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CHAMELEONS

Usambara soft-horned chameleon

Kinyongia tenuis

Kinyongia tenuis is a small, slender chameleon from the Usambara Mountains in Tanzania and the Shimba Hills in Kenya. It is brown and grey with a long tail and long legs and lives high up in damp, cool rainforest. The species lays eggs. It is rare in captivity, and its care is only sparsely described.

Family: Chamaeleonidae English name: Usambara Soft-horned Chameleon Former name: *Bradypodion tenue; Kinyongia tenue; Chamaeleo tenuis*

KEY FACTS

THE ANIMAL

Adult size	**15 cm** total length incl. tail
Lifespan	**5-7 years**
Active	**By day**
Lifestyle	**Arboreal**
Habitat	**Rainforest**
Difficulty	**Experienced**

CARE

Min. enclosure	**60 × 45 × 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	**12-20 eggs**
Incubation	**240-330 days** at 17-23 °C

PROTECTION AND PAPERWORK

CITES	**Appendix II**
EU annex	**Annex B**
IUCN	**Endangered (EN)**

About the species

Kinyongia tenuis is a small, slender chameleon in the genus *Kinyongia*. The colours are brown and grey. The species name is Latin for slender and refers to the longer tail and longer legs compared with the similar Madagascan *Calumma nasutum*.

The greatest total length including the tail is about 15 cm, which places the species among the small chameleons. Size and weight are not documented for each sex.

The species was originally described in the genus *Chamaeleo* and has since been placed in *Bradypodion* before it was moved to *Kinyongia*.

Distribution and habitat

Kinyongia tenuis lives in the Usambara Mountains in north-eastern Tanzania and in the Shimba Hills in south-eastern Kenya. The type locality is Derema in the Usambara Mountains. In the Shimba Hills the species is known from only a few records. It is assessed as Endangered (EN). In 2010 Tanzania had no export quota for wild-caught animals of the species.

Read more: Buying animals: captive-bred, wild-caught and transport

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

HABITAT

The species is a rainforest dweller and is found up to about 1,000 m. The climate is cool and damp, with over 2,000 mm of rain a year. There is a short rainy season from mid-November to early January and a main rainy season from March to May, followed by a dry season from June to October.

Kinyongia tenuis lives both inside the forest and along the forest edge and sits high in the vegetation, on average over 4 m up.

The better-known *Kinyongia fischeri* and *Trioceros deremensis* live in the same area, and the care is based on them.

Care

THE ENCLOSURE

The species is rare in captivity, and its care is only sparsely described. This guide is based on the climate of its range and on the better-known species from the same area, *Kinyongia fischeri* and *Trioceros deremensis*. The figures are borrowed from them or estimated from the climate.

An adult needs an enclosure of at least 60 × 45 × 90 cm (length × width × height). Bigger is better, especially in height, because the species lives high up in the trees. It is kept singly.

Furnish the enclosure densely with plants, twigs and branches at several heights, so that the animal can retreat into the foliage. An enclosure of glass and mesh provides ventilation while retaining humidity, and a drain in the base removes excess water.

Read more: Humidity, misting and ventilation

TEMPERATURE

The daytime temperature should be 20-25 °C with a moderate basking spot of 26-28 °C, and at night the temperature should fall to 14-18 °C. Heat above 30 °C must be avoided. Keep the air moving so that it does not become stagnant. Measure the surface temperature of the basking branch with an infrared thermometer.

Read more: Heat and temperature

HUMIDITY AND WATER

Humidity should be high, 70-100 %, and highest at night and in the morning. The animal drinks droplets and should not have a water dish. Use a drip or rain system or a fogger, and make sure that branches and leaves dry out during the day, so that mould and sores on the feet do not develop. Distilled water or reverse-osmosis water keeps the nozzles clean.

LIGHTING AND UVB

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

Read more: Lighting and UVB

FEEDING

Kinyongia tenuis eats insects. Crickets, cockroaches, silkworms and small locusts of a suitable size are good choices, as for the related species. Feeder insects should be captive-reared and gut-loaded. Feeding quantity and supplements are not documented for the species. In related chameleons, the food is dusted with calcium a couple of times a week, and D3 is given only sparingly.

Read more: Feeder animals: keeping and breeding Read more: Calcium, vitamins and supplements

BEHAVIOUR AND HANDLING

Chameleons are easily stressed by handling, and this probably applies to *Kinyongia tenuis* as well. Do not pick the animal up without reason. The species seeks out high positions and should have its regular sleeping branches in the upper part of the enclosure. If the animal stops eating, it should see a vet with experience in reptiles.

Breeding

SEXUAL MATURITY AND SEXING

Sexual maturity is not documented for the species. In related mountain species of the genus *Kinyongia* it occurs after about 9-12 months.

MATING

Mating in captivity is not documented for the species. In the related mountain species, the female is put in with the male. If she is receptive, she tolerates his advances without aggression, and if she rejects him, the animals must be separated at once. Males must not be able to see each other. All of this is borrowed from the *Kinyongia fischeri* group.

EGG-LAYING AND CLUTCHES

The species lays eggs. Clutch size is not documented; the figure in the specification box is borrowed from the *Kinyongia fischeri* group and is probably too high for such a small species. In the related *Kinyongia* species, the female digs a tunnel in a damp mixture of soil and sand and lays the eggs at the end of it.

INCUBATION

Incubation time and temperature are not documented for the species. The figures in the box are borrowed from the *Kinyongia fischeri* group: 8-11 months of incubation at 17-23 °C, coolest at night. The eggs are buried two thirds deep in slightly damp vermiculite in a closed container and must not be turned.

Read more: Incubating eggs

REARING THE YOUNG

Rearing of the young is not documented for the species. In the related mountain species, the young live in small groups for the first 2-3 months and then separately, in a slightly cooler and very humid enclosure, and they are given small insects with calcium and vitamins.

Health and common mistakes

There is no documented knowledge about diseases in *Kinyongia tenuis*. Typical problems in mountain chameleons are:

- Overheating from lamps that are too hot and temperatures that are too high.
- Dehydration from humidity that is too low and too few opportunities to drink.
- Intestinal parasites, especially in wild-caught animals.
- Respiratory infections from stagnant air.
- Metabolic bone disease from too little UVB and calcium.
- Sores and mould from branches that are wet all day.

Contact a vet with experience in reptiles if the animal stops eating, turns dark and lethargic or breathes with its mouth open. Lifespan is not documented for the species; the figure in the box is borrowed from the equally small *Kinyongia multituberculata*.

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.