

Easy Reference Sheet

Rescuing Domestic Reptiles

Introduction

As a rescue/rehabilitation organisation, WILDCARE is permitted to rescue and rehabilitate wild reptiles, not domestic/captive ones. All domestic/captive reptiles in Queensland are licensed through the Department of Environment and Heritage Protection (EHP). It is however, not uncommon for volunteer rescuers to take possession of a domestic reptile through the usual course of attending wildlife rescues.

If a domestic reptile comes into your possession, you must notify EHP within one business day of acquisition. The EHP Ranger will advise you on where to surrender the animal, which may be to an EHP regional office, or to the RSPCA Wacol.

If the animal is sick or unwell, it should be taken to your local vet or the RSPCA Wacol wildlife hospital for veterinary treatment in the same timeframe you would take any animal (i.e. critical injuries must be taken immediately). You will be expected to relinquish the animal to the vet/hospital in the same manner as any unclaimed/stray pet.

Note: Wildlife hospitals (other than the RSPCA) are under no obligation to admit and/or treat domestic/pet reptiles and they may refuse to accept the animal.

How do you know if the animal is domestic?

Below are the most common signs that may indicate that an animal is an escaped or released domestic reptile:-

Found outside of its normal geographical range

- Refer to a comprehensive field guide to determine the species natural geographical range
- If it has been found in a region outside of that range, then it is most likely a pet

Behaviour

- If the animal is extremely friendly and easy to handle without restraint, it could be a pet. It should also be noted that even a very tame pet reptile can become fractious when stressed, therefore it is advised that you consult an experienced reptile coordinator/keeper for more advice.
- If the animal readily recognises and eats captive food (such as mealworms, greens, fruit, vegetables - dependent upon the species).

Common captive diseases

- If the animal is suffering signs of and captive induced diseases such as metabolic bone disease, there is a high chance the animal may have spent time in a captive environment, therefore should be considered to be domesticated.

The most common examples of domestic reptiles that arrive into care through wildlife volunteers include:-

- Diamond Pythons
- Central Bearded Dragons
- Several species of turtles

What happens to the animal next?

When a domestic reptile is surrendered, the EHP will investigate their database for reptile licensees in the area where the animal was found. They will then attempt to contact those licence holders to establish if anyone is missing their pet.

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Should no owner be found, the animal will be assessed by a veterinarian appointed by EHP. If the EHP deems the animal appropriate to be re-homed, they will organise an extensive veterinary examination to be performed. If the health assessment is satisfactory, the animal may be made for rehoming, either through the RSPCA's adoption program, or Queensland Species Management Plan (QSMP).

Can I keep the reptile that I have found?

You *may* be given an opportunity to adopt the animal, if becomes available through the RSPCA's adoption program. However, there are no guarantees that this will occur as the placement of the animal is made at the discretion of EHP and/or RSPCA. When you relinquish the animal, you may be able to register your interest. You should ensure you have a current reptile licence to present on request.

You are not permitted to keep the animal until a decision is made by EHP and/or RSPCA; it must be relinquished upon it coming into your care.

Quarantine

There are diseases found in captive reptiles that are of great concern and have the potential to devastate wild populations if released. Many of these diseases have very subtle, if any, signs indicating the compromised health of the animal and can easily be overlooked, even by an experienced reptile carer/keeper.

It is imperative that strict quarantine procedures are adopted to ensure the protection of the animal in question along with any reptiles that you may have now or in the future.

The reptile should be kept separated from all other wildlife. This includes equipment used to house, handle or feed the animal. We recommend the use of disposal equipment that can be discarded safely once the animal is relinquished (e.g. cardboard box etc.).

Can I help someone rehome a reptile?

You are not able to take a reptile from a licensed owner for rehoming, as licensed species may only change hands once every 6 months, according to the license conditions. Licensed owners may be able to surrender their reptile to the EHP, at the discretion of the ranger on duty. Unlicensed owners can surrender reptiles to the RSPCA and can find the surrender conditions on their website.

Contact Numbers:

RSPCA Queensland	1300 264 625
Dept of Environment & Heritage Protection (EHP)	1300 130 372