



\*Currumbin Valley Vet.

## Inland or Central Bearded Dragon *(Pogona vitticeps)*

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### **Widespread Bearded Buddies**

Bearded dragons are medium sized to large, spiny skinned and scaled agamid lizards indigenous to much of Australia. The most readily available species in captivity are also known as the central bearded dragon. Other species of bearded dragons are also seen in the pet trade, such as the Rankin's bearded dragon (*Pogona henrylawsoni*), but much less commonly, with care being mostly the same. Bearded dragons are named for their loose flap of spiny skin and scales on the underside of the neck that can be voluntarily puffed out in defense or territorial display. They are tan, light sandy brown, reddish, to light grayish lizards in color with a rather short and broad head and paler light colored spots and soft spines along the back and sides. They also have prominent spines on the neck and jowls that will darken considerably when they are defensive, territorial, or otherwise agitated, giving them their name of bearded dragon.

### **Taxonomy**

**Life:** All living, physical, and animate entities

**Domain:** Eukaryota

**Kingdom:** Animalia

**Phylum/Sub Phylum:** Chordata/Vertebrata

**Class:** Reptilia

**Order:** Squamata

**Suborder:** Lacertilia

**Infraorder:** Iguania

**Family:** Agamidae

**Subfamily:** Amphibolurinae

**Genus:** *Pogona*

**Species:** *Pogona vitticeps*\*

*\*Taxonomy subject to change and revision.*

### **Lifespan and Longevity**

If provided the proper care, bearded dragons can attain longevity of 10 to 15 years or more.

### **Distribution and Habitat**

The inland, or central bearded dragon has a wide distribution over much of eastern and central Australia, where they may be found from the southern half of South Australia, to the southeastern portion of the Northern Territory. Within this range, they may occupy a wide variety of habitats and environments, including arid to semi-arid deserts, scrublands, grasslands, to dry open forests and woodlands. They are also often semi-arboreal, being found in low

branches of trees, shrubs, and other vegetation, rocks, and other natural or manmade structures.

### **Origin and History**

*Pogona vitticeps* Ahl, 1927.

The Inland or Central bearded dragon has had somewhat of a legally questionable history in herpetoculture and the pet trade. Since about the 1960's, Australia has prohibited the exportation of its native and indigenous wildlife, including bearded dragons. However, this lizard's popularity has been sustained in the following decades despite this. It is most widely believed that a group of animals imported into Germany during the 1970's or 1980's (albeit unlawfully) formed the base group of animals which were then subsequently imported into the United States (and elsewhere in the world) during the early 1990's. Since then, the inland bearded dragon has become a long-standing pet industry staple, being kept, bred, and raised in the thousands or hundreds of thousands by commercial and private hobbyists, enthusiasts, and by the retail pet industry every year.

### **Experience Level Required**

Novice/Beginner to Moderate/Intermediate.

### **Size**

Bearded dragons range from about 3.5 to 5.0 inches in total snout-to tail length as hatchlings, and roughly 1 ½ to 2 feet as adults, or 16.0 to 24.0 inches in snout to tail length. Average snout-to-vent length (SVL) is about 7.0 to 10.0 inches.

### **Housing and Enclosure**

***Enclosure System: Primarily Terrestrial.*** Housing must be sealed and escape proof. Hatchling bearded dragons can be housed in a 20 gallon terrarium or enclosure. Adult bearded dragons require a minimum of a 40 gallon long terrarium or enclosure OR a 4 foot by 2 foot or equivalent sized enclosure, although this really depends on how much they are going to be taken out of the enclosure for handling and enrichment, their overall activity levels, and other variables within the enclosure or setup. Hatchling and adult bearded dragons can be maintained on a substrate of play sand mixtures, or ground walnut shell substrates. Avoid using substrates made from reptile bark that result in environments that are too humid. Provide a small dish of clean water, and change and clean it every several days, or sooner if fouled. Soaking them at least once weekly in lukewarm water for 15 to 20 minutes can also help raise their hydration. Provide ample basking and hiding opportunities by providing artificial foliage, driftwood, rocks, or logs.

### **Temperature, Lighting, and Humidity**

For basking, create a thermal gradient (or a warm side) in the cage/enclosure with an appropriate sized under tank heating pad, ceramic, or radiant heat emitter. Ideal temperatures for bearded dragons range from 80 to 85 degrees F on the cool side and around 100 to 112 degrees F on the warm, basking side. Providing the correct amounts of UVA/UVB overhead incandescent and florescent lighting, and calcium-to-phosphorus ratios is essential for ensuring the health and overall well-being of bearded dragons in captivity. Without UVA/UVB, or adequate amounts of it, they can be susceptible to the abnormal bone growth and development known as Metabolic Bone Disease (MBD), and other health and development maladies. Also be sure to spot clean the enclosure for urates, feces, or uneaten food at least twice per week. Be sure to periodically replace the substrate, clean, and disinfect the enclosure and its furnishings at minimum every 2 to 3 months. More specific lighting, heating, and humidity product suggestions and recommendations that can best suit one's needs, as well as those of one's animals can be given as well. Bearded dragons should ideally be maintained at relatively low humidity levels at, or around 35 to 40%.

## **Feeding, Diet, and Nutrition**

***Omnivorous***; In the wild, bearded dragons are omnivorous, meaning they will eat both plant and animal matter. They will eat a variety of insects and other invertebrates, as well as fruit and vegetable matter. In captivity, feed bearded dragons mostly a variety of appropriately sized feeder insects such as crickets, roaches, mealworms, superworms, and waxworms, but do not feed too many insects which are too fatty. They can also be given a mixed assortment of chopped up greens (vegetables) including carrot tops, peas, collard, mustard, and dandelion greens, and kale. Several commercially available omnivore mix diets are also available. Feeder insects should be gut-loaded in order to increase their optimal nutritional value. Bearded dragons also require additional calcium and vitamin D3 supplementation 1 to 2 times weekly or as otherwise directed for optimal health and development. This is in order to prevent Metabolic Bone Disease (MBD) and other growth and nutritional deficiencies. Their feeding frequency will depend on the age, size, and overall health of your animal. Use care as to not overfeed them, as obesity and other health related issues can become an issue. More specific dietary and supplementary product suggestions and recommendations that can best suit one's needs, as well as those of one's animals can be given as well.

## **Handling**

As with many reptiles, hatchling and juvenile bearded dragons typically tend to be initially more nervous and defensive. Handle your bearded dragon gently and deliberately, but do not drop or injure the animal. Most adult bearded dragons will settle down considerably and become quite docile and personable pets to keep as adults.

**\*\*Also be sure to practice basic cleanliness and hygiene associated with proper husbandry after touching or handling any animals or animal enclosures to prevent the possibility of contracting salmonellosis or any other zoonotic pathogens\*\***

## **Contact**

Authored by Eric Roscoe. For any additional questions, comments, and/or concerns regarding this animal, group of animals, or this care sheet, please email and contact:

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