

How You Can Lend a Hand to Herps and Inverts in Crisis



Erica “Air” Mede, CVT at Chicago Exotics Animal Hospital
President of Friends of Scales Reptile Rescue

Understanding What's In an Emergency Kit

- **Bandage Supplies**

- **Non-Stick Wound Dressing:** Keeps wounds clean and prevents iatrogenic (basically, accidental) trauma. Excellent for terrestrial amphibians.
- **Bandage Tape:** To hold wound dressings in place. Also useful in wound reduction.
- **Self Adhering Bandage:** This is called Vet Wrap usually but it is sold for people too. Excellent for holding shells in place and applying pressure bandages. Also, handy for keeping mouths secured.
- **Roll Gauze:** Excellent for injuries on limbs and snake bodies that are difficult to place a bandage on.

- **Wound Care**

- **Chlorhexidine Solution:** Can be used to clean all wounds except for eye wounds. This is safe in the mouth and if ingested accidentally. You want to dilute this solution to 20% strength. Safe for amphibians.
- **Povidone Iodine:** This comes in a solution that should be diluted to 20% strength or as a pad. This is excellent for use in animal (especially mammal bites & scratches). Do not let the animal ingest this. Do not use on amphibians! Do not get near the eye.
- **Betadine Solution:** Dilute to 20% and clean wounds that may have been caused by mammal bites and scratches. Do not let animals ingest this. Safe for amphibian use only in the case of mammal bites or scratches. Do not get this near the eyes.
- **Saline for Wounds:** Safe to flush all wounds except eyes unless specifically for eyes.
- **Dy's Liquid Bandage:** For invertebrates and superficial wounds
- **Super Glue:** For invertebrates

- **Antiseptic & Antibacterials**

- **Tea Tree Oil:** This is a natural antiseptic that is safe to apply to superficial wounds and the mouth.
- **Gentian Violet:** Another natural antiseptic and antifungal used to treat superficial wounds and mouth issues. Caution, this stains EVERYTHING purple!
- **Neosporin:** This is safe to use if there is NO other choice. This is not an ideal medication to use despite being an antibacterial ointment. Advised to use no more than 24 hours before medical intervention.
- **Triple Antibiotic Ointment:** Safe to use on wounds.
- **Silvadene or Other Silver Creams:** Safe to use on wounds especially those related to mammalian injuries.

- **Burn Care**

- **Silvadene or Other Silver Creams:** Safe to use on burns and broken skin.
- **Aloe Vera:** Safe to use on burns, especially those by the head.

- **Temperature Control**

- **8 Hour Hand Warmers:** Keep these away from the animal but close enough to allow radiant heat to maintain an appropriate temperature.
- **Ice Pack:** A shake-to-mix ice pack is a wonderful way to lower the temperature of a heat stressed animal. Keep this away from the animal but close enough to allow radiant cooling.

Miscellaneous Supplies

- **Pen and Paper:** Write down all pertinent information about what happened, what you did to treat, when you treated, etc.
- **Tweezers:** Fine tip tweezers are perfect for removing debris
- **Scissors**
- **Flashlight**
- **Temperature Gun and/or Thermometer**
- **Veterinary Information:** This should be your regular veterinarian as well as the number for emergency vets that will see exotics
- **Gloves:** Nitrile or vinyl only
- **Saran Wrap:** Excellent for increasing humidity immediately in enclosures as well as for wrapping large areas such as the underside of a Burmese python that has been burned.
- **Magnifying Glass**
- **Camera or Cell Phone**
- **Granulated Sugar:** Excellent for prolapses
- **Plain Lube:** Prolapses, tongue issues, etc.

Example of Veterinary Info...

If you are in the area of Chicago, Northwest suburbs, Southern Wisconsin, or Northwestern Indiana:

Clinic: Chicago Exotics Animal Hospital

Phone: (847) 329-8709

Website: www.exoticpetvet.com

E-Mail: chicagoexoticspc@gmail.com

Exam: \$65

Emergency Exam: \$106

Address: 3735 W. Dempster St. Skokie, IL 60076

(After April) 3755 W. Dempster St. Skokie, IL 60076

Things that Make Your Vet's Eye Twitch ...

- Never place medications in the eye that are not specifically for ophthalmic use! Never!
- Avoid listening to Dr. Google and folks that start with, “you don’t need a vet ...” these are not the ones you should trust for medical advice!
- Never soak, feed, or medicate an animal that cannot swallow.
- Please, do not soak or syringe your pet Pedialyte or Gatorade.
- Never place a debilitated animal on hot surfaces or directly under heat lamps.
- Never use hydrogen peroxide! It causes tissue damage and will not induce vomiting either.
- At home splints for broken bones generally end very poorly.
- When folks talk about medicinal honey, they are referring to honey comb not the bottled stuff.
- NEVER use medications prescribed to a different animal to treat your own animal without consulting a veterinarian! This is not greed on the vets part, this is your animal’s life.

