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AGAMAS

## Kimberley Bearded Dragon

# *Pogona microlepidota*

*Pogona microlepidota* is a large, diurnal bearded dragon with a small, narrow head, a broad, flat body and several rows of large spines along the sides of the body. It lives only in the north-western part of the Kimberley in Western Australia, and there is almost no care experience. The guide is based on its nearest relatives.

Family: Agamidae  Former name: *Amphibolurus barbatus microlepidotus; Amphibolurus microlepidotus; Uxoriousauria microlepidota*

KEY FACTS

### THE ANIMAL

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|---|---|
| Adult size | **45-55 cm**<br>total length incl. tail |
| Lifespan | **10-15 years** |
| Active | **By day** |
| Lifestyle | **Terrestrial and burrowing** |
| Habitat | **Savanna** |
| Difficulty | **Intermediate** |

### CARE

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|---|---|
| Min. enclosure | **150 × 60 × 60 cm**<br>L × W × H for 1 adult |
| Temperature, day | **24-37 °C** |
| Basking spot | **40-45 °C** |
| Temperature, night | **18-24 °C** |
| Humidity | **30-60%** |
| Water | **Water dish** |
| UVB | **Essential**<br>Ferguson zone 3 |
| Diet | **Insects and plants** |
| Kept | **Singly** |

### BREEDING

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|---|---|
| Reproduction | **Egg-laying** |
| Clutch size | **5-19 eggs** |
| Incubation | **58-64 days**<br>at 29 °C |

### PROTECTION AND PAPERWORK

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

## About the species

*Pogona microlepidota* is a large bearded dragon with a relatively small, narrow head and a broad, strongly flattened body. It differs from *Pogona minor* in having three to five rows of large spines along the sides of the body instead of one row of small ones. The beard is somewhat heavier than in *P. minor* and reaches further under the throat. The back is matt yellowish brown to greyish brown with faint, narrow crossbands, the sides of the head and neck are blackish grey, and the tail is greyish brown with narrow, pale bands.

Adults are 15-18 cm from snout to vent, and the tail is about twice as long as the body, so the total length is 45-55 cm. The body is, however, slimmer and lighter than in *Pogona vitticeps*. Weight and lifespan are not documented; the lifespan in the box is borrowed from the relatives.

The species was described in 1952 by Ludwig Glauert as a subspecies of *Amphibolurus barbatus* and was moved to *Pogona* as a separate species in 1982. The species name comes from Greek and means "with small scales".

## Distribution and habitat

*Pogona microlepidota* lives only in the wetter north-western part of the Kimberley in Western Australia, from Napier Broome Bay south-west to the Prince Regent River, including the Mitchell Plateau and Bigge Island. The type locality is Drysdale River Mission, today Kalumburu. There are also a few records further south in the King Leopold Ranges. The range is small, and the species has been recorded only a few times.

Further south-west, in the dry western Kimberley, lives *Pogona mitchelli*.

> **Native range:** Australia.

### HABITAT

*Pogona microlepidota* lives in woodland in a tropical climate that is more humid than that of the other bearded dragons. The area around Kalumburu lies about 14-15 degrees south of the equator, and the year is divided into a wet and a dry season, with warm days all year.

What the species eats, or how it breeds in the wild, is not documented. The species of the genus eat insects and a smaller proportion of plant matter, and this probably applies here too. *Pogona microlepidota* is diurnal and lives on the ground and in low vegetation.

## Care

### THE ENCLOSURE

Little is known about the care of *Pogona microlepidota*, and the species has not been described in captivity. The figures for enclosure, temperature, humidity, lighting, food, egg-laying and lifespan are borrowed from *Pogona mitchelli*, *Pogona minor* and *Pogona vitticeps*. Australia does not permit the export of wild reptiles, and the species is hardly kept outside Australia.

A single adult needs an enclosure of at least 150 × 60 × 60 cm, and more space will be used, because the species is large. The enclosure must be well ventilated, with a lid or mesh. Floor space is more important than height, because the species lives on the ground and digs.

Furnish with a flat basking platform of stone or wood under the lamps, at least two hiding places (one at the warm end and one at the cool end), low branches and stable stacks of flat stones. The substrate must be diggable: a layer at least 10 cm deep of fine-grained sand mixed with clean topsoil, for example 60 % sand and 40 % topsoil. A solid substrate such as unglazed tiles or slate slabs is an alternative for young and sick animals. Calcium sand, crushed nutshells and bark are unsuitable, because they can cause impaction if swallowed. Remove droppings daily, and replace loose substrate completely every 3-6 months.

Keep the animals separately. Males are territorial, and adults and young animals must always be kept apart.

Read more: Humidity, misting and ventilation Read more: Calcium, vitamins and supplements

### TEMPERATURE

Heat with at least two halogen spots over the basking platform. The surface there should be 40-45 °C measured with an infrared thermometer, and the warm patch should be at least as large as the whole animal. The air in the enclosure should be 24-37 °C, warmest at the basking end and coolest at the opposite end. The surface at the cool end should be 25-29 °C.

