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AGAMAS

Black-soil Bearded Dragon

Pogona henrylawsoni

Pogona henrylawsoni is the smallest bearded dragon: a low, compact agamid of no more than about 30 cm from the treeless black clay plains of central Queensland, with a weak beard and a short, blunt head. It is diurnal and calm and needs far less space than *Pogona vitticeps*, but has the same need for heat, strong UVB and a diggable substrate, and lives 10-15 years.

Family: Agamidae Former name: *Pogona brevis* Published 16 November 2026

KEY FACTS

THE ANIMAL

Adult size	**25-30 cm** total length incl. tail
Lifespan	**10-15 years**
Active	**By day**
Lifestyle	**Terrestrial and burrowing**
Habitat	**Semi-desert and savanna**
Difficulty	**Intermediate**

CARE

Min. enclosure	**90 × 45 × 45 cm** L × W × H for 1 adult
Temperature, day	**24-29 °C**
Basking spot	**38-45 °C**
Temperature, night	**13-24 °C**
Humidity	**30-50%**
Water	**Water dish**
UVB	**Essential** Ferguson zone 3
Diet	**Insects and plants**
Kept	**Singly, in pairs or one male with several females**

BREEDING

Reproduction	**Egg-laying**
Sexually mature	**12-24 months**
Clutch size	**5-19 eggs**
Clutches per year	**2**
Incubation	**58-64 days** at 29 °C

PROTECTION AND PAPERWORK

CITES	**Not listed**
EU annex	**Not listed**
IUCN	**Least Concern (LC)**

About the species

Pogona henrylawsoni is a small, compact bearded dragon with a short, blunt snout, short hind legs and a short tail. Head and body measure up to 15 cm, and the tail is slightly shorter than that, so the animal reaches no more than about 30 cm in total. It is thus considerably smaller than *Pogona vitticeps*.

The beard is weakly developed and lacks the elongated spines on the throat that the larger bearded dragons have. The largest spines sit at the back of the jaw, on the shoulders and in 1-4 rows along the flanks. The base colour is pale olive, brown, sandy or yellowish with two rows of pale spots between the neck and the thighs. Some adults are almost without pattern. When the animal threatens, it opens its mouth wide.

The taxonomy has been muddled. The species came to Europe in the early 1980s, but was not described until 1985. In 1994 it was described again as *Pogona brevis*, because the type specimen was wrongly believed to be lost, and in the hobby it went for a long time under the name "rankini", which has never been valid. *P. henrylawsoni* is now the valid name. The species name

honours the Australian writer Henry Lawson (1867-1922).

The species can be crossed with *P. vitticeps* and *Pogona nullarbor*, and hybrids are found in the trade. The animals outside Australia descend from a few animals that came out in the 1980s, and the small gene pool causes problems, including deformed spines. This guide applies to pure animals.

The animal is calm and curious and is often kept in place of *P. vitticeps* where there is no room for the large species.

Distribution and habitat

Pogona henrylawsoni is found only in central Queensland in Australia. The range runs from the area around Croydon in the north to Augathella in the south. The type locality lies 118 km west of Richmond.

> **Native range:** Australia.

HABITAT

Pogona henrylawsoni lives on the treeless black clay plains, which are cut by drought cracks and covered with grasses of the genus *Astrebla*. There are neither trees nor tall branches here, so the animal basks on low ground, stones and clods of earth. In danger it runs for cover. If cornered, it threatens with an open mouth and finally bites.

The animal lives on the ground and seeks shelter in soil cracks and burrows. The spines on the body help it wedge itself into the crack, so a predator cannot pull it out. Life in the wild is only poorly known. Two other reptiles that are also tied to the plains, *Varanus spenceri* and *Pseudechis colletti*, are known predators.

In winter the animal withdraws and is inactive for a couple of months. It is diurnal and eats insects and plant parts.

Care

THE ENCLOSURE

A single adult needs an enclosure of at least 90 × 45 × 45 cm, and more space will be used. A small group, for example a male with one or more females, requires at least 120 × 60 × 60 cm. The enclosure needs good ventilation and a lid or mesh.

P. henrylawsoni lives on the ground and needs floor space more than height. Furnish with a flat basking spot of stone or wood under the lamps, at least two hides (one at the warm end and one at the cool end) and stable stacks of slate or flat stones, shelves and a couple of low branches, so there is something to climb on.

The substrate should be diggable: at least 5 cm, preferably more, of fine sand mixed with clean topsoil (for example 60 % sand and 40 % topsoil). Solid substrate such as tiles or kitchen paper is an alternative for young and sick animals. Calcium sand, vitamin sand, crushed walnut shells and bark or wood shavings are unsuitable, because they can cause constipation. Remove faeces daily, and replace the substrate completely every 3-4 months.

The species tolerates conspecifics better than *P. vitticeps*. Two males must never be kept together, but a male with females or a group of females can work in a large enough enclosure. One animal per enclosure is just as good for the animal. Adults and young must always be kept apart.

Read more: Heat and temperature Read more: Calcium, vitamins and supplements

TEMPERATURE

The basking spot should have a surface temperature of 38-45 °C, measured with an infrared thermometer on the stone. The cool end should be 24-29 °C. Use a halogen spot above a flat stone or a piece of wood; halogen imitates the sun's heat best. Ceramic heaters and red or blue bulbs are poorer choices.

At night all heat and light are switched off, and the temperature may fall as low as 13 °C without extra heat. If the day is too cool, the animal may go into rest or fall ill. Use a thermostat as protection against overheating.

