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GECKOS

Afroedura africana

Afroedura africana is a small, flat, nocturnal rock gecko from the granite mountains of central Namibia. It squeezes into narrow crevices, tolerates a large difference between day and night and is a species for the experienced keeper. Little is known about its care, so the guide is based on the climate, the habitat and the habits of the genus.

Family: Gekkonidae Former name: *Oedura africana*

KEY FACTS

THE ANIMAL

Adult size	**5-6 cm** snout-vent length
Lifespan	**5-10 years**
Active	**At night**
Lifestyle	**Rock-dwelling**
Habitat	**Semi-desert and rocky terrain**
Difficulty	**Experienced**

CARE

Min. enclosure	**40 × 30 × 40 cm** L × W × H for 2 adults
Temperature, day	**24-30 °C**
Basking spot	**30-32 °C**
Temperature, night	**12-18 °C**
Humidity	**30-50%**
UVB	**Optional** Ferguson zone 1
Diet	**Insects**
Kept	**In pairs or one male with several females**

BREEDING

Reproduction	**Egg-laying**
Clutch size	**1-2 eggs**
Incubation	**60-90 days** at 24-28 °C

PROTECTION AND PAPERWORK

CITES	**Not listed**
EU annex	**Not listed**
IUCN	**Least Concern (LC)**

About the species

Afroedura africana is a small, strongly flattened gecko with a broad, flat body that allows it to crawl into narrow rock crevices. Under each toe sit three pairs of enlarged adhesive lamellae, and the tail is flat and ringed. The species was described in 1888 as *Oedura africana* and moved to the genus *Afroedura* in 1947. Two forms from southern Namibia and Namaqualand were formerly included in the species, but since 2014 they have been treated as the separate species *Afroedura namaquensis* and *Afroedura tirasensis*. Even within the Erongo Mountains the genetic difference between populations is large, so the species may contain several unresolved forms.

The species in the group that *A. africana* belongs to stay under 65 mm from snout to vent, and adults are about 5-6 cm. Total length including the tail, weight and lifespan are not documented; the lifespan in the box is an estimate based on other small geckos. The tail can be dropped when in danger, and it grows back, but not as neatly as before.

The species is nocturnal and rarely kept. This guide is therefore based on the habitat and on other nocturnal rock geckos from Namibia, such as *Chondrodactylus bibronii* and *Chondrodactylus fitzsimonsi*.

Distribution and habitat

Afroedura africana lives only in central Namibia: in the Erongo Mountains, on Brandberg and Spitzkoppe, in the inselbergs along the Swakop and Khan rivers and in the western part of the Khomas Highland. The type locality is given as Walvis Bay on the coast, but the species is known today from the granite mountains inland.

Older records further south, including in South Africa, belong to *Afroedura namaquensis* and *Afroedura tirasensis*, which were formerly included in the species. The map shows an approximate area.

> **Native range:** Namibia.

HABITAT

The species lives on rocks, especially exfoliating granite: in crevices, under loose rock flakes and on boulders and rock faces on mountains and inselbergs in arid Namibia. By day it hides deep inside the crevices, and at night it comes out to hunt on the rock surfaces nearby.

The climate is dry, with hot days and cool nights. In the highlands around Windhoek the daytime temperature in summer is 28-31 °C and in winter about 21 °C, while winter nights can fall to 6-7 °C. The rain falls in the summer half of the year, from November to March, and the total is under 400 mm a year, while winter is almost completely dry. Humidity averages 20-50 %.

Read more: Humidity, misting and ventilation

Care

THE ENCLOSURE

Little is known about the care of *Afroedura africana*. The advice is based on the climate and habitat and on other nocturnal rock geckos from Namibia such as *Chondrodactylus bibronii* and *Chondrodactylus fitzsimonsi*.

A pair needs an enclosure of at least 40 × 30 × 40 cm (length × width × height), and bigger is an advantage, because it gives more hiding places and a more stable temperature. The gecko uses crevices both vertically and horizontally, so both the floor area and the back wall must be used. Build a back wall of cork, slate or hewn stone with narrow crevices of 1-2 cm where the animal can squeeze in. Use flat stones or cork sheets lying close against each other, and make sure everything is firm so that nothing can slide down onto the animal.

The substrate is a mixture of sand and soil. The enclosure must have a lid, because the species climbs and can squeeze through small openings, and good ventilation keeps the air dry. Males must not be kept together.

