



DOOBIE

By Dr. Patty Link

"Doobie", an approximately 5-year-old male ball python was presented for evaluation of red skin blisters all over his body. He had been rescued from a poor husbandry situation only a few days prior. The exact husbandry situation was unknown. Upon presentation Doobie had red coalescing blisters on both sides of the caudal half of his body. (photo) He was slightly thin but bright, alert, and responsive. A sample of the vesicles was collected and submitted for culture and sensitivity as well as cytology.

While waiting for the results, 20mg/kg ceftazidime IM Q 72 hours was initiated. Husbandry recommendations were reviewed with the client. These included making a homemade humidity box out of gladware. The client was instructed to dremel a hole in the corner to allow the snake to enter the container. Moistened vermiculite or sphagnum moss should be placed into the box and the lid tightly replaced. This creates a high humidity environment in part of the cage that can be easily cleaned by removing the lid but allows the remainder of the cage to be dry. Ball pythons are from a warm fairly dry area of Africa but do require higher humidity during shedding periods. It was recommended to keep the ambient temperature from 75 degrees F at night to 80 degrees during the day. Ball pythons should have a basking area of 90 degrees. These temperatures are within the ball python's preferred optimal temperature zone or "POTZ". The POTZ for most reptile species can easily be found online at anapsid.org, which is where I usually refer clients for reliable reptile information.

The client was instructed to replace all bedding with clean dry plain newspaper until skin condition resolved and to always provide a large fresh bowl of clean water.

Staphylococcus was isolated and was intermediately susceptible to ceftazidime that was already started. Doobie was showing signs of improvement by the time the culture result was final so this protocol was continued. The cytology showed toxic heterophils (the neutrophils of the reptile world) as well macrophages with phagocytized bacteria. There was no evidence of cancerous cells or fungal elements.

Most medical problems seen in reptiles are a direct result of improper husbandry which was likely the cause in this case. The generic term for this condition is "blister disease" and can be caused by a bite from live prey, improper humidity, poor sanitation, or improper enclosure temperature.

Three months into treatment he is continuing to improve and will likely stay on antibiotics for at least another month and continues to come in for his recommended rechecks.