Use an infrared thermometer for the surfaces and a digital thermometer with a probe for the air, and measure only after the lamps have been on for about three hours.

At night the temperature may fall to 18-24 °C. Connect the lamps to a thermostat with the probe at the cool end, so that they switch off if the cool side rises above 37 °C.

Read more: Heat and temperature

### HUMIDITY AND WATER

Humidity should be 30-60 %, measured at the cool end. The species comes from a more humid climate than the other bearded dragons, but the enclosure must still be able to dry out: stagnant, damp air and a wet substrate cause illness. If humidity is constantly too high, a small fan over the mesh at the cool end helps. Always offer fresh water in a shallow dish. A slightly damp hide at the cool end helps during shedding.

### LIGHTING AND UVB

*Pogona microlepidota* is diurnal and needs strong, white light. The basking platform should be the brightest spot, and 75-100 % of the enclosure's length should be lit.

UVB is essential, and like the other species of the genus the species is rated as Ferguson zone 3. Use a T5 HO tube of 10-14 % UVB in a reflective fitting over the warm side, parallel with the heat lamps. The aim is a UV index of 4.0-4.5 at the basking platform, falling to 0 at the cool end. Preferably measure with a UV meter, because the distance depends on the tube, fitting and mesh. Glass and plastic between the tube and the animal block UVB. Good T5 HO tubes are replaced after about 12 months. The light is on for 12-14 hours a day in summer and about 10 hours in winter, controlled by a timer.

Read more: Lighting and UVB

### FEEDING

*Pogona microlepidota* is fed like *Pogona minor*: mostly insects and a smaller proportion of greens.

- Hatchlings (under 3 months): insects 2-3 times daily and greens daily.
- Young animals (3-12 months): insects and greens daily.
- Adults: insects 3-5 times a week and greens daily in a small portion.

Good feeder insects are dubia cockroaches, crickets, grasshoppers, black soldier fly larvae and silkworms; mealworms are given sparingly. The insects must be no larger than the distance between the animal's eyes and should have been fed a good diet for at least 24 hours before being offered. Wild insects may have been sprayed and should be avoided.

Greens include rocket, pak choi, kale, dandelion and watercress, cut into small strips. Avocado is toxic. Fruit is an occasional treat.

Dust the insects with calcium. Sprinkle multivitamin on the salad once a week.

Read more: Feeder animals: keeping and breeding

### BEHAVIOUR AND HANDLING

*Pogona microlepidota* is diurnal and basks a great deal. Its body language is familiar from other bearded dragons: head-bobbing towards rivals and waving a front leg as a sign of submission.

Let a new animal settle into the enclosure for about two weeks before picking it up. Offer food from tweezers, and let your hand rest in the enclosure until the animal is calm. Lift it with support under body and legs. Animals that hide or are dark and withdrawn are often too cold or stressed.

## Breeding

### SEXUAL MATURITY AND SEXING

The age at sexual maturity is not documented. Males have a broader head and more distinct femoral pores than females, as in other bearded dragons. Breeding animals must be fully grown and in good condition, and the female must have received plenty of calcium.

### MATING

Mating and breeding season are not documented for *Pogona microlepidota*. In *Pogona minor*, the eggs are laid in the northern part of the range from July to September. Give only healthy, well-nourished animals a cool rest period in winter; the length and temperature are not known for the species. Introduce the female to the male for a short period, and separate them afterwards.

### EGG-LAYING AND CLUTCHES

Clutch size is not documented for *Pogona microlepidota*. The figure in the box (5-19 eggs) is borrowed from *Pogona minor*. Give the female a laying box with a layer at least 25 cm deep of damp, diggable sand and topsoil. A female that does not find a suitable site may lay the eggs scattered around the enclosure, where they dry out, or retain them; the latter requires a vet.

### INCUBATION

In *Pogona minor*, the eggs hatch after 58-64 days at 29 °C. The figures are borrowed from there. Place the eggs in an incubator in damp vermiculite, and do not turn them.

Read more: Incubating eggs

### REARING THE YOUNG

The young must be kept on a solid substrate, for example kitchen roll, until they eat reliably. Give insects daily and the same light and heat conditions as for adults: basking platform, UVB and calcium on all food. Sort them by size, so that they do not bite each other's toes and tails.

## Health and common mistakes

Husbandry errors are the most common cause of illness. Sick reptiles hide for a long time that they are ill, so weigh the animal every week, and keep notes on weight, appetite, droppings and shedding. The list applies to bearded dragons in general.

- Metabolic bone disease from too little UVB, too little calcium or too low a temperature.
- Obesity and gout from too much food and too little water.
- Dental disease and mouth infection.
- Constipation from too low a temperature, dehydration or parasites.
- Intestinal parasites and mites; have a faecal sample examined when the animal is new.
- Retained eggs in females.

Loss of appetite, lethargy, swollen joints and an animal that stops eating are reasons to go to a vet with reptile experience. Reptiles often carry salmonella, so wash your hands after touching animals, the enclosure and equipment.

Read more: Quarantine and hygiene Read more: Common diseases and signs of illness

### 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.