TEMPERATURE

Provide a gradient so that the animal can choose for itself. By day the enclosure should be 24-30 °C, and a small, warm rock surface may reach 30-32 °C. At night the temperature should fall to 12-18 °C. The large difference between day and night is natural for the species.

The figures are based on the climate in the species' range; a specific recommendation for the species is not documented. Keep the enclosure cooler in winter, 20-25 °C by day and 8-12 °C at night, for two to three months, and let the day length become shorter. Heat with a small heat lamp or heat mat over part of the area, controlled by a thermostat, and measure with a digital thermometer.

Read more: Heat and temperature

HUMIDITY AND WATER

The species comes from an arid area. Keep the air relatively dry, around 30-50 % relative humidity. The range is an estimate based on the habitat.

Mist lightly once a day or every other day in the evening on the back wall and over part of the enclosure, so that the animal can drink droplets. The surface must be dry again the next day. Keep a shallow dish of fresh water available, and let part of the enclosure stay completely dry. A hygrometer shows whether the air stays dry. Mould and damp crevices are a danger.

LIGHTING AND UVB

The species is nocturnal and hides by day. UVB is not documented as necessary, but a weak UVB tube (Ferguson zone 1), for example a T5 tube of 5-7 %, over one side of the enclosure is a good safeguard, as long as there are many hiding places in shade. The animal must be able to choose to stay in the crevices.

Keep the light on for 11-12 hours a day in summer and 9-10 hours in winter, preferably controlled by a timer. Do not use coloured night lighting.

Read more: Lighting and UVB

FEEDING

Give live insects: crickets, smaller grasshoppers, brown and black cockroaches (dubia) and mealworms and waxworms as a change. The insects must be smaller than the distance between the animal's eyes and dusted with calcium. Adults are fed twice a week, and young animals every second or third day. A vitamin supplement with D3 once every two weeks is enough.

Feed in the evening, when the animal is active. Small animals readily take springtails and small crickets. Keep an eye on the weight: a plump tail base shows that the animal is getting enough.

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

BEHAVIOUR AND HANDLING

Afroedura africana is shy and fast and should not be handled. It disappears into crevices at the slightest disturbance, so all care should be carried out calmly and in the evening. Never grab the tail.

A pair or a male with a couple of females can be kept together if there are many crevices. Males must be kept apart. By day you rarely see the animal, and that is normal.

Breeding

SEXUAL MATURITY AND SEXING

Age and weight at sexual maturity are not documented for the species. Males have pores in front of the vent and a distinct bulge at the base of the tail. Do not put the female to breeding until she is fully grown and in good condition.

MATING

Mating has not been described for the species. A cooler winter with short days matches the climate in the species' range and is probably what starts breeding in spring. Introduce the male to the female in spring, and remove him again if she shows signs of stress. Give the female calcium and plenty of insects.

EGG-LAYING AND CLUTCHES

The female probably lays two hard-shelled eggs at a time, occasionally just one, like other geckos in the family. The species of the genus either stick the eggs fast in crevices or hide them, and eggs that are stuck fast cannot be moved without damage. The number of clutches per season is not documented.

Give the female a laying box or a crevice of cork or slate where the eggs can sit hidden. End breeding if she loses weight.

INCUBATION

Incubation time and temperature are not documented for the species. The figures in the box, 24-28 °C and 60-90 days, are an estimate based on other small, egg-laying geckos. Remove the eggs together with the substrate if they must be moved, and avoid turning them. Leave eggs with a shrunken shell and mould until you are sure that they are dead.

Read more: Incubating eggs

REARING THE YOUNG

The young are small and fast and need a small enclosure with many crevices, dry air and a small humid hide. They are fed every second or third day with springtails and small crickets, dusted with calcium. Keep them singly or in small groups of the same size. Growth and time to sexual maturity are not documented.

Health and common mistakes

Health problems are not documented for the species. The advice is based on experience with other rock and desert geckos. The typical mistakes are:

- Too much humidity. Damp crevices and a wet substrate cause mould, skin problems and respiratory infections. The surface must be dry.
- Overheating. The gecko must always be able to retreat to cooler crevices.

- Calcium deficiency (metabolic bone disease), especially in young animals and breeding females. The signs are tremors, bent limbs and a soft jaw. Use calcium and D3.
- Stuck shed on the toes and tail tip. Provide a humid hide, and loosen the remains gently with lukewarm water.
- Stress from disturbance and handling. The species is shy.

A healthy animal has clear eyes, a plump tail base and a good grip on the rock. Consult a vet experienced with reptiles if the gecko loses weight, does not eat for several weeks or looks limp.

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.