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AGAMAS

Green Pricklenape

Acanthosaura capra

Acanthosaura capra is a green forest agamid with a crest of long spines on the nape and a spine behind each eye, native to the humid forests of southern Vietnam and eastern Cambodia. It grows to 25-32 cm, lives in the trees and needs a tall, humid and relatively cool enclosure where the air never gets warmer than 29 °C.

Family: Agamidae

KEY FACTS

THE ANIMAL

Adult size	**25-32 cm** total length incl. tail
Lifespan	**5-10 years**
Active	**By day**
Lifestyle	**Arboreal**
Habitat	**Rainforest and montane forest**
Difficulty	**Intermediate**

CARE

Min. enclosure	**100 × 50 × 120 cm** L × W × H for 1 adult
Temperature, day	**22-27 °C**
Basking spot	**30-32 °C**
Temperature, night	**18-22 °C**
Humidity	**70-90%**
Water	**Water section**
UVB	**Recommended** Ferguson zone 2
Diet	**Insects and worms/snails**
Kept	**Singly or in pairs**

BREEDING

Reproduction	**Egg-laying**
Clutch size	**6-15 eggs**
Incubation	**110-180 days** at 25-27 °C

PROTECTION AND PAPERWORK

CITES	**Not listed**
EU annex	**Not listed**
IUCN	**Near Threatened (NT)**

About the species

Acanthosaura capra is a slender forest agamid with a laterally compressed body and a long, thin tail that makes up more than half of the total length. The base colour is green to olive green with a brown pattern that breaks up the outline against bark and leaves. The colour changes with mood, temperature and light, and when stressed or at night the animal turns brown. Along the nape runs a crest of long, pointed scales, separate from the lower dorsal crest, and behind each eye sits a distinct spine. The strong nape and back spines distinguish the species from the closely related *A. coronata*.

Adults grow to 25-32 cm including the tail, and the female is slightly larger than the male. The male is slimmer, with a thicker tail base and a yellowish throat pouch, which he shows only when threatening. The species was described in 1861 by Albert Günther. The name probably comes from the Latin *capra*, goat, after the horn-like spines.

The genus is difficult to identify to species level, and several species are sold under the same trade name, including *A. lepidogaster*, *A. crucigera* and *A. armata*. Check which species you have before adjusting the care to a guide. The species thrives at lower temperatures than most agamids in the trade, and this is where it most often goes wrong.

It is diurnal and peaceful. It can become calm and take food from the fingers, but it is not an animal for daily handling. Wild-caught animals are often stressed and heavily infested with parasites; captive-bred animals are far preferable.

Read more: Buying animals: captive-bred, wild-caught and transport

Distribution and habitat

Acanthosaura capra is found in southern Vietnam and eastern Cambodia. In Vietnam it is known from the provinces of Dong Nai, Khanh Hoa and Lam Dong, among others, and in Cambodia from Mondolkiri Province. Cat Tien National Park and Hon Ba Nature Reserve are well-known localities.

Records from Laos are probably erroneous. The species is listed as Near Threatened (NT) because forests in the area are being cleared for rubber, cassava and coffee.

> **Native range:** Cambodia and Vietnam.

HABITAT

Acanthosaura capra lives in dense, humid tropical forest, often near streams. It is diurnal and lives mostly in the trees, preferring the shaded zone just below the canopy. Here it sits for long periods head-up on a trunk, well camouflaged against bark and foliage, and it seeks neither direct sun nor rain. It also comes down to the ground to catch worms and insects and readily enters running water to drink and bathe.

The forests are shaded and humid with moderate temperatures, and the animal basks only a little. If it is spotted, it flees or slips round to the other side of the trunk; only when cornered in a crevice does it open its mouth wide and flare the throat pouch.

Care

THE ENCLOSURE

An adult needs a tall enclosure of at least 100 × 50 × 120 cm (length × width × height). Height matters more than floor area, because the species uses the vertical surfaces. A pair or a male with two females needs considerably more space, ideally 140 × 70 × 170 cm. A mesh lid and large ventilation areas provide the air exchange needed when humidity is high.

