



## HIBERNATING MY PET REPTILE

### What is hibernation/brumation in reptiles?

Most people will think of bears and hedgehogs when they think of hibernation, but many reptiles also hibernate, but to our reptile pets it is called brumation. **This is the process in which a reptile's metabolism slows dramatically to help them survive the cold winter**, rather than the process of surviving from fat reserves as with our mammalian friends. While many people think of only tortoises brumating many popular snake species also brumate including the king snake, garter snake and milk snake.

Brumation occurs in response to reduced temperatures, day length and day light. Due to this most owners will have no choice but to let their pets undergo brumation, as they will take it upon themselves to go through the process unless care is taken to alter temperature and day light hours through UVB as autumn approaches.

### Why should I let my pet go through the process?

It's that time of the year again when the weather is beginning to get colder and the trees are losing their leaves; it's autumn. As a reptile owner you may be starting to think about hibernating your pet. So why should you allow your pet to hibernate?

- Reptiles will naturally slow down during this time of the year.
- Allows reptiles to display normal behaviours that they would in the wild.
- Reduces growth rates.
- Necessary for breeding and the cooling temperatures stimulates the production of sperm and eggs in the female.

While a natural process, **brumation can be dangerous if any reptile is not in good condition** - a poorly reptile that undergoes the process can become seriously ill and even die. It is therefore always advisable to **take your pet to a vet for a pre-hibernation health check** before you choose to brumate or if you suspect your reptile has decided themselves that brumation is happening.

### Brumation Protocol

#### **Preparing your reptile for brumation:**

- Pre-hibernation check with the vet. Remember to bring a faecal sample with you to your appointment!
- Give last feed on the last day in October.
- Maintain normal temperatures and light for the next 2 weeks to allow gut contents to clear then slowly start to decrease temperature by approx. 5° per week until brumation temperature is reached.
- Weigh after final defecation.
- It is important to **continue regular bathing** until completely ready to brumate.
- Turn off heat sources and supplemental lighting.
- Ensure area is free from hazards such as predator risk.



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### During brumation:

- The temperature for hibernation should be around 10-12°C depending on the species for the next 1-4 months (3-4 months for most colubrid snakes).
- Except for Mediterranean tortoises where the temperature should be between 4-7°C, and brumation should last a maximum of 3 months.
- Keep the room or environment dim or dark for the duration of hibernation, except for health checks which should be carried out every other week.
- If you **find the tortoise has urinated on any health checks the brumation process should be stopped** and the reptile woken up.
- Weigh the reptile at the midpoint on brumation. Any weight loss of 7.5% of its starting weight is a sign of deteriorating health and the animal should be removed from brumation.

### Following brumation:

- In the first week of February or March depending on your target brumation period resume heating to its normal levels and resume normal supplemental lighting.
- Weigh brumated reptiles on the day of heating and lighting being reinstated - **any animal which has lost 10% of its body weight should see a vet immediately.**
- For breeding animals feed small frequent meals during the first week of post-brumation and then large frequent meals thereafter to encourage breeding behaviour.
- **Any concerns then please book in for a post-hibernation check up with your vet.**

There are many problems associated with poor brumation in reptiles. These include post-hibernation conjunctivitis, neurological problems, liver problems and post brumation anorexia. Leukopenia - a problem with white blood cells - is also common and causes a compromised immune system leaving these pets susceptible to other infections.

**If you have any questions about brumation/hibernation in reptiles, or if you need any advice about your reptile, please call the surgery on 01325 620968**