REPTILE & AMPHIBIAN EMERGENCIES

Burns

Cause: Improper Thermostat Setting; Malfunctions of Equipment; Fires

Emergency Rating: ★ to ★★★★★

What You Can Do:

- Soak in slightly warm chlorhexidine solution 10 minutes
- Remove all particulate bedding and climbing surfaces
- Place soft bedding such as towels down
- Severe cases should have the worst of the burn protected with non-stick gauze or saran wrap and lube
- Aloe vera and silvadene can be applied
- Use a temperature gun to monitor the temperature of the wound and environment

What Your Vet Will Do:

- In severe cases antibiotics will be prescribed
- Pain medication can be prescribed
- Debridement of dead or necrotic tissues



Trauma

Cause: Dropping; Falling Objects; Car Accidents; Cage Doors

Emergency Rating: ★★ to ★★★★★

What You Can Do:

- Gently cleanse any open wounds
- Remove all particulate bedding and climbing surfaces
- Place soft bedding such as towels down
- Keep the animal as still as possible

What Your Vet Will Do:

- Antibiotics may be prescribed for open wounds
- Pain medication will be prescribed
- Debridement of dead or necrotic tissues
- Diagnostics to examine to extent of the trauma
- Fractures will be stabilized and reduced
- Wounds will be closed and flushed thoroughly





These are all different but they are ALL emergencies!



Eye Trauma

Cause: Dropping; Crushing; Attacks; Lacerations; Punctures

Emergency Rating: ★★☆☆ to ★★★★★

What You Can Do:

- Gently cleanse flush debris off the eye ONLY with sterile saline
- Remove all particulate bedding and climbing surfaces
- Place soft bedding such as towels down
- Keep the animal as still as possible

What Your Vet Will Do:

- Thorough examination of the eye
- Antibiotics will be prescribed
- Pain medication will be prescribed
- Debridement of dead or necrotic tissues
- Diagnostics to examine to extent of the trauma
- Radiographs of the skull
- Enucleation if necessary. Amphibians will require euthanasia.



Chameleon & Frog Tongue Trauma

Cause: Eye Issues; Inappropriate Caging; Poor Life Decisions

Emergency Rating: ★★★★★ to ★★★★★

What You Can Do:

- Gently remove tongue from cage wall or item if necessary
- If tongue remains out, keep it moist
- Place soft bedding such as towels down
- Keep the animal as still as possible

What Your Vet Will Do:

- Radiographs may need to be taken to determine fractures of the hyoid bone.
- Pain medication will be prescribed
- Debridement of dead or necrotic tissues
- Tongues that are prolapsed and will not retract require euthanasia.



Predator Attacks

Cause: Cat/Dog/Ferret/Raccoon Attacks; Cagemate Attacks

Emergency Rating: ★★★★★

What You Can Do:

- Gently cleanse any open wounds and cover with non-occlusive bandages.
- Remove all particulate bedding and climbing surfaces
- Place soft bedding such as towels down
- Keep the animal as still as possible
- Apply an antiseptic and/or antibacterial product

What Your Vet Will Do:

- Antibiotics and pain medications will be prescribed
- Wounds will be thoroughly cleaned and examined
- Radiographs may be required to assess involvement
- Debridement is necessary
- Fractures are set
- Hospitalization and surgery for internal repairs



Stuck

Cause: Poor Life Decisions; Ceramic Logs; Box Turtles (they do get stuck in their own shells occasionally)

Emergency Rating: ★★ to ★★★★★

What You Can Do:

- Gently apply light traction to see if it can be dislodged
- Mineral or vegetable oil can be wiped around the sides of the pet
- Use a flashlight to determine if pet is just being stubborn

What Your Vet Will Do:

- Sedation may be required to relax the pet for removal
- Item may require careful dissection to remove
- Radiographs may be needed to determine if there is damage
- In the case of box turtles, gentle traction may be required



Hemorrhage

Cause: Lacerations; Punctures

Emergency Rating: ★ to ★★★★★

What You Can Do:

- Gently cleanse any open wounds
- Remove all particulate bedding and climbing surfaces
- Cover any open wounds with non-occlusive bandages
- Apply gentle pressure
- If a very large wound or unresolving, apply pressure bandage

What Your Vet Will Do:

- Antibiotics and pain medications will be prescribed
- Wound closure
- If punctures or lacerations are too deep, wounds may need surgery



Dehydration

Cause: Exposure to Dry Climates; Mister Dysfunction; Ongoing Disease

Emergency Rating: ★★ to ★★★★★

What You Can Do:

- Cover screens partially with Saran wrap to retain higher relative humidity.
- Soak in warm water for 10 minutes twice a day
- If an amphibian, moisten skin with lubricant in emergency but do not cover the ventral drinking patch (their belly!)

