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GECKOS

Marbled leaf-toed gecko

Afrogecko porphyreus

A small, flat, marbled gecko from the southern and south-western coast of South Africa, living in rock crevices and under bark and hunting insects around lamps and house walls in the evening. Its care is hardly described at all, so this guide is based on the mild Mediterranean climate the species comes from.

Family: Gekkonidae Former name: *Phyllodactylus porphyreus; Gecko porphyreus*

KEY FACTS

THE ANIMAL

Adult size	**10-12 cm** total length incl. tail
Lifespan	**5-8 years**
Active	**At dusk and at night**
Lifestyle	**Arboreal and rock-dwelling**
Habitat	**Rocky terrain and temperate woodland and meadow**
Difficulty	**Intermediate**

CARE

Min. enclosure	**40 × 30 × 40 cm** L × W × H for 2 adults
Temperature, day	**22-26 °C**
Basking spot	**26-28 °C**
Temperature, night	**14-18 °C**
Humidity	**40-60%**
UVB	**Optional**
Diet	**Insects and small invertebrates (springtails, fruit flies)**
Kept	**In pairs or in groups**

BREEDING

Reproduction	**Egg-laying**
Clutch size	**1-2 eggs**
Incubation	**45-60 days** at 24-27 °C

PROTECTION AND PAPERWORK

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

About the species

Afrogecko porphyreus is a small gecko of the family Gekkonidae. The head and body are flat, as in many geckos that live in crevices, and the body is covered in small, smooth, granular scales. The upper side is grey to greyish brown, plain or marbled with reddish to dark brown, and some animals have a pale stripe down the back. A dark line often runs from the nostril through the eye. The underside is white. The tail is long. Females have distinct, pale calcium deposits on the sides of the neck behind the angle of the jaw.

Each toe ends in a pair of leaf-shaped lamellae, and the species climbs on rocks, under bark and on walls. It can shed its tail when seized, and in some populations almost all adults have a tail that has regrown or is regrowing. It is therefore a bad idea to grab the tail.

The species was described in 1802 as *Gecko porphyreus*, later went by the name *Phyllodactylus porphyreus*, and was given the genus name *Afrogecko* in 1997. The name comes from the Greek porphyreos, meaning purple-red. The two subspecies described in the 1930s are now regarded as the same species.

Adults measure 45-50 mm from snout to vent and around 10-12 cm including the tail. Weight is not documented.

Read more: Calcium, vitamins and supplements

Distribution and habitat

The species is found in the western and southern coastal regions of South Africa, from Nieuwoudtville and Namaqualand in the north-west, past Cape Town and east to Cape St. Francis and Port Elizabeth in the Eastern Cape. It also lives on most of the islands off the west coast, including Robben Island, Jutten, Dassen and Malgas. Records from Namibia and Cameroon are doubtful, and finds from Madagascar refer to a different species.

In the Western Cape it is often the commonest gecko along the south coast, especially in and around houses. In Cape Town it now lives in suburban gardens.

> **Native range:** South Africa.

HABITAT

The species is an adaptable hunter that hides under bark, under stones and debris, in rock crevices and in rotting wood. It is especially common on coastal rocks just above the high-water line. It also lives in built-up areas, where it takes advantage of the way artificial light attracts insects. Several animals often share a retreat, and they are neither aggressive nor territorial.

The climate of Cape Town is Mediterranean, with mild, wet winters and warm, dry summers. In summer the average is 26 °C by day and 16 °C at night, and in winter 18 °C by day and 8-9 °C at night. About 515 mm of rain falls a year, mostly in winter, and there is no frost in the lowlands. This is the climate on which the figures in the guide are based.

Care

THE ENCLOSURE

Little is known about the care of *Afrogecko porphyreus*, and the species is hardly kept on any scale. This guide is based on the climate of its range, its habitat and the size of the animal. Lifespan and incubation temperature are borrowed from the South African *Goggia lineata*.

A pair or a small group can be kept in an enclosure of at least 40 × 30 × 40 cm (length × width × height). The species climbs on rocks and bark, so height and vertical surfaces matter, and it seeks out narrow crevices. Furnish with a back wall of cork or stone, flat pieces of cork bark set at an angle, and flat stones with narrow gaps behind them that the animals can crawl into. Several animals gladly share a retreat, so provide several hides at both ends.

A mixture of sand and soil works well as substrate, so that parts of it can be kept dry. The lid must be completely secure, because a flat gecko of 10 cm can squeeze through narrow gaps, but there must also be ventilation.