Dark, sluggish and withdrawn behaviour suggests that the animal is too cold, and persistent open-mouth posture at the basking spot that it is too hot.

HUMIDITY AND WATER

Humidity should average 30-50 %, measured in the middle of the enclosure with a digital hygrometer. Brief fluctuations up or down are harmless. Stagnant air and a wet substrate cause illness, so the enclosure must be well ventilated.

Mist heavily with water in the evening, so the humidity rises at night, and lightly in the morning, so there is dew that the animal can drink. Also provide a shallow bowl of fresh water. A slightly damp hide at the cool end helps during shedding.

Read more: Humidity, misting and ventilation

LIGHTING AND UVB

P. henrylawsoni is diurnal and needs plenty of bright white light and strong UVB. Use a T5 HO tube with 10-12 % UVB in a reflective fitting on the same side as the heat lamp. Over mesh the basking spot should be about 23-30 cm below the tube, inside the enclosure about 35-40 cm below. Like *P. vitticeps*, the species belongs to Ferguson zone 3, and a UV meter is the surest way to get it right. Glass and plastic between tube and animal block UVB.

An extra daylight lamp (about 6,500 K) makes the enclosure brighter. The light is on 13 hours a day in summer and 11 hours in winter and is switched off completely at night. A lack of UVB and calcium causes metabolic bone disease, one of the most common diseases in the species.

Read more: Lighting and UVB Read more: Common diseases and signs of illness

FEEDING

P. henrylawsoni is omnivorous and eats mostly insects and leafy greens.

- Hatchlings (under 3 months): insects 2-3 times daily and greens daily.
- Young (3-7 months): insects twice daily and greens daily.
- Subadults (7-12 months): insects and greens daily.
- Adults (over 12 months): insects 3-5 times a week and greens daily.

Good feeders are dubia roaches and other cockroaches, crickets, black soldier fly larvae, silkworms and tobacco hornworms; mealworms are given sparingly. The insects must be no larger than the distance between the animal's eyes. Greens include rocket, pak choi, kale, mustard greens, dandelion, watercress, endive, cactus pads and romaine lettuce, cut into small strips. Fruit is a rare treat.

Dust the insects lightly with calcium; it does no harm to skip a dusting now and then. Feed the insects a good diet for at least a day before they are used.

Read more: Feeder animals: keeping and breeding

BEHAVIOUR AND HANDLING

P. henrylawsoni is calm and tolerates gentle handling, but does not like being held firmly or turned onto its back and struggles if this happens. Let a new animal get used to the enclosure for a couple of weeks before you pick it up, and always support the whole body.

In danger the animal first seeks cover. If it cannot get away, it threatens with an open mouth and finally bites. The species uses the same body language as other bearded dragons, for example head bobs and arm waving.

Males do not tolerate each other. A male can live with one or more females, but the females become stressed by a male that constantly wants to mate, so keep an eye on them, and separate the animals if a female loses weight or hides all the time.

Breeding

SEXUAL MATURITY AND SEXING

The age at sexual maturity is not documented for *P. henrylawsoni*; the figure in the box (1-2 years) is borrowed from *Pogona vitticeps*. Males have a broader tail base and more distinct femoral pores than females. Use only fully grown, healthy animals for breeding, and give the female plenty of calcium.

MATING

The mating season in the wild is not documented. As with other bearded dragons, a cool rest period in winter is used to bring the animals into breeding condition; it is given only to healthy, well-nourished animals, and its length and temperature are not known for the species.

A male can be kept with females all year, or the female can be put in with the male for a shorter period. The female needs extra food and calcium during the breeding season.

EGG-LAYING AND CLUTCHES

The clutch size is not documented for *P. henrylawsoni*. The figures in the box are borrowed from the closely related, slightly larger *Pogona minor*, which lays 5-19 eggs, on average about 8, and at least two clutches per season. *P. vitticeps* lays far more. Give the female a laying box with a thick layer of damp, diggable sand and topsoil, where she can dig a pit.

A female that does not find a suitable place to lay the eggs may retain them. This is an emergency that requires a vet.

INCUBATION

The incubation time is not documented for *P. henrylawsoni*. In *Pogona minor* the eggs hatch after 58-64 days at 29 °C and after 100-109 days at 25 °C, and the figures in the box are borrowed from there. Place the eggs in damp vermiculite in an incubator, and do not turn them. In *P. vitticeps* very high temperatures can change the sex, so keep the temperature stable.

Read more: Incubating eggs

REARING THE YOUNG

The hatchlings are independent from hatching. Keep them on solid substrate, for example kitchen paper, until they eat reliably, and give them the same light and heat as adults, with UVB and calcium on the insects. Give small insects several times a day and greens every day.

Young can bite each other's toes and tails, so they must be sorted by size.

Health and common mistakes

Most diseases are caused by faults in husbandry. The most common are:

- Metabolic bone disease from too little UVB and calcium. It is one of the most common diseases in the species.
- Deformed spine, which is linked to the small gene pool in captivity.
- Obesity from too much food and too little exercise.
- Constipation from too low a temperature and dehydration.
- Intestinal parasites and mites.
- Eggs that are not laid.

A cool rest period should be given only to healthy animals, and a new animal should have a faecal sample examined for parasites. If the animal stops eating, loses weight, has an open mouth without being hot, or has swollen limbs, it must go to a vet with reptile experience.

Always ask someone who knows

This guide is a good place to start, but it cannot replace experience. Animals differ, and much of what matters most is learned from people who have kept the species for years. Talk to a breeder, an experienced keeper or a vet who knows reptiles and amphibians before you get the animal - and again if anything looks wrong.