What Your Vet Will Do:

- Antibiotics may be prescribed for open wounds
- Pain medication will be prescribed
- Debridement of dead or necrotic tissues
- Diagnostics to examine to extent of the trauma
- Fractures will be stabilized and reduced
- Wounds will be closed and flushed thoroughly



Hyperthermia and Hypothermia

Cause: Inappropriate Thermostat; Equipment Malfunction

Emergency Rating: ★ to ★★★★★

What You Can Do:

- In the case of hyperthermia, slowly bring down the temperature with a cool bath soak or use of an ice pack near the patient.
- In the case of hypothermia, slowly increase the temperature with cool water soaks that increase gradually in temperature. A hot pack can be used to warm an enclosure.
- Monitor the internal temperature in larger animals with a cloacal temperature or at the very least an external temperature.

What Your Vet Will Do:

- Diagnostics of organ damage
- Stabilize
- Monitoring for neurologic situations and treatment of seizures

Foreign Body Ingestion

Cause: Inappropriate Feeding Response; Poor Life Decisions

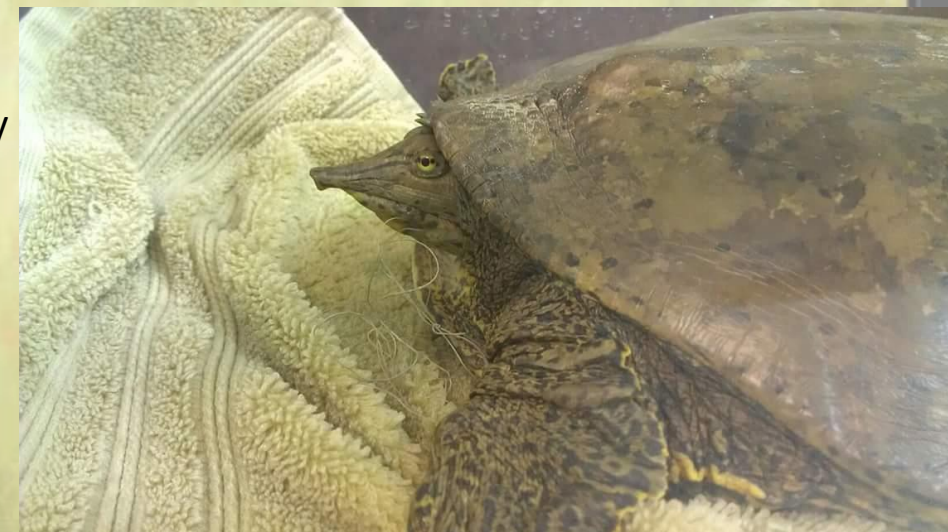
Emergency Rating: ★ to ★★★★★

What You Can Do:

- If the item is visible in the mouth, attempt to remove if safe
- If the item is not visible, keep patient still and avoid handling
- Frogs will often evert their stomach if the substance was noxious
- Snakes may regurgitate ingested items
- Remove future temptations

What Your Vet Will Do:

- If the item was not regurgitated, radiographs may be necessary
- Contrast studies may be necessary
- Surgical removal
- Sedation and non-surgical retrieval attempts



Prolapse

Cause: Parasites; Egg Laying; Straining to Defecate; Trauma (Crushing)

