

Taming a bearded dragon, part II

Adolescent Angst

Case history #1, Teemu I read these posts of your dragons, how wonderful they are, how they like to climb on you and free roam in your house. And I'm wondering if you're keeping the same species that I am. Our dragons are totally different!!!

Case history #2, Cheryl I purchased a bearded dragon about 5 months ago. The first week I got him, everything went well. I was able to handle him, he would even crawl onto my hand willingly. About a week after I got him, I placed my hand into the tank to change his water, and he went nuts! He starting running around the perimeter of the tank. The next day, I went to pick him up and he showed every sign that he was pissed off: wide open mouth, black take, puffed black beard, and sometimes hissing. Since then, he has never let my hand(s) approach him without showing the above signs. I got a bearded dragon because all the research I did showed me that the bearded dragons were always "calm" and "friendly". My question: Is there any way I can gain his "love", so I can handle him?

A dragon can go through a phase during which he turns from a lovable little lizard into sulky, uncooperative, downright hostile stranger. I call the phase "Adolescent Angst". It can be ameliorated. Some suggestions:

- 1) Try turning the aggression into hunger...always have greens or treats in hand when putting your hands into the cage. If he gapes or threatens, shove the food in his mouth.
- 2) Pick her up and hold him gently despite squirming.
- 3) Keep the holding brief, but don't put him down as long as he is squirming (he will think "If I squirm, they will let me go!!!"). Put him down only when he has stopped squirming and closed his mouth.
- 4) Persist. At the least, she will be well-fed.
- 5) Calm a squirming BD is by covering his head gently with your hand.
- 6) Pick him up frequently, but keep your hand in his cage and just hold him gently for a few minutes.
- 7) Bribery: give her wax-worms or mango as lizard "candy"
- 8) Make a dragon-burrito; wrap him in a warm blanket and hold him.
- 9) Pick her up and hold her early in the morning before she is fully awake, or at night after she's gone to sleep.
- 10) Wait. Time will help. Much of this hostility is just adolescence!!

Case history #3, Tammy Give her some time, she will settle down but it takes a lot of patience & time. I had the same problem when I got my Red Sandfire female. The manager at the store I bought her from told me that she had bitten him & everyone else who dared to touch her. I paid the \$200.00 & brought her home expecting the worst, but she was so cute anyway. It took a while & a lot of patience but she is now lovable most of the time, she has never bitten me & even tolerates kisses. All I did was let her get used to seeing me & used to my hand in the tank at feeding times, eventually I started petting her everytime I fed her & when she got used to that I petted her everytime I walked by the tank. After she was used to that I then started getting her out for play time, only holding her long enough to get her out & talk to her a couple minutes. Now she is so used to me that I can hold her for long periods & when I say her name she responds. Just don't give up on her yet, believe me it's well worth the time. Good luck.

Case history #4, Ryan I'm not an expert but I had the same problem with my beardie when she was younger (~3-4 months). I couldn't figure out what was wrong. She would run away and beard at me whenever I tried to pick her up. Someone on this list, I forgot who, suggested to make sure I (my hands) did not smell like anything threatening. Since I have cats, I thought this could be a definite possibility. I made sure I washed my hands well with a non-scented soap before I handled her. This made a huge difference. After a week, she stopped running away and bearding at me.

Case history #5, Mark Lee Hanibal's name is, indeed, well deserved ! We bought Hanibal from a pet store here in Seattle who had 4 or five Rankins, but Hannibal was the only one who looked perfect. The others had deformed tails, missing toes etc. We discovered that this was a direct result of Hannibal's handiwork. He's an alpha male, who's not afraid of anyone or anything. The reason he and Clarise are in separate cages is that about a year and a half ago he tried to bite her foot. Since then, we've tamed him a lot and Clarise has become the aggressor! She knows that he can't get to her, so she'll dance around in front of him and sit in her hammock staring at him. Hannibal behaves like a lovestruck teenager around her and has taken to sleeping in the corner of the cage nearest to her :) When he puts his mind to it, he can still be difficult. Occasionally, when we've had to take him out to clean his cage, he'll whip our hands with his tail and open his mouth really wide in a threatening gesture. When he does this, we use an oven mitt to pick him up. The oven mitt was how we tamed him originally, as he can bite it without hurting himself, or us and after a few minutes he gets frustrated, stops biting and allows us to pick him up. We learned this technique by watching a program about training cage birds and modified it for lizards !

