

Shedding

Shedding or Ecdysis is the process by which snakes and other reptiles periodically discard the outer portion of their skin. This activity is under hormonal control and associated with growth. Most reptiles shed their skin 4-8 times per year. The frequency of shedding depends upon many factors, including environmental temperature, frequency of feeding, amount fed at each feeding, and activity level. Young reptiles shed more than older ones because growth is relatively rapid in the first few years of life.

Healthy reptiles usually have little or no difficulty with shedding. Snakes will tend to shed their skin in one piece while lizards will shed in many pieces. Snakes that shed in pieces usually occur due to previous injuries or scarring, poor temperature and humidity control, or just in plain enclosures where snakes may not have enough rough objects to aid in the shedding process.

Stresses associated with shedding can be substantial. Sick reptiles, those suffering from malnutrition, or those whose health has been directly or indirectly compromised by poor husbandry can experience delays in or have difficulty shedding.

The shedding process is preceded by a period of relative inactivity. In snakes this period usually lasts 1-2 weeks, during which time the eyes begin to exhibit a dull, bluish-white opaque appearance. During this period, the snake's vision is impaired, which can cause them to be rather unpredictable and sometimes aggressive. The skin tends to have an overall dull appearance. The underlying skin is soft and vulnerable to damage while the outer layers prepare to slough away. Lizards don't get the opacity in the eye.

The eyes again become transparent after 7-15 days and shedding commences. A snake will make use of any rough objects or surfaces within its enclosure to help shed the skin. Shedding commences with

the skin of the head and progresses down the body and tail. It sort of slides out of the old skin. Lizards don't shed in one piece and rather peel non-specifically, similar to a human with a sunburn.

Many snakes will defecate after shedding and/or consume large quantities of water.