Read more: Incubating eggs

TEMPERATURE

Temperatures follow the climate of the range. In summer it should be 22-26 °C by day and 14-18 °C at night. In winter the daytime temperature can fall to 16-20 °C and the night to 10-14 °C, and a cool period of a few weeks suits the climate.

Use a thermostat-controlled heat mat on one side of the floor or a weak heat bulb so that there is a slightly warmer zone of 26-28 °C. The enclosure must not stand in direct sun and must not exceed 30 °C for any length of time. Measure with a digital thermometer at both ends.

Read more: Heat and temperature

HUMIDITY AND WATER

The climate has moderate humidity, with most rain in winter. Humidity in the enclosure should be around 40-60%. Mist the enclosure lightly every second or third day so the animals can drink droplets from rocks and leaves, and let it dry out in between. Also provide a small, shallow dish of fresh water. The substrate should not be constantly wet.

Read more: Humidity, misting and ventilation

LIGHTING AND UVB

The species is active at dusk and at night, and nothing is known about its UVB requirements. A weak UVB light for shade-dwelling animals (Ferguson zone 1) can be used as a supplement, but it is optional if the food is dusted with calcium with D3. Always provide dark hiding places. The light is on for 12 hours a day in summer and 10 hours in winter, and it should be dark at night.

Read more: Lighting and UVB

FEEDING

The species feeds on a range of small arthropods. Give crickets, small locusts, small roaches and the occasional waxworm. Feeder insects must not be longer than the distance between the animal's eyes. Adults are fed 2-3 times a week. Dust the insects with calcium, and give a vitamin D3 supplement at intervals. Leave a small dish of calcium available, because females use a lot of calcium for the eggs. Feed in the evening, when the animals come out.

Read more: Feeder animals: keeping and breeding

BEHAVIOUR AND HANDLING

Afrogecko porphyreus is social and not territorial. Several animals often share a retreat, and the females lay their eggs together. A pair or a small group with more females than males can therefore be kept together if there is space and plenty of hiding places. Watch for bites and scars, and separate the animals if there is unrest.

The gecko is fast and nervous and is not an animal to be handled. Never grab the tail, because it is shed easily.

Breeding

SEXUAL MATURITY AND SEXING

Females can be recognised by the white calcium bulges behind the angle of the jaw. Age and weight at sexual maturity are not documented. Females should have reached full size before being bred, and they must be in good condition.

MATING

The species lays eggs mainly in summer, and the mating season comes before this. There are no documented breeding conditions in captivity. A cool winter rest with shorter days and lower temperatures for a few weeks, followed by rising warmth and longer days in spring, suits the climate.

EGG-LAYING AND CLUTCHES

The female lays two hard-shelled eggs per clutch, like most geckos, and a clutch can also be a single egg. The eggs are laid in early summer and measure about 7-8 × 9-11 mm. In the wild they are found under stones, in rotting wood, under bark and in rock crevices, and several females often lay in the same nest. Provide a laying box with slightly moist sand or vermiculite and a narrow opening, or put flat hides on the floor. The number of clutches per year is not documented.

INCUBATION

Move the eggs to a small box of slightly moist vermiculite and leave them without turning. In the wild they hatch after one and a half to two months, 45-60 days. The incubation temperature is not documented for the species; 24-27 °C is borrowed from *Goggia lineata*. At lower temperatures it takes longer.

REARING THE YOUNG

The young are small and need a sealed box with kitchen paper or sand, hides and a small dish of water. Give them springtails, fruit flies and small crickets, dusted with calcium, every day or every other day. Keep them singly or in small groups of the same size. Growth and time to sexual maturity are not documented.

Health and common mistakes

Afrogecko porphyreus is rarely kept in captivity, so there are no species-specific health data. The typical faults with an insectivorous gecko are:

- Too much heat or a small enclosure without a cooler zone. This causes stress and dehydration.
- Too little calcium and vitamin D3, especially in egg-laying females. This causes soft jaws and tremors.
- A constantly wet substrate and too little ventilation, which cause mould and skin problems.
- Retained shed on the toes and tail tip. Provide a slightly moist hide.
- Lost tails after handling or fighting. The tail regrows but looks different.

See a reptile vet if the gecko loses weight, does not eat for several weeks or looks limp.

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.

The full guide with map and updates: herpy.org/en/geckos/afrogecko-porphyreus