Case history #6, Bill:

- Take the gloves off and risk a nip- gloves will just reinforce the alienation because they never get to know YOU
- Persevere; it's just a teenager having a hoolie
- Reward good behaviour with tidbits.
- Go for small steps forward- any progress is better than none or a retrograde occurrence
- Don't worry- it seems like a lot of them go through this- they will grow out of it and they'll be all the better for it.

Case history #7, Sarah my abused female i rescued was a blood drawing biting teenager who hissed at me for the first two weeks we had her. After she realized that all her gaping did not impress me, she calmed down but still flattens out when I pick her up. I guess that she will always be a bit skittish on her backside where her tail was broken to a 90% hook in it. Patience will accomplish much . She is a beautiful lizard and I do not know why she was abused, they were going to put her down when I overheard them and offered to take her home. I contacted her previous owners and told them how much she had changed and you wouldn't believe that they wanted her back I told them no way!

Case history #8, Karen. Maximillian flared his beard and flattened out and hissed every time we had to put our hand in for anything. When we tried to handle him he'd run as fast as he could from our hand and then wriggle for all he was worth once we caught him. He's grown quite a bit and has settled down a lot. We persisted and tonight gave me a great pay off for the patience I've shown him. I take a different dragon out each night after their heat lamps go out for some one-on-one bonding time. Tonight was Max's turn. I put him on my chest and talked to him and rubbed his head. He stayed really alert for a while with a worried look on his face. About a half hour later he nuzzled his whole body down against me, folded his arms under, laid his chin down and went to sleep. The persistence is finally showing some results. This is a huge step for him. We've got him at 1 month of age and he's a little over 4 and 1/2 months now. He never used to sit still, much less close his eyes and relax. I'm so excited! Keep persisting...the rewards are wonderful.

Case history #10, Cath We had the same reaction from Neko at first. I think he thought we were going to eat him. But someone suggested that we wrap him in a towel (washcloth) like a burrito so he feel safe. Now, it's been 7 weeks and he loves us...doesn't "glup" at us and really looks forward to evening cuddles with the kids. We all pass around the Neko burrito! Try that....warmth is key. And remember-the more you handle now the better life will be later, like when it is time to trim those toe nails.....ack

Case history #11, Trudy Oh brother, have I been there.... Mem went through one of those rebellious stages for about 2 months before he went into brumation. It all culminated with him throwing a GIANT hissy fit when I tried to put a lizard leash on him. Tail whipping, hissing, puffing up, lunging at me. Before I had a chance to get my hand out of the way he did manage to put a pretty good pinch on my thumb and slice the skin a little. (How bad was it? All of my cats - including the 15 pound one - were terrified of him!) Mem just woke up from brumation on Sunday morning and I am glad to say he's behaving better. Now I can pick him up without a fuss and he's even trusting enough that he seems to be having fun at bath time. (Used to hate it.) Now he'll put his front two feet up on my hand and play "jet ski" in the water. No matter what Don't Give Up!!! Somewhere in that little monster you're tempted to recycle into a change purse is a loving little lizard! I think it's just a phase and with persistence you'll outlast the uglies and get to the good stuff!

Case history #12, Ter I sympathize. When Mr. B. first was with us, it was a constant worry for about 5 months. We were getting frustrated with the puffing and the mouth gaping. We tried a glove to pick her up and when we would go near her tank we would speak softly and reach in to caress her. Suddenly one day it all went away. We can handle her and she cuddles and is easy to be with .I called it her teenage time... Until she was better with us, I told the kids to leave her alone. Now they handle her fine and she is fine with them. I took her to my son's school, and she was a perfect lady.

Case history #13, Pam Have you tried swimming him? People with aggressive igs will sometimes fill the bathtub with warm water and let them swim until they get tired... then "rescue" them, and the igs are too tired to bite and whip.

Case history #14, Natasha I got a suggestion from someone on this list that might help you. She recommended that I pick him up at night while he was sleeping. I did try this and it helped. I would pick him up with a mud glove used for gardening. Once he got out and calmed down, I would just sit him on my lap while I did computer stuff.

Case history # 15, Urusula Our Bd behaved exactly the same way yours do. But let me assure you, they will outgrow this phase and you will have 2 lovable BD's. I was very frustrated with Pogo's behavior. Keep handling him, don't give up. Pogo was probably close to a year old when he finally decided, Mom isn't that bad at all and enjoyed being held. For us it was a very looooooong year and believe me, I was close to giving up on him several times. Pogo and I had quite a few talks and I threatened him that if he would try to bite one more time, he had to stay in his enclosure and would never see the outside again. And he just gave me that look which says: whatever!! He went from terrible toddler to rebellious teenager and finally to a very tame and cuddly adult. Patience...patience...patience