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GECKOS

Seychelles Bronze Gecko

Ailuronyx seychellensis

Ailuronyx seychellensis is a sturdy, mainly nocturnal gecko that lives only in the Seychelles. It has copper-coloured eyes with a vertical pupil and lives in forest, plantations and gardens. The species is common in the wild but rare in captivity, and its thin, fragile skin tears easily when handled.

Family: Gekkonidae English name: Seychelles bronze gecko Former name: *Platydactylus seychellensis*

KEY FACTS

THE ANIMAL

Adult size	**9-12 cm** snout-vent length
Lifespan	**8-12 years**
Active	**At night**
Lifestyle	**Arboreal**
Habitat	**Dry forest and rainforest**
Difficulty	**Experienced**

CARE

Min. enclosure	**60 × 45 × 90 cm** L × W × H for 1 adult
Temperature, day	**25-29 °C**
Basking spot	**29-31 °C**
Temperature, night	**22-25 °C**
Humidity	**60-85%**
UVB	**Recommended** Ferguson zone 1
Diet	**Insects, nectar and complete diet**
Kept	**Singly or in pairs**

BREEDING

Reproduction	**Egg-laying**
Clutch size	**1-2 eggs**
Incubation	**60-90 days** at 26-28 °C

PROTECTION AND PAPERWORK

CITES	**Appendix III**
EU annex	**Annex C**
IUCN	**Least Concern (LC)**

About the species

Ailuronyx seychellensis is the type species of the genus *Ailuronyx*, which is found only in the Seychelles. The genus is mainly nocturnal and has granular dorsal scales, a vertical pupil, often small spines above the eyes and a large claw on each toe. The adhesive lamellae under the toes are undivided. The males have pores in front of the vent, and large animals may have small cloacal spurs.

A. seychellensis grows to 116 mm from snout to vent, and the females are smaller, up to about 94 mm. The length of the tail, and thus the total length, is not documented.

The genus has a reputation for being delicate. The skin is so thin that whole strips can be left hanging on a hand if the animal is picked up. Handling should therefore be avoided entirely.

The species was described in 1836 by André Duméril and Gabriel Bibron as *Platydactylus seychellensis*, and the species name refers to the Seychelles. The genus was established in 1843. Two closely related species, *Ailuronyx tachyscopaeus* and *Ailuronyx trachygaster*, share the archipelago with it. *A. trachygaster* is critically endangered, while *A. seychellensis* is not threatened.

Distribution and habitat

Ailuronyx seychellensis is found only in the Seychelles in the western Indian Ocean. It lives on the granitic islands of Mahé, Praslin, Silhouette, Frégate, Aride and Cousine. *Ailuronyx trachygaster* is known only from Praslin, while *Ailuronyx tachyscopaeus* is found on Mahé, Praslin, La Digue and several of the smaller islands.

The species is numerous in places and also lives close to people.

> **Native range:** Seychelles.

HABITAT

Ailuronyx seychellensis lives in humid lowland forest and in dry forest, but also in plantations, gardens and heavily degraded forest. It climbs on trunks and palms and also moves in the leaf litter on the ground. The species is mainly nocturnal, but some animals are also seen during the day.

The Seychelles lie close to the equator, so the climate is warm and humid all year with small differences between the seasons.

Care

THE ENCLOSURE

Little is known about the care of *Ailuronyx seychellensis*. The recommendations are based on the climate and habitat of the Seychelles and on experience with other arboreal, humidity-dependent geckos.

An adult needs a tall enclosure of at least 60 × 45 × 90 cm (length × width × height). Height counts for more than floor area, because the species climbs on trunks and palms. Furnish the enclosure with thick, vertical branches and pieces of cork bark, so there are both open climbing surfaces and dark crevices where the animal can sit during the day. Plants with large leaves provide shade and hiding places. The substrate can be moist coconut soil mixed with unfertilised soil and a layer of leaves, which holds the moisture.

Surfaces and branches must be soft and without sharp edges, because the thin skin tears easily. Avoid rough stone and wire mesh that the animal can rub against. The enclosure should have good ventilation, so the air does not become stagnant.

Read more: Humidity, misting and ventilation

TEMPERATURE

By day the terrarium for *Ailuronyx seychellensis* should be 25-29 °C, with a small area at the top of 29-31 °C. At night the temperature falls to 22-25 °C. Seasonal variation is small in the Seychelles, so there is no need for a real winter rest.

The heat must come from above and from the side, so the animal can choose how warm it wants to be. Use a thermostat and measure with a digital thermometer both high and low in the terrarium. Prolonged time above 32 °C stresses the animal, and if the heat is not built on an even gradient, it can dry out the skin. In most homes extra heat is needed for most of the year.

