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CHAMELEONS

Cameroon Two-horned Mountain Chameleon

Trioceros montium

Trioceros montium is a medium-sized green chameleon from the mountains of Cameroon. The male carries two long horns on its snout, a tall dorsal crest and a sail on the tail, while the female is hornless. The species lays eggs and needs very high humidity and a calm, densely planted setup. It is rare in captivity and best suited to the experienced keeper.

Family: Chamaeleonidae Former name: *Chamaeleo montium; Chamaeleo monticum*

KEY FACTS

THE ANIMAL

Adult size	**20-25 cm** total length incl. tail
Lifespan	**4-6 years**
Active	**By day**
Lifestyle	**Arboreal**
Habitat	**Rainforest and montane forest**
Difficulty	**Experienced**

CARE

Min. enclosure	**60 × 60 × 90 cm** L × W × H for 1 adult
Temperature, day	**22-25 °C**
Basking spot	**29-32 °C**
Temperature, night	**15-20 °C**
Humidity	**80-100%**
UVB	**Recommended** Ferguson zone 2
Diet	**Insects**
Kept	**Singly**

BREEDING

Reproduction	**Egg-laying**
Sexually mature	**6 months**
Clutch size	**5-25 eggs**
Clutches per year	**2-3**
Incubation	**140-160 days** at 22-25 °C

PROTECTION AND PAPERWORK

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

About the species

Trioceros montium is a medium-sized, arboreal chameleon. The male reaches up to 25 cm in total, tail included, and the female up to about 20 cm. The male carries two long horns pointing straight forward from the snout, a tall, undulating dorsal crest and an even taller sail on the tail. The female has only small, cone-shaped scales instead of horns and no tail sail.

The base colour ranges from bright to dark forest green or bluish. Large, plate-like scales on the body can be orange, light green or sky blue, and the male often has a yellow, blue-edged stripe running diagonally from the back down towards the belly. When displaying, the male shows blue, lime-green and yellow spots on the head and shoulders. A female carrying eggs turns darker and often shows red skin between the green scales. The colours change with mood, temperature and stress, not to match the surroundings.

The scientific name means 'of the mountains' and refers to the distribution in the mountains of Cameroon. The species is less common in captivity than the large *Trioceros* species, and husbandry data are sparse. Enclosure size, UVB zone and feeding amounts are therefore borrowed from closely related mountain species.

Read more: Lighting and UVB

Distribution and habitat

Trioceros montium is endemic to Cameroon and occurs along the southern part of the volcanic mountain chain, from Mount Cameroon to the Manengouba Mountains. The species has also been found in the Mamfe district, on Mount Kupe and in the Rumpi Hills. It lives at 600-1,250 m, that is, on the lower and middle slopes of the mountains rather than on the summits.

> **Native range:** Cameroon.

HABITAT

The species lives in humid forest on mountain slopes, in stream valleys and in cloud forest at low to medium altitude, where rainfall is plentiful and clouds and mist often hang in the trees.

Humidity is high around the clock, and the nights are cooler than the days. The animals sit in the dense vegetation and are shy.

Read more: Humidity, misting and ventilation

Care

THE ENCLOSURE

An adult needs an enclosure of at least 60 × 60 × 90 cm (length × width × height). The species is kept singly, and males must not be able to see each other.

Furnish the enclosure very densely with live plants and thin branches and twigs at several heights, and provide good light for the plants. The animals must be able to withdraw completely into the foliage. A hybrid enclosure of glass and mesh gives ventilation while retaining humidity, and a drain in the base removes excess water. A substrate is not necessary.

Stagnant air causes respiratory infections, so the air must keep moving, even when humidity is high.

TEMPERATURE

The daytime temperature should be about 22-25 °C, with a basking spot of 29-32 °C. A cooler enclosure with a small basking spot suits the species better than a warm one.

At night the temperature should drop to 15-20 °C, but no more than about 10 °C below the daytime temperature.

Check the temperature with two thermometers, one at each end of the enclosure.

