



Portsmouth Reptile & Amphibian Society  
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P.R.A.S Care sheet No 3



## Species Common Name: **Bearded Dragon, Rankins and Vittakins Dragons**

**Scientific Name:** *Pogona vitticeps*  
*Pogona henrylawsoni*

### **Care Difficulty:**

Moderate, These lizards make wonderful pets; they are relatively easy to keep and do extremely well in captivity. They are very docile and develop real character and can get up to some amusing antics. Even though they tend to be quite expensive they make excellent first time lizards.

### **Distribution:**

Bearded Dragons (*P. vitticeps*) are found across most of the eastern half of Australia plus the southern Northern Territories. Their main habitat is semi arid areas. They are often seen basking on the sides of roads, on fence posts and fallen logs.

### **Description:**

Bearded Dragons grow up to 50cm (20"). They are stocky lizards with fairly short muscular legs. The toes are quite short, plus they have strong claws for burrowing. The males have a large arrow shaped head. On both sexes the head and flanks have rows of spines. Those on the flanks are soft, but when the animal is alarmed it will puff itself up and then the spines stand erect making it very prickly. The scales on the lizard's dorsal surfaces are keeled and are raised to sharpened points. The skin on the lizards throat is covered with small spines which stand erect when the throat is puffed out and turned black, thus giving the lizard the appearance of having a beard and hence its name. The common ground colour is light to dark brown with light bars and blotches on the back and bands on the tail. Some specimens are bright orange in colour. Ventral surfaces are off white with black markings, which form rectangular patterns.

Rankins Dragons (*P. henrylawsoni*) are species that are very similar to Bearded Dragons, and look very similar, but are smaller.

Vittakins Dragons are crosses between Rankins and Bearded Dragons. Unusually, these are still fertile. The care for all 3 species is similar.

### **Size:**

Female Bearded Dragons can grow to a maximum length of around 50cm (20"). Although this sounds big, around 2/3 of this length is made up of the Dragon's tail.

Rankins Dragons only grow to a maximum of 30cm (12"). Vittakins Dragons tend to be mid way between the two.

### **Housing:**

Unless they can be housed in very large enclosures, Bearded Dragons should be kept in pairs. This is to avoid domination and aggression, which can cause stress and ultimately death. A vivarium measuring 1.2m x 0.6m x 0.5m (47" x 24" x 20") should be suitable for an adult Bearded Dragon.

Bearded Dragons require UV light supplied using a full spectrum natural light tube that emits some UV, with the starter enclosed by mesh on the back wall to provide a background heat source. A 60W-spotlight wired to a thermostat achieves a basking site on a rock over it. A 20W-heat mat should be used to provide heating at night. The daytime background temperature should be kept at about 28°C (82°F), and at the hot spot it should be about 40°C (104°F). The thermal gradient is important as it allows the lizards to thermoregulate. Night time temperatures can drop to 24°C (75°F). The substrate used is a choice for the keeper but calcium sand or bird sand is recommended.

### **Diet and Feeding:**

Bearded dragons like a varied diet; this should include crickets, wax worms, giant mealworms, locusts, plus dandelions (leaves and flowers), watercress, kale, broccoli and soft fruit. Every other meal should be supplemented with calcium and or vitamin D3 containing powders i.e. Nutrobal. The babies have a varied diet with insects proportional to their size.

### **Breeding:**

Bearded dragons are relatively easy to breed. To bring them into breeding condition they require a cooling down period. This is generally December and January when the temperature is kept at 24°C (75°F) with no hot spot. The photoperiod should be reduced from 15 hours to 10 hours. Their food intake is also cut down during this period so they are fed just a few crickets once a week. After the cooling down period the temperature is gradually increased over the next month, as is the food intake. The photoperiod is increased by 1.5 hours per month. Once they have reached their optimum temperature they should be offered dandelions and other fruit and vegetables plus a combination of insects every two days.

Courtship and mating should be seen by the end of February. The gestation period is about five weeks. About a week before laying the female will start to scratch at the

substrate. At this time a cat litter tray full of a mixture full of bird sand and peat should be placed in the vivarium with a piece of bark covering the top. This will provide the female with a nest-laying site and make it easier to retrieve eggs.

Incubation: Eggs are incubated on vermiculite mixed 50/50 by weight with clean water. Incubation temperature should be at 28-30°C (82-86°F) and it takes 67-75 days for the eggs to hatch. Babies are fed on micro crickets and wax worms.

### **Notes:**

A stressed bearded dragon can be recognised by the following:

- It will lie on the floor compressing its body as flat as possible.
- It will go very pale and its markings will fade, when picked up the animal just goes limp.

If your lizard is stressed then it must be put in isolation to give it a chance to recover. Don't forget that stress can be a killer.

All food should be dusted with Nutrobal vitamin powder at every other feed. Gravid females should have their food dusted at every feed. A dish of crushed cuttlefish bone should also be placed in the vivarium and left at all times. Gravid females also require additional D3 for the production of healthy young. This can be achieved in two ways. Firstly by adding a D3 supplement, though this must be done in exact dosages (Too much can be harmful). The second way is to expose them to direct sunlight.

Bearded Dragon mature at about one year, but experience shows that females do not reach prime breeding age until they are about three years old. Females remain fertile for around three years, after this their fertility diminishes.

### **REFERENCES:**

The Care and Maintenance of Bearded Dragons P.Vosjoli(1990)

The inland bearded dragon its maintenance and breeding in captivity Douglas Sherriff

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