

What's the Scoop on Reptile Poop?

By Eric Roscoe

As with all animals, reptiles and amphibians (which are collectively known as herps, or herptiles) urinate and defecate, just as humans need to, as well as our dogs, cats, and other animals. Once the food they have previously consumed has been passed through their stomachs and broken down internally into wastes in their small and large intestines, they are ready to expel it through their multi-purpose openings known as their **vents** or **cloacas**, that are also used in reproduction. Expelled wastes from reptiles and amphibians can either come in the form of feces, or **urates**, which for these animals, are their nitrogenous waste products equivalent to urine seen in mammals. Many reptiles and amphibians expel wastes in this form as a way of greatly preventing water loss associated with excreting wastes. These urates typically are the whitish to yellowish chalky to liquid-like substances seen either along with feces, or separately.

When it comes to your pet reptile or amphibian's wastes, there are many clues and pieces of information that can be learned and discovered about the overall health of your animal, as well as the animal's diet, history, and many other factors. While comparative waste charts for dogs and cats are widely utilized and available in the veterinary profession, similar charts for herps are scarce simply due to the tremendous variety of species that are kept, and what may constitute as normal wastes in one species, or even individual animal, may differ greatly or be considered abnormal in another. Many different factors can influence the outcome of poop, including each animal's species, metabolic rate or activity, their specific diet, current and overall health, their level of hydration and humidity, and other ambient or environmental factors. It should therefore be important for all pet owners and enthusiasts to learn and become familiar with each of their individual pets and their health, and be able to note when or what anything may be abnormal. However, there are several general considerations that can be looked for in

this quick article that can be used to indicate any changes from the norm. As always, if you suspect your pet to be seriously ill, it is always best to consult with or visit your veterinarian for best advice specifically pertaining to the problem, as well as treatment options. Your veterinarian will also be able to formally run or conduct fecal examinations to identify any health related issues such as internal parasites, or other problems. With this said, here are some general considerations to note:

- Changes in the amount of feces (more or less than usual)
- Changes in the frequency of excrements (more or less often than usual)
- Odor. Although most poop naturally gives off nitrogenous gasses which give it is odor, any unusually or exceptionally foul, rancid, or “rotting” odors should be noted.
- Changes in thickness and consistency (thicker and more consistent, or thinner, runnier, and less consistent than usual)
- Texture, Ability to Maintain Shape, and Level of Moisture (harder, smaller, and/or drier than usual, or larger, wetter, and softer than usual)
- Changes in Color of the waste products and/or presence of blood in the fecal masses. Color changes can indicate internal issues with specific organs or organ systems. Internal parasites can also sometimes be visually detected through fecal masses as well depending on the health issue.
- Changes in the ease or ability to pass wastes. This should be carefully observed, noted, and remedied whenever possible.

Overall, noting any changes in your reptile or amphibian’s fecal matter and other waste products are only one of many different signs and symptoms that can be used to indicate whether or not your animal is healthy and up to par and all of their systems functioning properly. Always be sure to research and learn as much as possible about the specific diets, natural histories, and other aspects of keeping the species in question, and never be hesitant to (or ignore for that matter) consult with or seek professional treatment from your veterinarian when a serious problem or change does occur and requires professional veterinary attention.