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AGAMAS

Western Bearded Dragon

Pogona minor

Pogona minor is a medium-sized, relatively slender and diurnal bearded dragon of 30-40 cm from south-western and central Australia, with only a weak beard of small spines. It lives in dunes, scrub and dry woodland, eats mostly insects and lays several small clutches of eggs a year.

Family: Agamidae Former name: *Amphibolurus minor; Pogona loriae*

KEY FACTS

THE ANIMAL

Adult size	**30-40 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	**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**
Clutches per year	**2-4**
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 minor is a medium-sized, flattened and relatively slender bearded dragon. Adults measure 10-15 cm from snout to vent and 30-40 cm in total, and about two thirds of the length is tail. It is much smaller than *Pogona vitticeps* and *Pogona barbata*.

The beard is greatly reduced: the throat has only small spines, and the beard is barely visible when the animal threatens with an open mouth. Several small spines sit on the head, and a regular row of spiny scales runs along the flank. The base colour is greyish brown with several paler, large spots and often a diamond-like pattern. The throat is dark grey to black, the underside whitish grey, and over the shoulder all young and many adults have a dark spot. The inside of the mouth and the tongue are yellow. The tail is faintly banded. The appearance varies from region to region: some populations have a long snout and tail, others are more compact with a broad head and strong spines.

The taxonomy has not been settled. *Pogona mitchelli* from north-western Australia and *Pogona minima* from the Houtman Abrolhos Islands are treated here, and by many, as separate species, but are also listed as subspecies of *P. minor*. Where *P. minor* and *P. mitchelli* meet, they hybridise. This guide deals with *P. minor* in the narrow sense.

P. minor is sometimes called the dwarf bearded dragon, but the name is also used for *Pogona henrylawsoni*, and the two species are different. The species name *minor* is Latin for smaller.

Distribution and habitat

Pogona minor is distributed over most of south-western and central Australia: from the southern Pilbara, Little Sandy Desert and Gibson Desert in Western Australia to the south coast and into the western deserts of South Australia and the Northern Territory. The species is also found on the islands of Barrow, Salutation and Dirk Hartog. The range covers almost a third of the Australian mainland.

Pogona mitchelli replaces the species in northern Western Australia and the north-western Northern Territory, and *Pogona minima* lives only on the Wallabi Islands in the Houtman Abrolhos.

> **Native range:** Australia.

HABITAT

Pogona minor lives in hot, open landscapes: dunes and coastal plains, steppe, savanna-like scrubland, heath, scrub and dry woodland. On the coast it prefers dune landscapes, and on Barrow Island it lives in the vegetation, especially in tussocks of *Triodia* grass. The animal often basks on fence posts, sits in branches and tussocks and runs away when there is danger.

The diet consists mostly of small animals: crickets and grasshoppers make up just under 30 %, beetles 17 %, termites 12 %, insect larvae 8 % and plants about 19 %. The species is thus mainly insectivorous.

The breeding season follows latitude. In the northern part of the range the eggs are laid from July to September, south of latitude 30 from October to December. The females dig a burrow up to 25 cm deep, lay the eggs and close it completely again.

Read more: Feeder animals: keeping and breeding

Care

THE ENCLOSURE

The care of *P. minor* has been only sparsely described. The figures for enclosure, temperature, humidity, light, food and lifespan are borrowed from *Pogona vitticeps* and the smaller *Pogona henrylawsoni*.

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.

The species lives mostly on the ground and digs, so floor space is more important 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), low branches and stable stacks of flat stones, so the animal has something to climb up on.

The substrate should be diggable. A layer at least 10 cm thick of fine-grained sand mixed with clean topsoil (for example 60 % sand and 40 % topsoil) resembles the soil in the wild. Solid substrate such as unglazed tiles, slate 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 if swallowed. Remove faeces daily, and replace loose substrate completely every 3-6 months.

Keep the animals separately. Two males must never share an enclosure. Adults and young 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 spots above the basking spot. The surface there should be 40-45 °C measured with an infrared thermometer, and the hot spot 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. Halogen bulbs give short-wave infrared heat like the sun. If the basking spot is too cold, move it closer to the lamp.

