

Veiled Chameleon

caresheet - veiled chameleons

Veiled Chameleons

Scientific Name: Chamaeleo calytratus
Common Names: Veiled Chameleon, Yemen Chameleon

Difficulty: Novice - Chameleons in general are not beginner animals but those designated novice are considered the best beginner species in the hobby with large, stable captive populations relative to other species. They are relatively easy to breed as well.

Brief Introduction:
The veiled chameleon is a very common species in the pet trade with widely spread captive populations. Native to the south Arabian peninsula (Yemen and Saudi Arabia) it is sometimes referred to as the Yemen Chameleon. A common myth is that this species does not need much water or humidity as it is from a desert region, but this is not true; this species inhabits the greenest area of the peninsula where the climate is subtropical to tropical. There are several feral colonies of this species in areas of Florida and California.



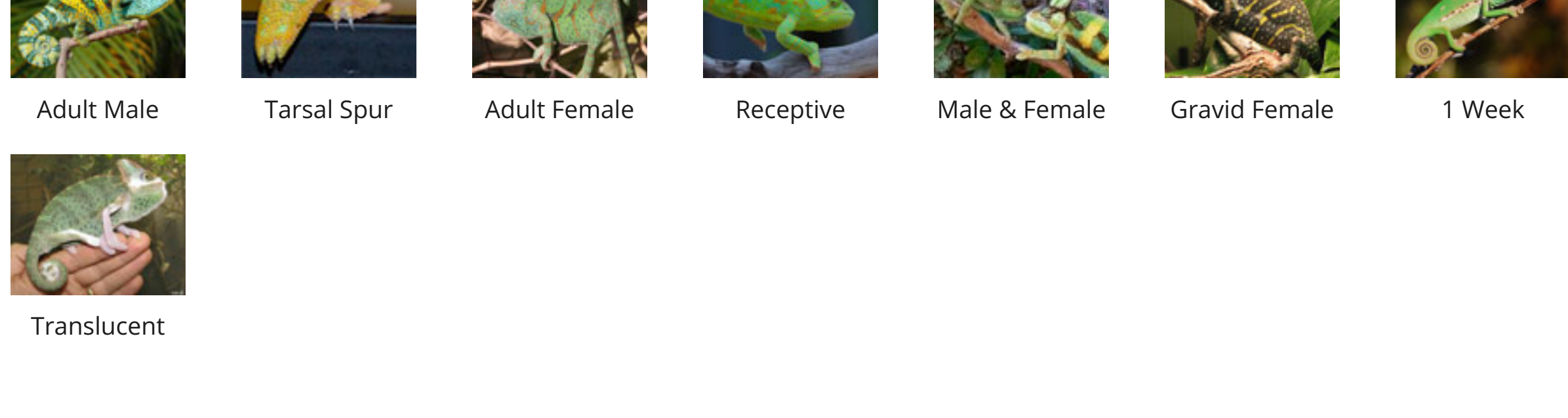
Description:
The veiled chameleon is a large species with an average adult length of 18"-24" (45-70cm). They are well known for their prominent casque (crest on top of the head), which is believed by some to help channel rainwater toward their mouth for drinking. The species is predominantly green, ranging from a bright yellow-green to a drab olive. Males have a much larger casque and a distinct pattern of brown and yellow barring. Females and juveniles are primarily solid green with some yellow spots and stripes. While uncommon, there are several veiled chameleon morphs that include hypermelanistic and hypomelanistic (translucent) mutations.

Behavior:
Like most chameleon species veiled chameleons are tree-dwelling reptiles that are active only during the day. They can generally be found hunting prey or basking on the branches of trees and large bushes. Veiled chameleons are very territorial and don't tolerate the presence of other chameleons in close proximity. When threatened they will frequently change color and inflate their body to appear larger. Some also display the unique ability to vibrate or buzz when frightened, which is an attempt to intimidate other chameleons, predators, or even an insect bothering them. Contrary to popular belief, chameleons don't change color in a direct attempt to match their background. Their color changes are influenced most by their state of health, emotions or level of stress, and the process of thermoregulation. Pet chameleons are better for observation and should not be handled regularly. Some veileds tolerate occasional handling and even hand-feeding, while many don't and can be quite aggressive towards people.

Lifespan:
With proper husbandry veiled chameleons can live 5-7 years on average.

Veiled Chameleons - Identification

Male veiled chameleons have a more prominent and ornately patterned casque compared to females. They also have a noticeable tarsal spur (bump on the back of the hind feet) that females lack, making sexing of this species easy to verify at any age. Click images for larger versions.



