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CHAMELEONS

Kilimanjaro Two-horned Chameleon

Kinyongia tavetana

Kinyongia tavetana is a medium-sized mountain chameleon from Kilimanjaro, Mount Meru, the Pare Mountains and the Chyulu Hills in Tanzania and Kenya. The male has two flat, leaf-shaped horns on the snout, the female only two small knobs. The species lays eggs and needs cool nights, high humidity and a densely planted enclosure. Little is known about its care, and it is best suited to the experienced keeper.

Family: Chamaeleonidae Former name: *Chamaeleon tavetanus; Bradypodion tavetanum; Chamaeleo abbotti*

KEY FACTS

THE ANIMAL

Adult size	**20-24 cm** total length incl. tail
Lifespan	**5-7 years**
Active	**By day**
Lifestyle	**Arboreal**
Habitat	**Montane forest**
Difficulty	**Experienced**

CARE

Min. enclosure	**60 × 60 × 90 cm** L × W × H for 1 adult
Temperature, day	**20-25 °C**
Basking spot	**26-28 °C**
Temperature, night	**14-18 °C**
Humidity	**70-100%**
Water	**No water dish**
UVB	**Recommended** Ferguson zone 2
Diet	**Insects**
Kept	**Singly**

BREEDING

Reproduction	**Egg-laying**
Sexually mature	**9-12 months**
Clutch size	**2-12 eggs**
Clutches per year	**1-2**
Incubation	**220-270 days** at 16-23 °C

PROTECTION AND PAPERWORK

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

About the species

Kinyongia tavetana is a medium-sized chameleon in the genus *Kinyongia*. The male has a pair of flat, spread-out horn-like projections on the snout, a flat casque and a low crest along the front third of the back. The female has only two small knobs on the snout and no dorsal crest.

Colour varies with locality and sex and is mostly brown, grey, green or yellow, sometimes with red or blue tones. Females occasionally have a red stripe on the back.

Males reach around 20 cm and the largest animals up to 24 cm in total; females are slightly smaller. The species is thus smaller than *Kinyongia fischeri* and *Kinyongia matschiei*.

Until 1991 the species was regarded as a local population of *Kinyongia fischeri*. The population from the Taita Hills in Kenya was described as a subspecies in 2002 and has been regarded since 2008 as a separate species, *Kinyongia boehmei*. Older records of *K. tavetana* from the Taita Hills therefore refer to that species. The species name refers to the forest at Taveta at the southern foot of Kilimanjaro.

Distribution and habitat

Kinyongia tavetana occurs in the highlands of southern Kenya and northern Tanzania: on Kilimanjaro, Mount Meru, in the Pare Mountains and the Chyulu Hills. The type locality is Kilimanjaro.

The species is assessed as near threatened (NT). It is widespread within its range, but lives in scattered patches of forest.

> **Native range:** Kenya and Tanzania.

HABITAT

Kinyongia tavetana lives in forest, forest edges, scrub, tree-rich gardens and plantations in the highlands. The animals sit in bushes and small trees. The climate is cool and humid with cool nights, and the species does not tolerate sustained heat.

Care

THE ENCLOSURE

Little is known about the care of *Kinyongia tavetana*. Care is based on the climate of the range and on the closest, better-known mountain species *Kinyongia fischeri*, *Kinyongia matschiei* and *Kinyongia tenuis*. Day and night temperatures, clutch and incubation time are known for the species; lifespan and part of the care are borrowed from the related species.

An adult needs an enclosure of at least 60 × 60 × 90 cm (length × width × height), and bigger is better. The species is kept singly, because the animals are nervous, and males are aggressive towards each other and stress females that are not receptive.

Furnish the enclosure densely with plants, twigs and branches at several heights, so that the animal can withdraw into the foliage and take droplets from the leaves. The enclosure need not be made entirely of mesh, because the species requires high humidity, but there must be good ventilation. In summer, time outdoors is an advantage, provided the animal has shade and never gets too warm.