Furnish with many vertical and diagonal branches and trunks, at least as thick as the animal's body, cork or bark panels on the back wall and dense, living plants such as ficus, pothos and dracaena, which give shelter and hold droplets. Leave an open area under the heat lamp. A shallow water feature or a large, shallow water bowl, ideally with a small waterfall or drip, is used for drinking and bathing. The water should be no more than 10-15 cm deep so the animal does not drown, and it is changed or filtered to keep it clean.

The substrate is a moisture-retaining mix of forest soil, coconut fibre and a little sand over a drainage layer of expanded clay pebbles and a fibre mat, so that no water stands at the bottom. It should be at least 15-20 cm deep so the female can dig and lay eggs. Woodlice and springtails in the substrate help keep it clean. Remove droppings daily.

Two males should not be housed together, because they are territorial. Provide plenty of hiding places among the foliage so the animals can avoid each other.

Read more: Humidity, misting and ventilation Read more: Terrarium construction and bioactive substrate Read more: Feeder animals: keeping and breeding

TEMPERATURE

Acanthosaura capra tolerates heat poorly. The air in the enclosure should be 22-27 °C during the day and must never get warmer than 29 °C. If it stays warmer for a longer period, there is a risk of heatstroke, stress and dehydration. Therefore place the enclosure out of direct sun, and make sure the lamps do not heat the whole enclosure.

A small basking spot of 30-32 °C high up at one end is enough. The species basks only a little, and the most important thing is an even, moderate temperature that drops slightly from top to bottom. Use a weak heat lamp, and measure with digital thermometers both at the basking spot and down in the enclosure. At night the temperature should fall to 18-22 °C; the night-time cooling is important for the animal.

In hot summer periods the room alone can make the enclosure too warm. Then move it to a cooler room, use a fan, or switch the heating off completely.

Read more: Heat and temperature

HUMIDITY AND WATER

Humidity should be 70-80 % during the day and around 90 % or more at night. Mist the enclosure thoroughly with soft water 2-3 times a day, so that droplets hang on plants and walls. A timer-controlled rain system keeps the level stable, and a fogger at night can raise the humidity. Measure with a digital hygrometer in the middle of the enclosure.

The animal drinks from droplets and from running water and often overlooks a still water bowl. Without daily misting and a drip or waterfall it risks dehydration and problems with shedding. At the same time the enclosure must be able to dry out a little between mistings, otherwise mould develops and the air becomes heavy. Good ventilation is therefore just as important as humidity.

LIGHTING AND UVB

The species is diurnal but lives in the shade of the forest and needs relatively weak UVB. Use a T5 HO tube of 6 % (Ferguson zone 2) in a reflective fitting over the mesh, covering about half the length of the enclosure. The branch under the tube should sit 20-30 cm from it, and the distance is checked with a UV meter. The animal must always be able to withdraw from the light into the foliage.

Supplement with an LED or T5 daylight lamp so the plants thrive, and keep the lights on 12 hours a day. Replace the tubes according to the manufacturer's instructions.

Read more: Lighting and UVB

FEEDING

The species feeds on insects and other small animals and is especially fond of worms. Give a varied diet of crickets, cockroaches, grasshoppers, silkworms, black soldier fly larvae, earthworms and slugs. Mealworms, waxworms and superworms are fatty and are given only occasionally, because the species easily becomes overweight. Do not use compost worms, and collect small animals only from natural areas free of pesticides. Prey should be no larger than the distance between the animal's eyes. The animal eats during the day and rarely takes flying insects.

Juveniles are fed daily with as many small insects as they can eat in 10 minutes. Adults are fed daily or every other day, as much as they eat in about 5 minutes. Lightly dust the insects with a calcium supplement with a little D3 and vitamins, and feed them greens and vegetables for at least a day before feeding.

Many animals take food from tweezers or directly from the fingers.