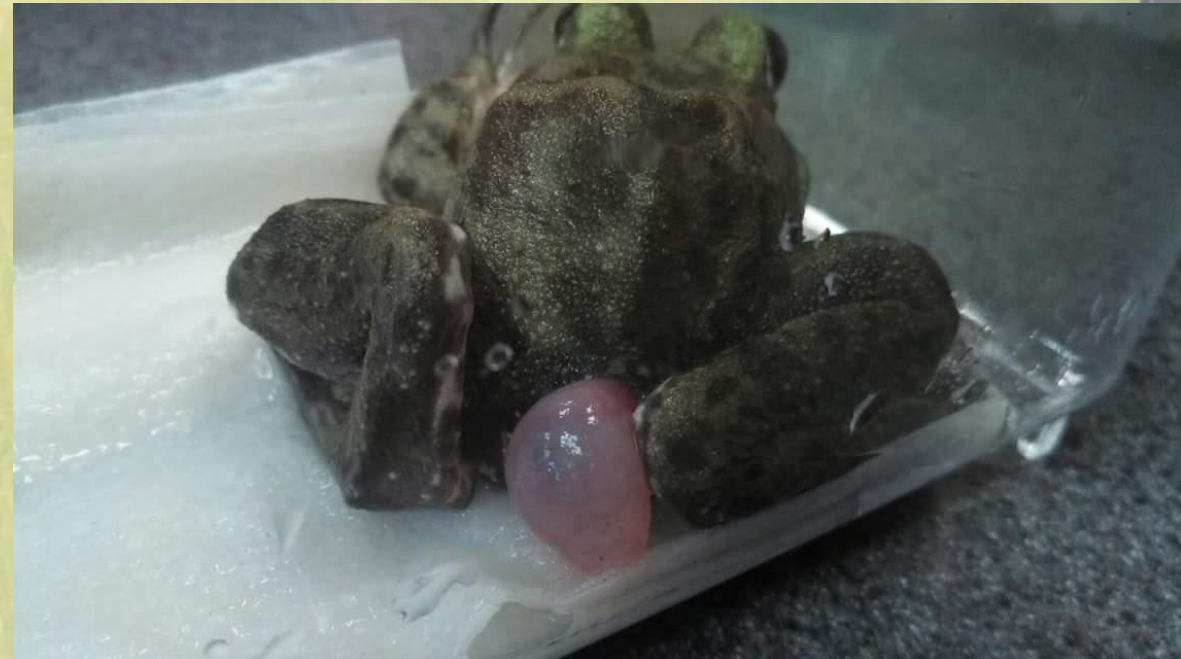
Emergency Rating: ★★ to ★★★★★

What You Can Do:

- Gently cleanse the area with saline
- Soak the pet in luke warm sugar water
- Place granulated sugar directly on the prolapse, wrap in KY and gauze

What Your Vet Will Do:

- Antibiotics and pain medications will be prescribed
- Sutures may need to be replaced
- Necrotic tissue will be debrided
- Surgical removal or repair



Upper Respiratory Distress

Cause: Inappropriate Humidity &/or Temperatures; Infection; Choking

Emergency Rating: ★★☆☆ to ★★★★★

What You Can Do:

- Increase the humidity in the enclosure to the higher end of the preferred zone
- Keep the patient at their preferred optimal temperature zone (POTZ)
- Clear discharge as it is seen
- Using a flashlight and spatula, look to see if the cause of choking is evident

What Your Vet Will Do:

- Antibiotics, nebulization, and other treatments will be prescribed as needed
- Culture of discharge
- Radiographs to examine lungs and upper respiratory
- Hospitalization
- Removal of cause of choking
- Endoscopic examination of trachea



TARANTULA EMERGENCIES

Dehydration

Cause: Inappropriate Humidity

Emergency Rating: ★★ to ★★★★★

What You Can Do:

- Keep in a moistened enclosure with wet paper towel
- Cover ventilation partially with saran wrap and mist enclosure

What Your Vet Will Do:

- Hospitalization
- Fluid therapy



Incomplete Molts

Cause: Trauma; Improper Humidity

Emergency Rating: ★★ ★ to ★★★★★

What You Can Do:

- Place in a plastic, ventilated container with wet paper towel
- Spray sides of enclosure, not the tarantula!
- Do not FLIP it on to it's back if upright
- Be patient! 15 minutes – 4 hours is normal

What Your Vet Will Do:

- Gently remove any residual pieces of molt
- High five you!



Limb Loss

Cause: Dropping; Cage Doors; Handling Accidents

Emergency Rating: ★ to ★★

What You Can Do:

- Clean the area gently with a cotton tipped applicator
- If there is still part of a limb, remove it
- Keep on moistened paper towel for a few hours

What Your Vet Will Do:

- Remove remnants



Cracked Exoskeleton

Cause: Dropping; Falling Objects; Handling Accidents

Emergency Rating: ★★★★★

What You Can Do:

- Place in an enclosure on moistened paper towel
- Gently clean the area with sterile warm saline
- Place a dab of Dy's liquid bandage or Superglue on the crack

What Your Vet Will Do:

- Medications may need to be prescribed
- If the crack is large, more intensive measures may be needed
- Fluid therapy may be required
- Euthanasia may be needed



I DON'T ALWAYS NEED A VET

A close-up photograph of a vibrant green iguana resting on a grey, textured rock. The iguana is facing right, with its head slightly tilted upwards. Its scales are detailed and bright green, contrasting with the dull grey of the rock. The background is out of focus, showing more of the rock and some indistinct shapes.

BUT WHEN I DO, IT'S CHICAGO EXOTICS