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ANGUIDS

## Gila Monster

# *Heloderma suspectum*

*Heloderma suspectum* is a sturdy, slow-moving lizard from the deserts of the south-western USA and north-western Mexico, black with pink or yellow bands and covered in bead-like scales. It is venomous: a bite is a medical emergency, and the species requires experience, firm routines and safe handling. It grows to 35-55 cm, burrows, feeds on eggs and small vertebrates and can live for over 20 years.

Family: Helodermatidae

### KEY FACTS

#### THE ANIMAL

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|---|---|
| Adult size | **35-55 cm**<br>total length incl. tail |
| Weight | **500-800 g** |
| Lifespan | **20-30 years** |
| Active | **By day and at dusk** |
| Lifestyle | **Rock-dwelling, terrestrial and burrowing** |
| Habitat | **Desert, semi-desert and rocky terrain** |
| Difficulty | **Expert** |

#### CARE

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|---|---|
| Min. enclosure | **150 × 70 × 50 cm**<br>L × W × H for 1 adult |
| Temperature, day | **22-32 °C** |
| Temperature, night | **20-24 °C** |
| Humidity | **40-60%** |
| Water | **Water dish** |
| UVB | **Recommended**<br>Ferguson zone 2 |
| Winter rest | **10-15 °C**<br>13-17 weeks |
| Diet | **Vertebrates** |
| Kept | **Singly or in pairs** |

#### BREEDING

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|---|---|
| Reproduction | **Egg-laying** |
| Sexually mature | **36-60 months** |
| Clutch size | **3-7 eggs** |
| Clutches per year | **1** |
| Incubation | **134-155 days**<br>at 26-29 °C |

#### PROTECTION AND PAPERWORK

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| CITES | **Appendix II** |
| EU annex | **Annex B** |
| IUCN | **Near Threatened (NT)** |

## Care at a glance

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| **THE ENCLOSURE** | An adult needs an enclosure of at least 150 × 70 × 50 cm (length × width × height). The size is an estimate based on the animal's size and way of life. |
| **TEMPERATURE** | By day the enclosure should have a gradient from 22 °C at the cool end to 32 °C under the heat lamp, so that the animal can choose for itself. Active animals keep a body temperature of around 30 °C. |
| **HUMIDITY AND WATER** | Humidity is 40-60 %, and part of the substrate is kept slightly damp so that the animal can dig into moister soil. |
| **LIGHTING AND UVB** | The species is active by day and at dusk. The light is on for 10-13 hours a day, shortest in the periods before and after brumation and off during it. UVB is recommended: a UVB spot or a UVB tube at the basking spot. |
| **FEEDING** | In the wild the species takes small mammals, nestlings, birds, lizards, snakes, frogs and insects, and especially eggs from birds and reptiles. |
| **BEHAVIOUR AND HANDLING** | SAFETY: the animal is venomous, and the biggest mistake is to trust that it is slow and tame. A bite comes without warning, even from an animal that has taken food from tweezers for years. |
| **NATIVE RANGE** | United States and Mexico. |