOH: 2011 Aq: 10/3/2011

About Irwin

Irwin was a relinquished pet. Irwin weighs 1 lb.



Status Not Evaluated

Geographic Region

Bearded dragons occupy a large range of habitats from the desert to dry forests and scrublands. It is a semi arboreal lizard that can be found basking on fallen branches, fence posts and picnic tables.

Habitat

Desert, dune, savanna, grassland

Characteristics

Size: 18-22" [1]; tail accounts for over ½ the total body length

Average weight is about 10-18 ounces (283-510 gr) [2]

Longevity: 4 to up to 15 years [3] [2]



Physical Description

- They are appropriately named bearded dragons because of their "beard," an expandable throat pouch with spiky scales.
- They have a broad, triangular head, round bodies, stout legs, and robust tails.
- Color for this species depends on the soil of the region they live in, ranging from dull brown, grey, tan with red or gold highlights, white, yellow, red, reddish-brown, or orange.
- They are capable of undergoing moderate changes in the shade of their color to help regulate temperature. [4]
- Coloration varies among the different races of the inland bearded dragons, from uniform tan to chocolate brown [2].

Dimorphism

Sexes are not strongly dimorphic, but males can be distinguished from females.

Males have a wider cloacal opening, the base of the tail is wider, the head is usually larger with a larger beard (often black) and possess **hemipenes**.

Males have a much broader head than females, the male's beard tends to be darker than the females' [2].

Males also have more pronounced femoral pores than females (these can be seen as waxy bumps on the underside of the back legs).

Females: Females are not markedly smaller at sexual maturity than males, but males mature at a much smaller size [5].

Diet: Opportunistic omnivore

Diet in the Wild: They live in areas where food may be hard to find, so bearded dragons are not finicky eaters. Their stomachs are large to accommodate large quantities of plant matter, insects, and the occasional small rodent or lizard. [6]

Diet in the Zoo: reptile salad (squash, sweet potato, fruit, greens), mealworms occasionally as enrichment

Behavior

- *Diurnal*
- *Semiarboreal*, can be found basking on fallen branches, fence posts, etc. [6]
- If required, they will dig into the ground and remain **dormant** for long periods of time until unfavorable conditions, such as unusually hot or cold weather, improve [2].

Defense Mechanisms

- When threatened by another inland bearded dragon or a possible predator, an inland bearded dragon will challenge the intruder by head-bobbing, flattening out its body, flaring out its throat and displaying the colorful lining of its gaping mouth [2].

Social Structure & Communication

- The beard of the dragon is used for both mating and aggression displays. [6]
- Both sexes have a beard, but males display more frequently, especially for courtship rituals. Females will, however, display their beard as a sign of aggression also. The beard turns dark to jet black and inflates during the display. [6]
- Another interesting behavior is **semaphore**, or arm waving. The bearded dragon stands on three legs and waves one of its forelimbs in a slow circular pattern. It looks a lot like the bearded dragon is waving hello, or swimming using only one arm. One function of arm waving seems to be species recognition. Arm waving is also used to show submission. A small bearded dragon will respond with arm waving when confronted with a larger, more dominant bearded dragon. Females will also arm wave to avoid aggression from males, especially if the male is head bobbing [6]. Males normally discontinue arm-waving as they reach maturity, but females will continue to wave” toward aggressive males during the breeding season and while copulating [2].
- *Head bobbing* is when the male quickly bobs its head up and down, often with a darkened beard. The male will head bob to show dominance to both smaller insubordinate males and females that he would like to mate. [6]

Reproduction

- **Oviparous**, egg-laying
- The age of sexual maturity has not been measured, although it is estimated to be about one or two years. Body size and growth rates are more important than age when determining sexual maturity in bearded dragons [4]
- Mating occurs in the Australian spring and summer months of September to March. [6]
- Females dig a burrow and lay up to 24 eggs per clutch, and up to 9 clutches per year. [6]
- In captive conditions, the eggs will hatch in 55 to 75 days [6]
- Females have also been known to store sperm and are able to lay many clutches of fertile eggs from one mating [6]
- Hatchlings weigh about .07 ounces (2 gr) at birth and average 4 inches (10 cm) in length. Young usually grow rapidly and gain adult size within a year [2].

Conservation

Wild populations of bearded dragons are unevaluated, but assumed stable due to Australia’s restrictions on animal exportation. This cannot be said, however, for many wild reptile species. Many species of snakes, lizards, crocodiles and turtles are removed from the wild for the pet trade or are killed to make products for sale. As a result, many reptiles are endangered or are declining rapidly.

- **Use & Trade:** Inland bearded dragons have been used in scientific research (Wood 1995). They are also very popular in the pet trade. In recent years, the bearded dragon has become a favorite reptile to keep and breed because of their manageable size and pleasant temperament [6].
- *Pogona vitticeps* is the most commonly found captive bred bearded dragon species. Breeders are focusing on breeding for particular colors such as red phase or gold phase, which are more marketable [6].
- **Threats:** Responsible pet ownership starts with research into reputable reptile breeders. Only purchase a bearded dragon from a breeder who does not collect stock from the wild, and insures healthy animals. Remember that keeping reptiles as pets is a long-term commitment, often 15-30+ years.
- **Predators:** Aside from their natural predators such as snakes and birds of prey, these lizards have no significant threats [7].

Did You Know?/Fun Facts

- The bulk of captive-bred bearded dragons today are thought to have originated from stock illegally exported from Australia during the 1970s. [4] Since the 1960's, Australia has strictly prohibited exports of any native wildlife [6].
- The two most popular species that are commonly kept as pets are this species, *P. vitticeps*, and the western bearded dragon (*Pogona minor minor*). [4]
- During lean seasons, they survive on nutrients and fat reserves stored in their large abdomens [2].

Glossary: List of definitions of the most important recurrent technical terms used in the text.

Dormant - is a period in an organism's life cycle when growth, development, and physical activity are temporarily stopped.

Oviparous- refers to animals that lay eggs, with little or no other embryonic development within the mother.

Hemipenes – duplex male sexual reproductive organs of lizards and snakes, usually held inverted, within the body’s vent/cloaca.

Semaphore – a method of sign-language communication consisting of arm or foot waving. Found in species lacking vocal communication abilities or eardrums, such as the Panamanian golden toad.

References

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- [3] Cincinnati Zoo, "Bearded Dragon," Cincinnati Zoo, [Online]. Available: <http://cincinnati.zoo.org/blog/animals/bearded-dragon/>. [Accessed August 2014].
- [4] Wikipedia, "Central Bearded Dragon," Wikipedia, [Online]. Available: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pogona_vitticeps. [Accessed

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- [6] Animal Diversity Web, "Pogona vitticeps," Animal Diversity Web, [Online]. Available: http://animaldiversity.ummz.umich.edu/accounts/Pogona_vitticeps/. [Accessed August 2014].