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Leopard Gecko Care

Care & Maintenance

Leopard geckos do not need fancy housing. They are happy in terrariums, plastic sweater boxes, big wooden cages, etc. However, they do require the following things:

Adequate Heat

A heating pad (like the ones used for people's backaches) can be used under one end of an aquarium. It should be under the glass, so that it never comes into contact with the lizard. Preferably use a pad smaller than the aquarium, so that the aquarium does not rest on the pad itself. This pad can be attached to the underside of the cage as well. A light can also be used, but the gecko also needs a day and night cycle, so the light will have to be turned off at night. Something else must keep it warm at night. A temperature around 85 degrees Fahrenheit or so during the day is best, while not much lower than 78 degrees at night.

A Constant Supply of Water

Leopard geckos drink fine from an open bowl of water.

Food

Hatching leopard geckos will eat small crickets. Larger geckos will eat crickets, assorted insects and even pinkie mice. You must supplement their diet with some reptile vitamin mix (these can be found in many pet stores) and calcium. The calcium is sold cheaply at most feed stores as agricultural grade limestone. You should mix up about half limestone/half vitamin mix (by weigh, not volume) and then sprinkle this mixture on the gecko's crickets once a week. The crickets should be covered in this whitish mixture. If the gecko is experiencing any calcium deficiency, its tail will begin to get little kinks in it. You should make sure it gets enough calcium. Most lizards can eat from 5-10 crickets every other day, but you will soon get a feel for what your individual lizard needs. Mealworms and other hard bodied insects should be avoided since they can cause constipation in lizards that are even a little bit "under the weather."

Adequate Shelter

Leopard geckos need some space where they can hide from daylight, heat, other lizards, and people. This can be an overturned box with a hole cut in it, or something more aesthetically pleasing. They must be able to get away from it all.

Shedding

All lizards shed their skin, so that they can grow. To aid in this process, you should place a stone in the cage somewhere, so that the gecko can rub against it when it sheds. If the gecko has any trouble shedding, you should help it. Place the gecko in a warm water bath up to the elbows for a few minutes, then pull any remaining skin off. You may have to soak it some more, if the skin does not pull off easily.

Natural History Information

The scientific name of the leopard gecko is *Eublepharis macularius*. This species of gecko is found in Pakistan and Western India in semiarid environments. Leopard geckos are mostly active at night or around dawn and dusk. They are predatory and eat most things that are smaller and they are, including

insects, spiders, mice, and lizards. These geckos can be long lived, since the record for keeping one in captivity is 15 years. They are in a different family from most geckos, as evidenced by them not having the adhesive pads on their toes (so they cannot climb glass!) and by them having movable eyelids.

Sex Determination

This species of gecko is especially interesting to scientists because the incubation temperature of the egg determines the sex of the individual. If a leopard gecko egg is incubated at 79-82 degrees Fahrenheit, then it will come out a female. If it is incubated at around 90.5 degrees, then it will probably be a male (80% chance), and if it is incubated at 93-95 degrees, then it will be a female. There are temperatures that produce about 50% male and 50% female. These are around 86-88 degrees Fahrenheit and 91 degrees.

Leopard geckos are not the only animals to have this strange sex determination mechanism. All crocodiles and alligators studied so far, many turtles, and a few other lizards all have their sex set during incubation. Scientists have yet to discover how they exhibit this phenomenon. No one has yet determined if there is some advantage to having males produced at some temperatures and females at others.

Reproduction

Leopard geckos can be sexed externally quite easily after they reach a few months of age (sexing before then is difficult at best). The males will have open pheromone secreting pores in a V-shaped pattern between their legs, while females will have closed pores, thus the V pattern will be unclear or invisible. Males also have swellings at the base of the tail, much wider heads and are generally larger than the females. If you want your geckos to breed, then beginning in midwinter (January or so), the males and females should be separated for a few weeks and then placed back together. One male can be used for several females.

WARNING: Males are territorial when placed with new males and can fight nastily. Please be aware of this when housing several lizards together.

The females should start to develop eggs inside of them at least 3 weeks after being placed with a male. These can often be seen developing inside the female's body. Before she lays, you should give the female a nesting box with moist vermiculite or sand in it. Females usually lay two eggs at a time (although first clutches often contain only one egg). The female should then lay a clutch of eggs every two weeks. The eggs should be removed immediately and placed in moist vermiculite or sand at a warm temperature (79- 93 degrees Fahrenheit). They should always be moist. The eggs should be ventilated and checked frequently during incubation as well. The higher the temperature, the faster the eggs will hatch. They usually hatch between 37 and 60 days.

The hatchlings are quite small (about 8 cm total length) and are also quite nasty tempered. They hiss and bite, but are quite harmless, even though the natives in Pakistan believe them to be poisonous.

Warning: Handle the hatchlings carefully because they often lose their tails when they are scared. The adults can do this too but they tend to be more resistant to it, since they have a lot of energy stored in their tail (hence their other common name – Fat-tailed Gecko). This tail dropping is a mechanism that many lizards use to get away from predators, because the predator goes after the writhing tail, while the lizard runs away.