



SAPPHIRE'S STORY

By Dr. Lauren Korecky

Sapphire, a 13 week old male bearded dragon presented through the emergency service for lameness of the left front leg. Upon presentation, he was dragging the limb and made little to no attempt to bear weight on or otherwise manipulate the limb normally. To better understand what was happening with the limb, radiographs were needed. However, being just 8 grams, (about the weight of two nickels,) Sapphire was too small for the full-sized radiograph machine to adequately capture the detail needed to examine his leg. As a result, Sapphire's leg was radiographed using the equipment normally employed to take dental x-rays on cat and dog patients. These radiographs showed thickening and irregularity of the radius and ulna, the two bones in the forearm, at the level of the elbow. This appearance can be consistent with osteomyelitis, or an infection in the bone. Bacteria can be introduced to the bone and surrounding soft tissue from another, already infected area of the body via the blood stream, or from trauma such a deep puncture wound. The cause of Sapphire's infection is unknown.

Treating Sapphire was a challenge, again due to his small size. A custom medication was made by mixing equal volumes of injectable Baytril, (an antibiotic,) and saline to make a dilute antibiotic solution. Sapphire's owner was then given insulin syringes and was instructed to inject a very small amount of the solution into a prey item, (such as a dubia roach or meal worm,) and then feed the injected prey to Sapphire. His owners also had to modify his habitat at home to restrict his exercise and normal activity. Branches, rocks and logs were removed, and newspaper was used as bedding. He was given a cave with a very shallow slope, (approximately 2 inches,) so that he had a place to hide and feel safe, but did not place a lot of stress on the leg should he decide to climb it.

Sapphire was treated for a total of six weeks using the previously described protocol, and was seen for two recheck exams during this time frame. Improvement was consistently noted during both exams – he had increased use of the leg and digits and was less painful on manipulation of the limb. During the second recheck exam, repeat radiographs were taken. The second set of radiographs showed a decrease in the thickening and irregularity of the bones when compared to the initial radiographs, indicating healing. At week six of treatment the medication was discontinued, and normal tank furniture and bedding were reintroduced to the habitat. Sapphire's owner reports that he has continued to do well after the antibiotic was stopped. He is able to climb and use the limb normally.