Veiled Chameleons - General Care

Temperature:
Baby/juvenile (<9 months): ambient 72-80F (22-26C), basking 85F (29C)
Adult males: ambient 75-80F (23-26C), basking 90-95F (32-35C)
Adult females: ambient 75-80F (23-26C), basking 85F (29C)



Ambient temperature refers to the temperature near the bottom of the cage and basking temperature refers to the hottest point accessible to your chameleon. Basking is where a chameleon absorbs heat from an external overhead source to help regulate their body temperature; it also promotes proper digestion and a healthy metabolism. Nighttime temperatures can safely drop down to 50F (10C) so a night heat source should not be used unless temperatures are lower than this. If night heat is needed a ceramic heat emitter or space heater should be used, not a light bulb, even red or black bulbs.

Humidity:
Humidity is an important aspect of chameleon husbandry. Veiled chameleons require levels around 40-70%, which can be achieved by several misting sessions a day over all areas of the cage. Live plants help increase and maintain humidity. Sometimes a cool mist humidifier or timer-controlled misting system is needed. See [Water & Humidity](#) for more information.

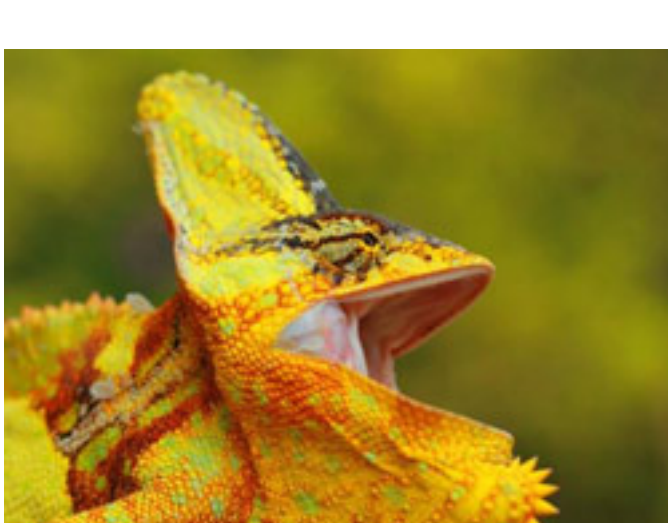
Cage Size:
In general when housing chameleons, bigger is better. Veiled chameleons are highly territorial and easily stressed by the presence of other chameleons, even of their own species. Two or more veiled chameleons should never be kept in the same cage. Cages should be furnished with many plants and climbing branches to provide opportunities for exercise and plenty of places for hiding. Substrate (mulch, soil, etc.) should not be used in chameleon cages. See [Chameleon Enclosures](#) for more information.

screen cage (length x width x height):
juveniles/sub-adults: 16x16x30" (40x40x76cm)
adult female minimum: 18x18x36" (45x45x90cm)
adult male minimum: 24x24x48" (60x60x120cm)

Lighting:
All lighting and heat bulbs should be outside and on top of the cage. There should be 12 hours of UVB light, along with 12 hours of darkness for proper rest. A UVB bulb is necessary to synthesize vitamin D3 in the skin and to facilitate absorption of dietary calcium. UVB bulbs only emit UVB rays for 6-8 months, even if they're still shining, so they must be replaced at least twice a year. A basking bulb creates the heat gradient so that your cold-blooded chameleon can regulate its body temperature by moving into warmer or cooler zones as needed. When choosing a basking bulb start with a 60watt bulb and monitor temperature closely. Higher wattage bulbs are hotter in temperature and vice versa so choose the appropriate wattage bulb based on the temperatures achieved. A bulb that makes it too hot can burn your chameleon badly even from several inches away and through the screen. See [Chameleon Lighting](#) for more information.

Veiled Chameleons - Food & Nutrition

Feeding:
Veiled chameleons are more omnivorous than most chameleon species and many enjoy munching on plant leaves and fruit in addition to using their long sticky tongue to catch live insects. Great feeder insects include crickets, silkworms, hornworms, butterworms, dubia roaches and superworms. Waxworms and mealworms are high in fat content and harder to digest so should only be used on occasion. The rule of thumb is to not feed insects that are longer than the width of your chameleon's head.



Neonates: as many small crickets as they can eat several times a day
Juveniles 3-6 months of age: 10-12 small crickets daily
Juveniles 6-12 months of age: 10-12 medium crickets every other day
Adults over 12 months of age: 7-10 medium-large crickets every other day

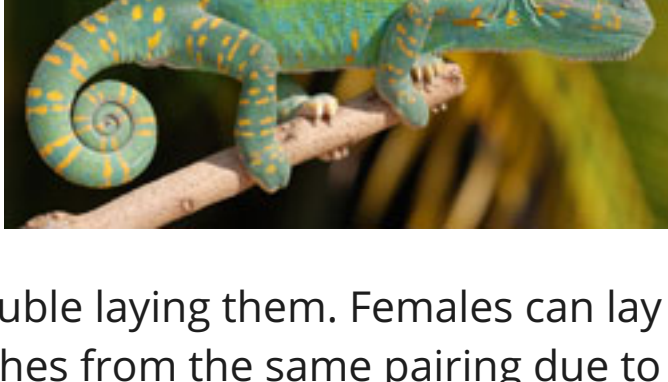
Chameleons should be fed in the first half of the day to give them time to bask and digest their food properly. Crickets need to be properly gutloaded with calcium rich vegetables several hours before being fed to your chameleon. Inadequate dietary calcium leads to metabolic bone disease, a very serious illness. Commercially available gutloads usually aren't properly balanced or sufficient for good nutrition. See [Chameleon Food](#) for more information.

