

Inland Bearded Dragon



Taxonomy

Order: Squamata

Family: Agamidae

Genus/species: *Pogona vitticeps*

Description

Inland bearded dragons are 13 to 24 inches (33 to 61 cm) long, including the tail. They are appropriately named bearded dragons because of their beard, an expandable dewlap 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 to tan with red or gold highlights.

Adult bearded dragons are territorial. As they grow, they establish social hierarchies in which aggressive and appeasement displays form a normal part of their social interactions. The beard is used for both mating and aggression displays. Both sexes have a beard, but males display more frequently, especially in 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. The bearded dragon may also open its mouth and gape in addition to inflating its beard to appear more intimidating.

Another interesting behavior is arm waving. The bearded dragon stands on three legs and waves one of its forelimbs in a slow circular pattern. One function of arm waving seems to be species recognition. Arm waving is also used to show submission. A small bearded dragon responds with arm waving when confronted with a larger, more dominant bearded dragon. Females also arm wave to avoid aggression from males, especially if the male is head bobbing.

Head bobbing is when the male quickly bobs its head up and down, often with a darkened beard. The male head bobs to show dominance to both smaller insubordinate males and females that he would like to mate with.

Distribution and Habitat

Found only in Australia, bearded dragons are widely distributed throughout the interior of the eastern states to the eastern half of South Australia and southeastern Northern Territory.

They occupy a variety of habitats including subtropical woodlands, scrublands, savannas, shore areas, and into the great interior deserts.

Diet in the Wild

Bearded dragons are opportunistic omnivores. 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, spiders, and the occasional small rodent or lizard; about 20 percent of their total diet is plant matter.

Zoo Diet

They are fed salad and crickets a few times a week.

Reproduction

Inland bearded dragons reach sexual maturity at one to two years of age. Breeding season is during the warm summer months of September through March. To mate, a male climbs on top of a female and bites into the side of her neck. He then reaches with his hind legs for the female's tail, and presses his cloacal region against hers. Females dig a burrow and lay up to 24 eggs per clutch, and up to nine clutches per year. Females have also been known to store sperm and are able to lay many clutches of fertile eggs from one mating. The ellipsoidal eggs are .7 to one inches (1.8 to 2.5 cm) in length and the shells are parchment-like. Incubation is 50 to 70 days and hatchlings are three to four inches (7.6 to 10.2 cm) long.

Life Span

They may live about ten years in zoos.

Status

They are neither threatened nor endangered.

Fun Facts

Since the 1960s, Australia has strictly prohibited exports of any native wildlife. It is believed that the "founder stock" of captive bred bearded dragons found outside of Australia today were smuggled out of the country between 1974 and 1990.