

Introduction

Keeping detailed records of your animals health, behavioral habits, and life-cycles is a very important part of good reptilian or amphibian husbandry. There are many ways in which this can be done. While some rely only on memory to keep track of feeding schedules and health concerns, most find it much easier and more accurate to keep detailed records. There are several software programs that allow the herp keeper to keep virtual records on their PC, but what happens when hard drive failure wipes out those records? I do use a few of the software programs to keep track of my animals, but also keep physical backup copies.

This system is the one that I designed and use to keep track of all of my specimens, enclosures, daily herp-room maintenance, monthly feeding and shedding cycles, health problems, and interesting behaviors that I observe.

This system is designed for any collection of any size, and is also designed for multiple keepers if more than one person helps to maintain your collection.

This general guide is based on the way that I use this system, and should help to get you started using it to if you chose to.

A Word On Names & Numbers

If you're like me, you have far too many animals to name each individual. All of my animals have two unique numbers, a "Specimen ID Number" and a "Specimen Reference Number".

One of my Western Diamondback Rattlesnake's "Specimen Reference Number" is A1, and that is the one I use as it's "name". That is the number that is on his cage label, and is the number I use to *refer* to him by. His "Specimen ID Number" is 00125.

If I decide to sell, trade, or he otherwise leaves my collection, I will use his "Specimen Reference Number" again for another animal. His "Specimen ID Number" will never be used again however, as all of his records use the Specimen ID Number as a unique "signature" for all the behaviors, feeding and shedding cycles I observed from a male of his species, with his unique health and care conditions while I owned him.

This way, I can look back to his old records, long after he is gone, and have some solid data to go by for care and health treatment, should I obtain another animal of the same species.

You will notice fields to enter a "Specimen ID Number" and a "Specimen Reference Number" on all of the records used in this system. The way you chose to utilize these numbering/naming systems is up to you.

The Specimen Care Information Sheet

This record contains fields to enter all of the basic information about the specimen in question, and the basic care conditions of the animal now that it is in your care. Each specimen should have a Specimen Care Information Sheet, and this sheet should be filled out directly after obtaining the animal.

The Specimen Observation Report

This report is the basic and most comprehensive record for each specimen in a collection. Each animal should have their own individual Specimen Observation Report.

Once an animal is obtained, set it up under the appropriate conditions in its new enclosure, or quarantine the animal and monitor its behaviors, feeding response, defecations, urinations, shedding, pre-shedding opaqueness, etc. for a period of 2-3 weeks. Also note any injuries, signs of illness, or parasites observed during this time in the Health Report Section of the Specimen Observation Report.

If any strange or noteworthy behaviors are observed, record this information in the Behavioral Observation Report Section of the Specimen Observation Report.

All of the pages in the Specimen Observation Report should be kept together (preferably stapled together), and all health reports or Behavioral Observation Reports completed throughout the animals life time should be added to this Specimen Observation Report.

The General Specimen Health Report

NOTE* This record is not designed to be filled out by a veterinarian. The General Specimen Health Report is designed to be filled out by the keeper, every month or so, or when an animal shows signs of illness, injury, or parasite infestation.

All documentation provided by a veterinarian (as well as prescribed medication instructions) should be stapled to this General Specimen Health Report in the event that veterinary service is required.

A General Specimen Health Report should be completed regularly by the keeper, noting the general appearance of the common areas of injury or illness (eyes, skin, mouth, etc.), as well as harmful behaviors such as refusing to accept food or water.

The Behavioral Observation Report

The Behavior Observation report is designed mostly for those who observe the natural habits of their animals regularly, and those who are interested in the scientific study of a species' natural behaviors.

Any noteworthy behavior should be recorded in a Behavioral Observation Report. Such behaviors may include: unusual body positioning, caudal luring (if the species in question is not known to caudal lure), arboreal species spending excessive time on the bottom of the enclosure, etc.

The Daily Maintenance Log

This log is a quick and easy way to record daily herp room maintenance. All activities can be recorded immediately on the Daily Maintenance Log, and then recorded to other records of importance at a later time.

This sheet works well when posted on the wall or door of the herp room.

The Communicator Log

The communicator log is designed for collections that are maintained by more than one person. Any noteworthy information or observation can be recorded to the Communicator Log by an assistant, and then recorded to the other records of importance by the main keeper at a later time.

This is a good way for multiple keepers to "communicate" what needs to be done in the herp room, or what to look out for. This sheet also works well if posted on the wall or door of the herp room.

The Monthly Specimen Activity Log

A quick and easy way to record the basic activities of each individual specimen in a collection. Any areas of importance (such as a n injury) can be recorded to the appropriate record at a later date.

Each specimen should have their own Monthly Specimen Activity Log for each month. For future reference, SAVE EVERY MONTHLY SPECIMEN ACTIVITY LOG.

This sheet works well if posted on or near the enclosure of that particular specimen.

The Specimen Log

This is how I keep track of the Specimen Reference Numbers and Specimen ID Numbers in my collection, and is also the way I record the gender, specimen count, and species count of every animal in my collection. This sheet also tells me what enclosure each specimen inhabits.

The Enclosure Log

This is how I keep track of all of my enclosures, the target parameters, and inhabitants of each.

Specimen Cards

Pretty self-explanatory. These cards are posted on the animals enclosure and basically serve as a name tag.

Once printed, fill out each card, and then cut them out. I place mine in the hard plastic sleeves used to protect baseball cards. They fit perfectly, and were designed to do so. This makes the cards last a lot longer.

Post these cards directly on the animals enclosure.

Enclosure Cards

Basically just labels for each enclosure, listing the target temperatures and humidity level, as well as the inhabitants of each enclosure.

These also work great in the plastic baseball card sleeves.

Post these cards directly on the animals enclosure.

I hope this guide was at least somewhat helpful in explaining how I use my system. I know that many herp keepers have devised their own record-keeping systems, but often fail to keep their records up to date. Believe me, in many cases, taking a few minutes to fill out a sheet of paper proves to be very helpful in the long run.

I thought I would share this system, for those who don't have the time to develop their own. Feel free to use my system, or distribute it freely if you so chose.

All I ask is that credit is given, and the copyright footer at the bottom of each page is not tampered with.

Take Care, and Happy Herping!

-John Mendrola (Pennsylvania Woodland Herpetological).