

Frequently Asked Questions--SKIN SHEDDING

You will find the answers to some basic snake keeping questions by reading these communications. Obviously, my answers were directed to the person asking the question, so my response to them may or may not give you all the details that you need. I recommend that you save yourself and your snake lots of trouble by making sure that you have a complete understanding of snake keeping requirements "up front" so you can prevent common problems before they happen.

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Question:

Over the last couple days I have noticed the skin on my ball python getting a bit milky looking, now her eyes are hazing over. I know this means time to shed. My question is, how long does the whole process take? And, when and if I should worry about providing increased humidity or anything like that.

Answer:

You're right, it sounds like it's shedding time. The length of the entire process can vary, and another problem in counting the exact number of days is that the starting point is subjective. (At what point do you start counting?) Since this animal is new to you, it had probably started the cycle a couple days before you noticed it. After more experience with this snake, you'll see it coming sooner.

Basically, the short answer is that it takes a week to two weeks. Extra humidity during the entire shedding cycle can be very beneficial (even necessary), but I can't comment specifically on your setup since I don't know what conditions you are currently providing to your snake. Offering a shedding box may be a good idea since you don't know for sure what this particular animal's needs are yet.

You can use the experience of each shed to determine what your snake needs, and then you can attempt to provide better environmental conditions the next time it becomes "opaque". After a couple of cycles, you'll know what conditions this animal requires to ensure a trouble-free shed. Also, in case you don't know, you should refrain from handling and feeding this snake until the shed is complete.

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Question:

My jungle carpet shed for the first time two days ago, since i've had him. The skin still remains on the last inch of his tail. I've tried soaking him, this worked for three inch section between the vent and the remaining section. Usually the soak works for my other boids but this one is being a bit of trouble.

Answer:

It was good that you noticed the unshed skin because this can sometimes turn into a health issue.

Soaking the snake in water almost always works if you use the following tip. Crumple up some newspaper to make numerous newspaper balls about the size of golf balls, enough to cover the bottom of the soaking container. Wet them and add them to the water. There should still be a small amount of unabsorbed water in the bottom of the container. If you can keep the temperatures appropriate, you can leave the snake in there overnight, but try for at least a couple of hours. Very often the snake will be able to use the paper as it crawls around to pull off loose skin on its own. This is what we want because it's the least stressful to the snake. However, if the skin is still there after soaking, you

can GENTLY restrain the snake and use a wet paper towel, wrapped around the snake's tail, to carefully pull off the offending skin.

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Question:

Pet stores sell products to help snakes shed. Do they really help in snakes with poor shedding?

Answer:

If you have a snake with a shedding problem, may I suggest that you look for an underlying cause? Snakes don't have pet-store products in the wild, and man-made products are not necessary to have snakes that shed well. All snakes need is the proper environment, and they'll do the rest. More than likely your snake just needs additional moisture during its shedding cycle. In nature, the snake might go find a pile of wet leaves to crawl into. A similar environment can be easily provided with a shedding box that provides the proper micro-habitat for your snake--think "hide box", only wetter.

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Question:

I have had my texas rat snake for almost 3 weeks feeding him every 4 days and he hasn't shed. he is 13-15 inches long and eats well. when will he shed?

Answer:

Since your snake is young and is therefore in the major growth phase of its life, I would expect that it will start a shed cycle soon. If you keep accurate records, you may begin to see a pattern after a few sheds. Of course, food intake, temperature, and other factors will affect the frequency of shedding, so I don't expect you will ever be able to predict exactly when it will happen.

Question:

hi, i have a 6 month old corn who shed two weeks ago but now she looks as if shes about to shed again!! i thought the normal time between shedding was 4 to 8 weeks, or around there. is it possible for her to be ready to shed again??? from what i can tell from her eyes and skin shes about to shed! Is she ok?? any help would be greatly appreciated, thanx.

Answer:

Sometimes this happens, and it shouldn't be anything to worry about. Young snakes can grow very fast and replace their outer layers of skin quite often--sometimes every 2-3 weeks. The shedding rate will vary, and of course there are other factors besides how fast the snake is growing that influence shedding frequency. Snakes operate on their own schedules, and sometimes it's hard for us to understand it, but we can observe, learn, and enjoy them for the wonders of nature that they are (corny, but true!).

Question:

I have a shed skin from my 1.5 yr. old corn. It is 4ft. even. How many inches do you figure I should take off to have an approx. actual size?

Answer:

That varies so much, I don't think there's a way to figure even an "approximate actual size" from a shed skin. I've had snakes that were young and obviously growing quickly produce sheds that were shorter than their previous one. In other words, it will vary from one shed cycle to the next even for the same snake. You'd be better off getting the best measurement you could with a tape measure. You can also coax a snake to crawl into a clear, plastic tube to keep it

relatively straight if you want a more accurate measurement of its length.

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Question:

Can you offer me some advice/reassurance? My six-month-old ball python has shed only twice since I got her - once at about 4 weeks, then again at about 3 months. On both occasions the skin has come off cleanly, so I'm pretty sure the humidity is O.K. The snake is feeding very well and steadily gaining body weight - in fact I have cut down the feeding regimen slightly to avoid obesity.

I'm just a bit concerned that she has shown no signs of entering a shedding cycle for three months now.

Answer:

It sounds like your snake is doing well. I understand that it's unusual for it to go this long without shedding. However, I wouldn't say that means there's a problem, even for a young snake that you'd expect to shed more often. Sometimes a snake's shedding rate closely reflects its growth rate, and other times it doesn't seem to. I've noticed a great deal of variation in shedding rates through the years, even among animals of the same species and also for a given snake from shed to shed. In the absence of actual symptoms of illness, I don't think you have anything to worry about.

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Question:

My mom just got me a pet snake. I wanted a captive bred one, but she got wild caught. The only problem I have is he has little pieces of unshed skin. Will they come off on his next shed?

Answer:

If the next molting cycle is relatively trouble-free, the pieces of old, unshed skin will be removed then. As long as the old skin only exists in a few small places, it shouldn't cause any problems. You should keep an eye on it and be sure that you don't start to see symptoms of something more serious, like infection, which could cause redness, discharge of fluid, etc. And you should also check to make sure that the snake doesn't have mites since they can contribute to shedding (and many other) problems.

If it were my new snake, especially since it's wild caught, I'd be wanting it to settle into captivity with a minimum of stress, so be careful about how you handle the animal, and make sure that you give it proper environmental conditions. One low-stress way to help a snake complete a bad shed is to put the snake into a medium of wet paper, making sure it has access to proper temperatures, and leave it for several hours or even overnight. As it crawls through the paper, your snake may be able to remove the old skin. Don't pull skin off yourself, even after soaking, unless it comes off very easily.

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Question:

Why does my kingsnake defecate each time she sheds, thus ruining the shed skin?

Answer:

It's normal for snakes to defecate when they shed, but they don't always do it on/in the shed skin. If you want to save a skin, you should eventually be able to get one that isn't soiled. If for some reason you need a skin now, I'd be happy to send you one. It would not be from the same species, however.

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