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GECKOS

Even-fingered Gecko

Alsophylax pipiens

Alsophylax pipiens is a small, nocturnal gecko from the deserts and steppes of Central Asia, where summers are hot and winters cold. It grows to 7-9 cm including the tail, hibernates from autumn to spring, and the males can produce a whistling sound. The care is based on the climate of the range.

Family: Gekkonidae English name: Even-fingered gecko Former name: *Lacerta pipiens; Alsophylax microtis*

KEY FACTS

THE ANIMAL

Adult size	**7-9 cm** total length incl. tail
Lifespan	**5-10 years**
Active	**At dusk and at night**
Lifestyle	**Rock-dwelling and terrestrial**
Habitat	**Desert, semi-desert and rocky terrain**
Difficulty	**Intermediate**

CARE

Min. enclosure	**40 × 30 × 30 cm** L × W × H for 2 adults
Temperature, day	**25-28 °C**
Basking spot	**32-35 °C**
Temperature, night	**15-20 °C**
Humidity	**30-40%**
Water	**Water dish**
UVB	**Optional**
Winter rest	**8-12 °C** 8-12 weeks
Diet	**Insects and small invertebrates (springtails, fruit flies)**
Kept	**Singly or in pairs**

BREEDING

Reproduction	**Egg-laying**
Sexually mature	**12 months**
Clutch size	**1-2 eggs**
Incubation	**40-60 days** at 26-28 °C

PROTECTION AND PAPERWORK

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

About the species

Alsophylax pipiens is a small, slender gecko with a relatively large, slightly flattened head and straight, narrow toes without the expanded adhesive pads that many other geckos have. The body measures 27-42 mm from snout to vent, on average about 33 mm, and the tail is about as long, so the total length is 7-9 cm.

The upper side is pale yellowish, brown or greyish brown with five broad, indistinct crossbands, which may be broken up into rows of spots. The underside is whitish, often with a lemon-yellow tinge. The nape, back and base of the tail are covered with small granular scales with scattered, larger and slightly domed tubercles between them.

The species name comes from the Latin pipio, to chirp, and suits the males' sound: at night and occasionally during the day they produce a metallic whistle that resembles a bird's voice.

The species was described by Peter Simon Pallas under the name *Lacerta pipiens* and is the type species of the genus *Alsophylax*. The name *Alsophylax microtis* has been merged with it. Genetically *A. pipiens* consists of several clearly separated lineages, so the species in its present delimitation probably contains several species. In Europe it is found only on Mount Bogdo by the lower Volga, and after *Euleptes europaea* it is Europe's second-smallest lizard.

Little is known about the species' life in captivity. The lifespan in the box (5-10 years) is an estimate for a small gecko and has not been measured for the species.

Distribution and habitat

Alsophylax pipiens has a large range in Central Asia: from the Astrakhan area in southern Russia between the Volga and the Ural through Kazakhstan, from the Caspian Sea to Lake Zaysan, and south to Uzbekistan, northern Turkmenistan and Kyrgyzstan. To the east it reaches north-western China and southern Mongolia (the Gobi). The type locality is Mount Bogdo by the Volga, the species' only occurrence in Europe.

Records from north-eastern Iran are not confirmed, and the species is not found in Afghanistan. In the Gobi it lives up to about 1,500 m above sea level. The species is assessed on the IUCN global Red List as Least Concern, and the population is stable.

> **Native range:** Mongolia, Russia, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Kyrgyzstan and China.

HABITAT

Alsophylax pipiens lives in dry, open landscapes: stony wormwood steppe, slopes of limestone and clay and the rocky parts of the Gobi Desert. By the Volga it is found especially in cracks and crevices at the foot of the limestone and clay slopes. During the day it hides in crevices and holes and emerges in the dark; only in spring, in overcast weather, is it also out during the day.

The climate is strongly continental with hot, dry summers and cold winters with frost. From October-November to March-April the animals hibernate deep in holes and crevices. Active animals in the wild have a body temperature of about 25 °C.

Care

THE ENCLOSURE

Little is known about the care of *Alsophylax pipiens*. The climate in the range is dry and continental with hot summers and cold winters, and the species lives in crevices in clay, limestone and rock. *Teratoscincus scincus* lives in a large part of the same area, but on open sand.

A pair can be kept in an enclosure of 40 × 30 × 30 cm. Floor area matters most, but the species lives on and between rocks, so a back wall of stone or cork with crevices provides both hiding places and extra space. Use a substrate of sand mixed with clay or soil that can hold its shape, and lay flat stones and slate so that narrow crevices form in both the warm and the cool end. The stones must rest directly on the bottom so they cannot slip. The enclosure should have good ventilation and a tightly fitting lid, because the species is small and fast.