Supplementation:
Calcium and other vitamins are very important to your chameleon's health. Feeder insects should be lightly dusted with powdered supplement before being fed to your chameleon. Many keepers successfully use calcium (without D3 or phosphorus) at nearly every feeding, multivitamin once every 2 weeks, and calcium with D3 once every 2 weeks.

Hydration & Misting
The cage should be misted at least twice a day, drying out completely between misting sessions. This raises relative humidity as well as stimulates your chameleon to want to drink. Water can be provided by means of a dripper (not a waterfall or water bowl). The dripper should be placed on top of the cage so that the water droplets drip down and accumulate on plant leaves. Other watering options include manual and automated misting systems. Chameleons do not recognize standing water as a drinking source. See [Water & Humidity](#) for more information.

Female Veiled Chameleons

Egg Laying & Breeding
Veiled chameleons do not need to be mated or even have seen a male to develop eggs. Like chickens they will lay infertile clutches of eggs periodically. Even if you only have a single female chameleon since she was a baby it will be critical to provide her a place to lay eggs because egg binding (being unable to lay eggs) is fatal. Veiled chameleons can start to develop eggs as early as 4-6 months of age. However, it is highly recommended not to breed your chameleon until the female is at least a year of age so she is mature and can dedicate calcium stores to eggs instead of stripping it from her own growing bones. A receptive female will often display blue spots on the body, but not always. A clutch can contain on average 20-70 eggs and fertile or infertile makes no difference on size of clutch or whether or not the female will have trouble laying them. Females can lay 1-3 clutches per year on average, during any season. A single breeding may produce several clutches from the same pair due to sperm retention by the female. Egg laying is a big strain on the female's body and heavy breeding can shorten life span. Extra calcium should be given to gravid females to keep up with the need of making eggshells. A female that is unable to lay her eggs for environmental, nutritional or medical reasons causes a serious condition of egg-binding, or being eggbound. This is a medical emergency and will be fatal if not treated. Over feeding can cause complications with egg laying and larger clutch sizes, making them more prone to becoming eggbound.



A female over 6 months of age should always have a laying bin available. The laying bin should be at least 16x16x16" with depth of substrate at least 12" being crucial. The egg laying substrate should be either washed playsand or a mixture of washed playsand and organic soil moistened so that a tunnel retains its shape and does not collapse. There should be one or several branches going into the laying bin so that the female can crawl in and out as desired. A female about to lay eggs will often become restless, pace her cage and make decrease or stop eating in the week before. Once a female enters the laying bin she may dig several test holes before choosing to lay eggs. They dig head first to make the tunnel and then back into the tunnel to lay their eggs before covering the tunnel completely. It is absolutely critical to give a chameleon complete privacy while she is in the laying bin. If she is disturbed she may abandon her tunnel and could become eggbound. The cage may need to be wrapped with a sheet with only a peep hole to keep disruptions out of sight. It can take several hours up to several days to lay eggs. A female that is weak, very uncomfortable, or refuses to use a laying bin may need veterinary assistance immediately. After a female lays eggs it is very important to give her at least a week of minimal stress, increased hydration and calcium-rich food to recuperate.

Egg Incubation
The fertile eggs should be removed from where they were laid while maintaining the exact position they were laid in (do not turn). Keep the eggs half buried in incubation substrate inside a tupperware container with no holes, or only a few very small holes, in the lid. Eggs are incubated in coarse vermiculite or hatchrite moistened to the point that only there are only a few drops of water when a handful of the substrate is squeezed. Seal the lid completely to retain moisture or the eggs will dry out and not survive. Depending on the temperatures of your home veiled eggs can be placed in a dark cabinet for incubation rather than using an actual incubator. Veiled chameleon eggs take on average 6-9 months to hatch when kept at optimal temperatures of 72-78F.

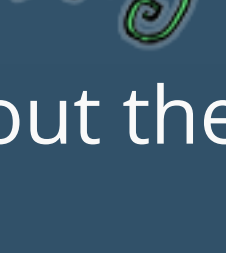
Related Links

- Keeping Veiled Chameleons, by Brad Ramsey - [Resource Link](#)
- How To Set Up A Laying Bin, by JannB - [Resource Link](#)
- Setting Up A Laying Bin Video, by Dez - [Resource Link](#)

References

Nečas, Petr. Chameleons: Nature's Hidden Jewels. Frankfurt Am Main: Edition Chimaira, 1999. Print.

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