Read more: Calcium, vitamins and supplements

BEHAVIOUR AND HANDLING

Acanthosaura capra is a calm forest agamid that is shy in the wild but quickly gets used to people in the enclosure. It often sits completely still on a branch or trunk and rarely moves fast. When frightened, it darkens, flares the throat pouch or opens its mouth wide. These are signs of stress, and the animal should then be left in peace. It rarely bites.

Give a new animal 1-2 weeks of peace. Tame it by being present, offering food from the hand and letting it climb onto the hand rather than grabbing it. Keep handling short and infrequent, because the animal is easily stressed by being held. Wash your hands with soap after any contact with animals, enclosure and food, because reptiles can carry salmonella.

Keep males apart, because they are territorial and fight. A male can live with one or two females in a large, densely planted enclosure. Gravid females can become aggressive towards the others; separate them until after egg laying. The species also does very well alone.

Read more: Quarantine and hygiene

Breeding

SEXUAL MATURITY AND SEXING

The female is slightly larger and broader in the body, while the male is slimmer with a thicker tail base. The male has a yellowish throat pouch and a yellow-green band under the eyes, which the female lacks. In young animals the sex is hard to see and is most reliably determined by a vet.

The age at sexual maturity is not known. Do not put a female into breeding until she is fully grown and in good condition.

MATING

Breeding of the genus is better described for the closely related *A. crucigera* than for *A. capra*, and the figures for clutch size and incubation are partly based on it.

A cool period in winter of 6-8 weeks with shorter days and a few degrees lower temperature gets breeding going. When light and warmth increase again, the animals are ready to mate after a few days. The male nods his head from a high branch and shows the throat pouch, follows the female and grips her with a bite on the nape during mating. Remove the male if the female gets wounds or becomes stressed.

Read more: Incubating eggs

EGG-LAYING AND CLUTCHES

The female lays her eggs about a month after mating. A few days beforehand she stops eating, goes down to the bottom and makes trial digs. On the day, she digs a hole up to 10 cm deep, lays the eggs and scrapes the hole shut again. The clutch is 6-15 eggs.

The substrate must be at least 15-20 cm deep and damp enough for a dug hole to hold its shape. Without a suitable site, the female can retain her eggs, which can cause life-threatening egg binding. Females also lay infertile eggs without a male. Give the female plenty of food, calcium and vitamins before and after laying.

Read more: Common diseases and signs of illness

INCUBATION

Dig the eggs up carefully and place them in the same orientation in a closed container with damp vermiculite or perlite. At 25-27 °C they hatch after 110-130 days, but incubation can last up to half a year, and a lower temperature lengthens it.

Do not turn the eggs, and keep the humidity in the container high. Check regularly for mould, and remove infertile eggs that collapse or turn slimy.

REARING THE YOUNG

The juveniles are moved to a rearing enclosure with the same furnishings and climate as the adults': high humidity, moderate warmth, UVB and plenty of twigs and leaves. The water feature should be no more than 5 cm deep. The juveniles can grow up together in a spacious enclosure, including several males, but separate them if they begin to fight.

Mist daily, and feed daily with small crickets, small worms and small snails, lightly dusted with calcium and vitamins. The juveniles eat a lot and can reach about 15 cm in a year.

Health and common mistakes

Wild-caught animals are often stressed and heavily infested with parasites, so a faecal sample at a vet with reptile experience is the first thing a new animal should have. The typical problems are:

- Heatstroke and dehydration at too high a temperature. The air must not get warmer than 29 °C.
- Problems with shedding and dry eyes at too low humidity and too little misting.
- Metabolic bone disease from too little calcium and UVB.
- Respiratory infections and mould if the enclosure is wet and poorly ventilated.
- Obesity from too many fatty larvae.
- Internal parasites and mites, especially in wild-caught animals.
- Egg binding in females without a suitable place to dig. It is life-threatening and requires a vet.

A healthy animal has clear eyes, a plump tail base and a sturdy body. It breathes with its mouth closed and eats regularly. See a vet if the animal loses weight, stops eating, sits on the bottom or breathes with its mouth open.

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.