Read more: Heat and temperature

HUMIDITY AND WATER

Ailuronyx seychellensis comes from a humid, tropical climate, and humidity should be 60-85 %. Mist the enclosure thoroughly once or twice a day, so leaves and branches are wet, and let the surfaces dry between mistings, so mould does not develop.

The animal drinks droplets from leaves and glass, but a shallow bowl of fresh water can be left out and changed daily. Sufficient moisture also helps with shedding, which is crucial for a species with such thin skin. A hygrometer shows whether the routine is working.

LIGHTING AND UVB

Ailuronyx seychellensis is mainly nocturnal, but some animals are also out during the day. It is not documented how much UVB it needs. A weak UVB light for shade-dwelling animals (Ferguson zone 1) is recommended, for example a T5 tube of 5-7 % on one side of the enclosure, so there is always shade in the rest. The UV index at the uppermost branches should not exceed 1-2.

Keep the light on for 12 hours a day, ideally on a timer, so the daily rhythm resembles that at the equator, where day and night are roughly equal in length all year. At night it should be completely dark.

Read more: Lighting and UVB

FEEDING

Ailuronyx seychellensis is omnivorous and in the wild feeds on arthropods and nectar and also takes bird eggs.

Give live insects two to three times a week, for example crickets, cockroaches and grasshoppers that are no wider than the distance between the animal's eyes. Dust them with calcium with D3. As a substitute for nectar, a ready-mixed powdered diet for fruit- and nectar-eating geckos can be stirred with water into a thick paste. Serve a small dish a couple of times a week to adults and more often to juveniles, place it high up, and remove leftovers after a day.

The quantities are borrowed from other geckos with the same diet. Keep an eye on the weight, and adjust the amount if the animal becomes too fat or too thin.

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

BEHAVIOUR AND HANDLING

Ailuronyx seychellensis is mainly nocturnal and lives fairly openly on trunks and palms. The species is fragile: the skin tears easily, and whole strips can be left hanging on a hand. Therefore never pick the animal up, and avoid catching it with your hands. If it has to be moved, let it climb into a plastic container.

It is safest to keep the animals singly. Males are probably territorial and can fight, and there are no documented ways of keeping them in groups. A pair can be put together if the enclosure is large and there is room to separate them again. Lost tails regrow only partially.

Breeding

SEXUAL MATURITY AND SEXING

Age and weight at sexual maturity are not documented for *Ailuronyx seychellensis*. The males are recognised by pores in front of the vent and a bulge at the base of the tail, and the females are slimmer. Wait with breeding until the female is fully grown and in good condition, because egg laying costs a lot of calcium.

MATING

The mating season for *Ailuronyx seychellensis* is not documented. The Seychelles have small differences between the seasons, so the species is probably not tied to a particular season. Place the male with the female in her enclosure, and watch that he does not become rough. Separate the animals if there are scratches or unrest.

EGG-LAYING AND CLUTCHES

Ailuronyx seychellensis lays 1-2 eggs at a time. The number of clutches per year is not documented. Place a laying box with moist coconut soil or sphagnum in the enclosure, or a shallow plastic box with a hole in the lid. Otherwise the female buries the eggs in the substrate or glues them into a crevice in the bark.

Give the female extra calcium and insects in the season, and watch that she does not lose weight.

INCUBATION

Incubation is not documented for *Ailuronyx seychellensis*. If the eggs are incubated at 26-28 °C, they probably hatch after 60-90 days, as in other tropical geckos. Carefully move the eggs without turning them to a small box with damp substrate such as vermiculite or perlite, and lay them half buried with the top marked. The box needs a few small air holes. An incubator gives the most stable conditions.

Keep the substrate damp but not wet, and leave eggs that look doubtful until they are clearly dead.

Read more: Incubating eggs

REARING THE YOUNG

Rearing of the young is not described for *Ailuronyx seychellensis*. The young measure about 30 mm from snout to vent at hatching and are fragile. They need a small, clean box with kitchen paper or damp sphagnum, a twig and a hide. Mist daily. For the first few days they live on the yolk. After that they get small insects dusted with calcium with D3 and a little powdered diet. Keep the young singly, and weigh them regularly.

Health and common mistakes

No special diseases are described in *Ailuronyx seychellensis*. The typical problems for the species and its relatives are:

- Skin injuries. The skin is thin and tears from handling, rough surfaces and fighting. Injuries can cause infection; keep the animal calm and clean, and see a vet if the wound does not heal.
- Too little calcium and vitamin D3, which causes soft bones, bent limbs and tremors, especially in juveniles and breeding females. Use a good ready-made diet and dust the insects.
- Heat above 32 °C, which stresses the animal and dries the skin out.
- A constantly wet substrate and poor ventilation, which cause mould, fungus and skin problems.
- Shed remnants stuck on the toes and tail tip. Keep humidity high, and loosen the remnants carefully with lukewarm water.

A healthy animal has clear eyes, a plump tail base and a good grip. See a vet with reptile experience if the animal 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.