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AGAMAS

Abrolhos Bearded Dragon

Pogona minima

Pogona minima is a small, diurnal bearded dragon that lives only on the Wallabi Islands in the Houtman Abrolhos off the coast of Western Australia. It is about 11 cm from snout to vent, has long legs and tail and only a weak beard. There is almost no husbandry experience, so this guide is based on its closest relatives.

Family: Agamidae Former name: *Amphibolurus barbatus minimus; Amphibolurus minimus; Pogona minor minima*

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**
Difficulty	**Intermediate**

CARE

Min. enclosure	**120 × 60 × 60 cm** L × W × H for 1 adult
Temperature, day	**24-37 °C**
Basking spot	**40-45 °C**
Temperature, night	**13-24 °C**
Humidity	**30-50%**
Water	**Water dish**
UVB	**Essential** Ferguson zone 3
Diet	**Insects and plants**
Kept	**Singly**

BREEDING

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

PROTECTION AND PAPERWORK

CITES	**Not listed**
EU annex	**Not listed**
IUCN	**Not Evaluated (NE)**

About the species

Pogona minima is a small and slender bearded dragon. Adults are about 11 cm from snout to vent. The total length is not documented, but the body-to-tail ratio in *Pogona minor* gives an estimate of 25-30 cm. The species is slightly smaller than *P. minor* and has longer legs and tail relative to the body. The beard is weak, and as in *P. minor* small, upright spines sit in a single row along the sides of the body.

The taxonomy is not settled. The species was described in 1933 by Arthur Loveridge as a subspecies of *Amphibolurus barbatus* and has since mostly been treated as a subspecies of *P. minor*. It is also regarded as a separate species, like *Pogona mitchelli*, but both forms still appear as subspecies of *P. minor* in much of the more recent literature. This guide treats *P. minima* as a separate species. The species name *minima* is Latin for the smallest.

The English name "Western Bearded Dragon" is used both for this species and for *Pogona minor*, so the name is imprecise.

Distribution and habitat

Pogona minima lives only on the Wallabi Group in the Houtman Abrolhos, an archipelago of 122 islands about 80 km west of Geraldton in Western Australia. The species has been recorded on North Wallabi, East Wallabi and West Wallabi. The type locality is West Wallabi. Its range is thus only a few small islands.

On the mainland the species is replaced by *Pogona minor*.

> **Native range:** Australia.

HABITAT

The islands have a semi-arid Mediterranean climate with hot, dry summers and cooler, wet winters. The sea moderates the fluctuations: in February the daily minimum and maximum temperatures average about 19 and 32 °C, in July about 9 and 20 °C. About 470 mm of rain falls a year, most of it from April to September. The vegetation is dominated by low, salt-tolerant shrubs, and the flora resembles the coastal flora of the mainland. *Pogona minima* is diurnal and lives on the ground and in low vegetation.

It is not documented what the species eats or how it breeds in the wild. Its closest relative, *Pogona minor*, is mainly insectivorous, and plant matter makes up about a fifth of the diet. The same must be assumed here.

Care

THE ENCLOSURE

Little is known about the care of *Pogona minima*, and the species is hardly described from captivity. The figures for enclosure, temperature, humidity, light, food and lifespan are borrowed from *Pogona minor* and *Pogona vitticeps*. Australia does not permit the export of wild reptiles, so animals outside the country come from old imports and their offspring.

A single adult needs an enclosure of at least 120 × 60 × 60 cm, and more space will be used. The enclosure must be well ventilated with a lid or mesh. Floor space matters more than height, because the species lives on the ground and digs.

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), 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, e.g. 60 % sand and 40 % topsoil. A solid substrate such as unglazed tiles or slate slabs is an alternative for juveniles and sick animals. Calcium sand, crushed nutshells and bark are unsuitable, because they can cause impaction if swallowed. Remove faeces daily, and replace loose substrate completely every 3-6 months.

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

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

TEMPERATURE

Heat with at least two halogen spotlights over the basking spot. The surface there should be 40-45 °C measured with an infrared thermometer, and the warm patch must 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 once the lamps have been on for about three hours.

At night the temperature may fall to 13-24 °C, which corresponds to the mild climate of the islands. Connect the lamps to a thermostat with the probe at the cool end, so that they switch off if the cool side goes above 37 °C.

HUMIDITY AND WATER

Humidity should be 30-50 %, measured at the cool end, and the enclosure must be able to dry out. Stagnant, wet 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 moist hide at the cool end helps during shedding.

LIGHTING AND UVB

Pogona minima is diurnal and needs strong, white light. The basking spot should be the brightest place, and 75-100 % of the length of the enclosure should be lit.

UVB is necessary, and the species is counted like the other species in the genus as Ferguson zone 3. Use a T5 HO tube of 10-14 % UVB in a reflective fitting over the warm side, parallel to the heat lamps. The aim is a UV index of 4.0-4.5 at the basking spot, 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 tube and animal block UVB. Good T5 HO tubes are replaced after about 12 months. The light is on 12-14 hours a day in summer and about 10 hours in winter, controlled by a timer.

Read more: Lighting and UVB

FEEDING

Pogona minima is fed like *Pogona minor*: mostly insects and a smaller share of greens.

- Hatchlings (under 3 months): insects 2-3 times a day and greens daily.
- Juveniles (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 roaches, 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 must have been gut-loaded with good food for at least 24 hours before being fed on. Wild insects may be sprayed and should be avoided.

Greens are e.g. 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 a multivitamin on the greens once a week.

Read more: Feeder animals: keeping and breeding

BEHAVIOUR AND HANDLING

Pogona minima is diurnal and basks a lot. Its body language is known from other bearded dragons: head-bobbing at rivals and waving a foreleg as a sign of submission. The beard display is weak, because the beard is little developed.

Let a new animal settle into the enclosure for about two weeks before it is picked 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. Animals for breeding 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 minima*. In *Pogona minor* gravid females are seen from mid-July to the end of December. Give only healthy, well-nourished animals a cool rest period in winter; the length and temperature are not known for the species. Put the female in with the male for a short period, and separate them afterwards.

EGG-LAYING AND CLUTCHES

The clutch size is not documented for *Pogona minima*. The figure in the box (5-19 eggs) is borrowed from *Pogona minor*, and a smaller species probably lays fewer eggs. Give the female a laying box with a layer at least 25 cm deep of moist, 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 moist vermiculite, and do not turn them.

Read more: Incubating eggs

REARING THE YOUNG

The hatchlings are small and must be kept on a solid substrate, e.g. kitchen paper, until they eat reliably. Give insects daily and the same light and heat conditions as for adults: basking spot, UVB and calcium on all food. Sort them by size, so 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 their illness for a long time, so weigh the animal every week, and keep notes on weight, appetite, faeces 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 stomatitis.
- Constipation from too low a temperature, dehydration or parasites.
- Intestinal parasites and mites; have a faecal sample examined when the animal is new.
- Eggs that are not laid, in females.

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