At night the temperature can fall to 13-24 °C. A night-time drop makes the animal bask earlier in the morning. Connect the lamps to a thermostat with the probe at the cool end, so 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, because the species lives in dry regions. Stagnant, wet air and a wet substrate cause illness. If the humidity is constantly too high, a small fan over the mesh at the cool end helps. Too low humidity causes dehydration and problems with shedding.

Always offer fresh water in a shallow bowl. The animal gets part of its water through its food, so rinsed greens that have been left in water help. A light shower over the furnishings provides droplets that the animal can lick. A slightly damp hide at the cool end helps during shedding.

LIGHTING AND UVB

Pogona minor depends on strong, white light, which promotes appetite and activity. The basking spot must be the brightest place, and 75-100 % of the length of the enclosure should be lit.

UVB is necessary, and like the other species in the genus, it belongs to Ferguson zone 3. Use a T5 HO tube with 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. The distance between tube and basking spot depends on the tube, fitting and mesh, so preferably measure with a UV meter. Glass and plastic between tube and animal block UVB. Good T5 HO tubes are replaced after about 12 months, even if they still light up.

LED lamps with UVB are not yet considered safe for reptiles. 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 minor is mostly insectivorous. In the wild insects and other small animals make up about 80 % of the diet and plant parts about a fifth.

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

Good feeders 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 fed a good diet for at least 24 hours before being passed on. Wild insects may be sprayed or toxic and should be avoided.

Greens include rocket, pak choi, kale, mustard greens, dandelion, watercress and cactus pads, cut into small strips. Avocado is toxic. Fruit is a rare treat.

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

BEHAVIOUR AND HANDLING

Pogona minor is diurnal and basks a lot. The animal uses body language like other bearded dragons: males bob their heads at rivals, and waving a foreleg is a sign of submission. The beard display is weak, because the beard is greatly reduced.

Let a new animal get used to the enclosure for about two weeks before it is picked up. Feed from tweezers, and let your hand rest in the enclosure until the animal is calm. Lift it with support under body and legs, and move slowly. Animals that hide or are dark and withdrawn are often too cold or stressed.

Keep the animals singly. Males are territorial, and animals that share an enclosure quarrel over rank and the basking spot.

Breeding

SEXUAL MATURITY AND SEXING

Females become sexually mature at a snout-vent length of about 9 cm. The age 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 had plenty of calcium.

MATING

Gravid females are seen in the wild from mid-July to the end of December, earliest in the north. Males bob their heads at rivals and females, and females wave a front leg. Give only healthy, well-nourished animals a cool rest period in winter to bring them into breeding condition; 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

A female lays 5-19 eggs per clutch, on average 8, and lays at least two and up to four clutches per season. Clutch size does not follow the size of the female. The clutch weighs a fifth to a third of the female's weight, so she needs plenty of calcium and food. The eggs are 20-25 mm long, 12-14 mm wide and weigh about 2 g.

Give the female a laying box with a layer at least 25 cm thick of damp, diggable sand and topsoil. A female that does not find a suitable place may lay the eggs scattered in the enclosure, where they dry out, or retain them; the latter is an emergency that requires a vet.

INCUBATION

The eggs hatch after 58-64 days at 29 °C and after 100-109 days at 25 °C. The incubation time varies, and at 28 °C the eggs can hatch after as little as about 51 days. Place them in an incubator in damp vermiculite (slightly more water than vermiculite by weight), and do not turn them. At both 25 and 29 °C both males and females hatch. Young from 29 °C get about 17 % longer tails than young from 25 °C.

Read more: Incubating eggs

REARING THE YOUNG

The hatchlings weigh about 2 g and are 9-10 cm long (about 4 cm from snout to vent). Keep them on solid substrate, for example kitchen paper, until they eat reliably, and give insects daily. They need the same light and heat as adults: a 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 faults 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, 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, open-mouth breathing when the animal is not hot, 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, and keep the animal and its things away from the kitchen.

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.