Read more: Humidity, misting and ventilation Read more: Incubating eggs

TEMPERATURE

By day the temperature should be 20-25 °C, ideally around 25 °C, with a basking branch at 26-28 °C, and at night it should fall to 14-18 °C. Heat above 28 °C for any length of time must be avoided, so in warm summers the enclosure must stand somewhere cool. Switch the heat off at night.

Keep the air moving, so that it does not become stagnant. Measure the surface temperature of the basking branch with an infrared thermometer.

HUMIDITY AND WATER

Humidity should be high, 70-100 %, and highest at night and in the morning. The animal drinks droplets and should not be given a water bowl. Mist at least twice a day, or set up a drip or rain system. Branches and leaves must dry out during the day, so that mould and foot sores do not develop. Distilled water or reverse osmosis water keeps misters and nozzles clean.

LIGHTING AND UVB

The species is active by day and needs a bright, but not too warm enclosure. UVB is recommended, and Ferguson zone 2 is an estimate for a mountain chameleon. Position the tube so that the animal can choose between light and shade, and have the light on for 10-12 hours a day.

Read more: Lighting and UVB

FEEDING

Kinyongia tavetana eats insects of suitable size such as crickets, flies, small locusts and cockroaches. Feeder insects should be captive-bred and well fed on nutritious food.

Juveniles are fed daily. Adults get 3-6 suitably sized insects every second or third day, and overfeeding must be avoided. Supplements are not documented for the species: dust the food with calcium a couple of times a week, and give D3 and multivitamin sparingly, as long as the animal has UVB.

Read more: Feeder animals: keeping and breeding Read more: Calcium, vitamins and supplements Read more: Buying animals: captive-bred, wild-caught and transport

BEHAVIOUR AND HANDLING

Kinyongia tavetana is nervous of its surroundings and is stressed by handling. Do not pick the animal up without reason, and let a new animal settle for a few weeks. Opaque sides and back give calm. Males must not be able to see each other. If the animal stops eating, it must go to a vet with reptile experience.

Breeding

SEXUAL MATURITY AND SEXING

Males are recognised by the two leaf-shaped horns on the snout, females by the two small knobs. The animals are sexually mature after 9-12 months, but females should only breed when they are a little older and in good condition.

MATING

The female is put in with the male. After a short, nodding courtship display the animals mate. If the female is not receptive, the male stresses her, and she often turns dark and restless. If she rejects him, the animals must be separated immediately, and the male must not be put in again until she is receptive once more.

EGG-LAYING AND CLUTCHES

Around 40 days after mating the female lays up to 12 eggs, and she lays one or two clutches a year. The smallest clutch is not documented; in the closely related *Kinyongia boehmei* clutches are 2-11 eggs. Give her a layer at least 20 cm deep of lightly moist soil and sand to dig in, and give her balanced food with calcium while she is carrying eggs, so that she avoids egg-laying problems.

INCUBATION

The eggs are moved to a closed container with lightly moist vermiculite and must not be turned. At room temperature they hatch after about 220 days. At 23 °C by day and 16 °C at night it takes about nine months. The young are around 3 cm at hatching.

REARING THE YOUNG

The young are fed fruit flies and small crickets and must be kept cooler than the adults, below 25 °C. They should live separately as they grow. Give small insects with calcium.

Health and common mistakes

No documented knowledge exists about diseases in *Kinyongia tavetana* specifically. Typical problems in mountain chameleons are:

- Overheating and burns from lamps that are too hot and temperatures that are too high.
- Dehydration from too low humidity and too few opportunities to drink.
- Intestinal parasites, especially in wild-caught animals.
- Respiratory infections from stagnant air.
- Bone loss from too little UVB and calcium.
- Overdosing of vitamins A and D.
- Sores and mould from branches that are wet all day.

Contact a vet with reptile experience if the animal stops eating, turns dark and lethargic 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.