Read more: Heat and temperature

HUMIDITY AND WATER

Very high humidity is essential for the species. Humidity should be close to 100 %, and the animal must have access to water at all times, including during the day. Fog the enclosure with an ultrasonic humidifier at night and early in the morning, and mist or drip in the morning and late afternoon, so that the animal regularly has droplets to drink.

The species drinks water droplets from the leaves, not from a bowl. Use distilled water in the humidifier, and place two hygrometers at opposite ends of the enclosure. Branches and leaves must be able to dry out now and then, so that mould and sores do not develop.

LIGHTING AND UVB

The species is diurnal. Provide 12-13 hours of light a day and a strong T5 HO tube or LED across the width of the enclosure. The plants in the enclosure also need plenty of light.

UVB is recommended all year round. Use Ferguson zone 2, that is, a UV index of no more than 1-3 at the basking spot and plenty of shade. A UV meter helps. Replace UVB tubes according to the manufacturer's instructions.

FEEDING

T. montium is insectivorous and a good hunter that takes most feeder insects. Offer crickets, small grasshoppers, flies, cockroach nymphs and other small insects, where the prey is no larger than the distance between the animal's eyes. Let the insects roam freely so that the animal hunts them; a feeding dish is not recommended.

The insects should themselves be fed a nutritious diet and dusted with calcium. Vitamins are given sparingly, as males in particular are sensitive to overdosing. Juveniles are fed daily, and adults get 3-8 insects every other day. Keep the animal lean, and weigh it every month.

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

BEHAVIOUR AND HANDLING

The species is kept singly. The animals are often aggressive towards conspecifics, and the female must be kept apart from the male until she is receptive.

The species is shy. If approached too quickly or too closely, the animal often drops and runs, turns black, tumbles or hides in the corners near the bottom. It is a display animal, not a pet, and handling should be brief and infrequent. Dark colours can be a sign of cold, stress or illness.

Wild-caught animals must be treated for parasites. With the right treatment and the right conditions, the species can become a hardy captive chameleon.

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

Breeding

SEXUAL MATURITY AND SEXING

The male is recognised by the two horns on the snout, the tall dorsal crest, the tail sail and the bright colours, while the female lacks both horns and sail. The female is smaller. Sexual maturity is reached after about 6 months.

MATING

Breeding can be difficult, as the males are often reluctant. Keep the female apart from the male, out of sight as well, and take her to the male's enclosure only when she is receptive. A slightly cooler period with higher humidity can get the male going. Separate the animals when mating is over or the female rejects the male.

EGG-LAYING AND CLUTCHES

The species lays eggs. The female turns darker when carrying eggs and lays them 2-3 months after mating. A clutch is 5-25 eggs, and there can be 2-3 clutches a year.

The female is not fussy about the laying site and lays the eggs anywhere, so she must have a suitable laying container with moist soil in the enclosure, otherwise the eggs are easily lost.

INCUBATION

The eggs are incubated at 22-25 °C, preferably about 24 °C with a slight drop at night. Keep the temperature steady, and avoid both very low and very high incubation temperatures, as a middle temperature is the safest choice. The eggs hatch after about 21 weeks.

Read more: Incubating eggs

REARING THE YOUNG

The young often hatch all at once and have a good appetite. Keep them in a hybrid enclosure with the same climate as the adults, with plenty of foliage and thin branches. Feed them daily with small insects such as fruit flies, small flies and small crickets, dusted with calcium. The young are separated from each other as they grow, and males must not be able to see each other.

Health and common mistakes

Typical problems and husbandry errors:

- Dehydration from too low humidity and too few opportunities to drink.
- Intestinal parasites in wild-caught animals.
- Respiratory infections from stagnant air or surfaces that are too wet.
- Metabolic bone disease (MBD) from too little UVB or calcium.
- Overdosing of vitamins, especially in males.

- Sores and mould from branches that are wet all the time.
- Eggs that are lost or retained if the female has no suitable laying site.

Lifespan is not documented; 4-6 years is an estimate. Weigh the animal every month. Contact a vet experienced with reptiles if the animal stops eating or becomes dark in colour, limp or has difficulty breathing.

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.