TEMPERATURE

Create a gradient. By day the terrarium is kept at 25-28 °C with a basking spot of 32-35 °C under a lamp controlled by a thermostat. At night the temperature falls to 15-20 °C. Active animals in the wild have a body temperature of around 25 °C, so the terrarium must not be warm all the way through.

Winter rest is part of the annual rhythm. Lower the temperature and day length gradually in autumn, and keep the animals at 8-12 °C for 8-12 weeks. This is shorter and warmer than in the wild; the exact temperature during winter rest is not documented for the species. Only healthy animals in good condition may go into winter rest, and they must have access to water. Use digital thermometers at both ends of the terrarium.

Read more: Heat and temperature

HUMIDITY AND WATER

The air should be dry, about 30-40 %. Provide a very shallow dish of fresh water, changed regularly, and put a couple of stones in it so small animals cannot drown. Mist part of the furnishings lightly once a week, and let it dry out again. A crevice or hiding place with a slightly moister floor helps with shedding.

LIGHTING AND UVB

Alsophylax pipiens is active at night, so UVB is not necessary when the feeder insects are dusted with calcium and vitamin D3. A weak UVB tube can be used if there is enough shade and cover.

Keep the light on for 12-14 hours a day in summer, and shorten the days in autumn leading up to hibernation. Control the light with a timer.

Read more: Lighting and UVB Read more: Calcium, vitamins and supplements Read more: Brumation and the seasons

FEEDING

The species feeds on small arthropods. Give small feeder insects: springtails, fruit flies, small crickets and newly hatched cockroaches. Prey must not be wider than the distance between the animal's eyes.

Feed in the evening, juveniles daily and adults two or three times a week. Remove leftovers the next morning. The feeder insects themselves should have been fed greens or a prepared diet. Dust them with calcium at every second feeding and with vitamins once a week to twice a month. Stop feeding 1-2 weeks before hibernation, so the gut is empty when the temperature is lowered.

Read more: Feeder animals: keeping and breeding

BEHAVIOUR AND HANDLING

Alsophylax pipiens is a small, shy and fast animal that is not suited to handling. The tail can break off if you grab it. The animal is most active after dark, and the males can be heard whistling.

Social conditions in captivity are not documented. Two males are not kept together. Singly or as a pair in an enclosure with many crevices and hiding places is the safest solution.

Breeding

SEXUAL MATURITY AND SEXING

Alsophylax pipiens becomes sexually mature at the beginning of its second year, at about 12 months old. The males are recognised by a row of 8-13 pores in front of the vent and by the hemipenial bulges at the base of the tail. Wait with breeding until the female is fully grown and in good condition.

MATING

Egg laying begins at the end of May, so mating takes place in spring, shortly after hibernation. Hibernation controls the annual rhythm and is probably a prerequisite for breeding. Watch the male and female when they are put together, and remove the male if he chases the female persistently.

EGG-LAYING AND CLUTCHES

The female lays one and sometimes two hard-shelled eggs at a time and lays several times from the end of May to the end of June. Give her a slightly moist corner with sand and clay under a stone or in a crevice, and provide plenty of calcium and food during the egg-laying period.

INCUBATION

The incubation time is not documented. Eggs laid from the end of May hatch in the wild from July, so development is relatively fast in the summer heat. The 40-60 days at 26-28 °C in the box is an estimate based on that rhythm. Carefully move the eggs, without turning them, to a small ventilated box with slightly moist vermiculite, and keep the temperature even.

Read more: Incubating eggs

REARING THE YOUNG

The juveniles measure about 17 mm from snout to vent at hatching and are seen in the wild from July. They get the smallest feeder insects, such as springtails, fruit flies and newly hatched crickets, daily and dusted with calcium, in a small plastic box with hiding places, a warm spot and a very shallow water dish. Juveniles from late summer must be well fed before they go into their first hibernation.

Health and common mistakes

No diseases specific to *Alsophylax pipiens* in captivity are documented. The typical mistakes for small desert geckos are:

- Too little calcium and vitamin D3, which can cause soft bones and tremors.
- Too high humidity and poor ventilation, which cause skin and respiratory problems.
- Too high temperatures around the clock and all year, when the species is adapted to cool nights and cold winters.
- Hibernation with a lean or sick animal or with food in the gut.
- Lost tail. The tail is dropped when stressed or restrained and regrows only partially.
- Shed remnants on the toes and tail tip. If there are remnants, place the animal for a couple of hours in a box with wet kitchen roll.

A healthy animal is alert and has clear eyes and a plump tail. See a vet with reptile experience if the animal loses weight or stops eating.

Read more: Humidity, misting and ventilation

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.