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NATIVE ANIMAL TRUST FUND INC.

“REMOVING TAR from BLUE TONGUE LIZARDS “

(and other reptiles)

During this summer, I have received into care, FOUR Blue Tongue Lizards, who have, in one way or another, found themselves embedded in warm-hot tar. This has happened when they have either tried to cross a newly tarred road, or come to grief in a backyard shed. (We all know what junk there is in a backyard shed!).

I once heard a saying that:

***“ONE THING WRONG WITH TODAY’S SOCIETY IS
THAT TOO MANY DIRT ROADS HAVE BEEN TARRED.”***

A Lizard has either written this, or at least thought it, as it has found itself sinking deeper and deeper into the black glug.

If you can imagine what it would be like sinking helplessly into Quick-Sand, then that must be at least similar, to a lizard as they sink deeper in the tar, finding they cannot even open their mouths.

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Although my first “tar baby” was a Bearded Dragon, all the others have been Blue Tongue Lizards

I have been caring for Lizards for over Twelve Years and after my first fumbling, bumbling attempt at Tar Removal, I now find I can remove the tar quickly and efficiently.

IT IS FOR THIS REASON THAT I WISH TO SHARE THIS KNOWLEDGE WITH YOU TODAY.

On 3rd OCTOBER 1997, a telephone call came in at approximately 2PM. Elizabeth was one of our carers and she was very distraught. She had been called to her neighbour’s property to view his new driveway. He had poured bitumen onto it that afternoon and was very proud of what he had achieved.

As they were checking out the bitumen, a Bearded Dragon came from nowhere and ran straight across the bitumen, which was still warm, and dived into an old container for safety. Unfortunately this was the watering can, which held the bitumen, and it was still quite warm.

By the time Elizabeth got to the can, there was only the head, and a portion of his back exposed. The rest of the Bearded Dragon had sunk into the container of tar.

It was three days, and many products later, before that Bearded Dragon was free of the tar. Now it only takes me approximately 2 hours to release a lizard from the same coverage of tar.

This Bearded, who was my first tar baby, was rescued and brought home in a clean cotton cloth. He was placed into an unheated carry container. This was to keep the body temperature low, thus decreasing his feeling of pain.

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Using a pair of scissors with rounded tips, I commenced cutting away some of the excess tar. This was tedious, time-consuming but some headway was being made. The plan was to cut the tar back as close to the bodyline as I could.

I then had to find a product to remove the tar, without injuring the scales on the Bearded Dragon. As the Ventral/tummy surface was the worst affected I needed to take great care with the fine layer of scales present in that area.

I then commenced telephoning as many Veterinarians and Chemists that I knew. I ended up with a wonderful list of items to buy. I was advised that there was no guarantee that these items would do the job, but everyone was very helpful. At this stage the tar removal was looking good.

Over the next 24 hours, some of the items which I can remember using were:

- ❖ Methylated Spirits**
- ❖ Remover “soap”**
- ❖ Ether**
- ❖ Tea Tree Oil**
- ❖ Eucalyptus Oil**
- ❖ Various other removers**

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None of these products made any significant difference, although I was slowly making progress, but it was quite distressing. My hands were becoming cracked and sore. From the point of view of the Dragon, he also was becoming agitated, as these guys do not settle as easily as Blue Tongue Lizards.

It was now the second day and things did not appear to be progressing fast enough for the dragon or myself. He had been kept “off heat” and had not been fed since his accident. I felt that feeding would result in regurgitation and certainly did not want to risk any further harm to him

My hands were quite sore and the tar was becoming adhered to my skin. I needed to do something about my hands at this stage and grabbed a tube of UNGVITA that was in our bathroom cupboard. I started to work it into the cracks of my hands only to find that the tar came away immediately.

I think it was at this stage that I remembered a saying that a very dear friend of mine used often:

“COMMON THINGS OCCUR COMMONLY, RARE THINGS OCCUR RARELY”.

I started to work the Ungvita Cream into the tarred areas of the Dragon, it softened and I could wipe off a layer at a time. Over the next few hours I found that if I “lathered” the dragon with Ungvita Cream, working it in to the tar, I was able to wipe it off with great success.

In less than 2 hours the Dragon was free of most of the tar.

UNGVITA is (Vitamin “A” Ointment) In A Petroleum Ointment Base. The manufacturer is Roche. The one I buy has a purple label as opposed to the Lanolin based product. Each Tube contains 50gNet.

BLUE TONGUE LIZARDS AND TAR REMOVAL

When it comes to removing tar from Blue Tongue Lizards I find that scissors, with rounded edges, are excellent just to cut the tar back to the body level as mentioned before. Again I cover the lizard quite thickly with Ungvita and work it into the tar. Using clean, old cotton rags I gently wipe as much of the tar as I can.

With Blue Tongues you need to be extremely careful if they have tar in their ear cavities. You can plug this area with Ungvita and wipe it out with a piece of rolled material. Never put cotton buds into this area as you may damage the fine membrane in the ear cavity and thus run the risk of meningitis occurring.

Around the legs and digits, you also need to be careful that you do not pull off any digits, thinking they are tar. Gently work the cream in and wipe off is the only safe method.

This may take 2 lots of 2 hours over say 2 days. You need to check the mucus membranes in the mouth of the lizard, to ensure that there is no paleness occurring. This will be from stress and it is better to leave the lizard for a while and continue cleaning him later.

I do not have the lizard on heat nor do I feed him during this time. Again, this is to lower the feeling of pain and to prevent stress regurgitation.

Once the lizard is free enough of the tar to expose the scales underneath, I then leave the lizard be. He can be gently warmed and water, or a very small amount of food, given. Feeding can increase as the days go on. Hopefully he will be a very hungry lizard and thus ecdysis (shedding) should occur within a few weeks. This is the exciting part for both you and the lizard. Occasionally the Blue Tongue Lizard will have burn marks showing after ecdysis has occurred. Keep using Ungvita to this area and it will soon heal.

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When doing this work with lizards, it is wise to remember that without the intervention of the carer, the lizard would “come to a sticky end”. Be brave when offering this type of help, it is scary at first, but it is also a matter of life and death to the Lizard. What I have described above is a most gentle method of doing this work.

As a footnote -I now use Ungvita on all Lizard wounds. It promotes new growth of scales and helps in the healing of the wound.

One very successful case using Ungvita was when a Lace Monitor had Domestos bleach accidentally poured over his head and eyes. He was badly burnt and only had raw skin on his head and raw skin on his eyelids. We tried all the Veterinary Eye Products and as the swelling was not going down, this Monitor could have ended up being Euthanased.

Using the Ungvita cream to the eyes and cranial area, the swelling went down within 12 hours, and eventually the Monitor was released.

Thank you for allowing me to pass this knowledge on to you all and I can always be contacted on my mobile if you have further queries.

Thank you,

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NATF Co-ordinator of Lizards, Turtles and Goannas**

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