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GECKOS

Robust Velvet Gecko

Amalosia robusta

Amalosia robusta is a sturdily built, nocturnal gecko from eastern Australia with pale spots on a grey or dark brown back and a flat, broad tail. It climbs on rocks and tree trunks and copes in both forest and the edges of towns. Its care is only sparsely described and is based on closely related species.

Family: Diplodactylidae English name: Robust velvet gecko Former name: *Nebulifera robusta; Oedura robusta*

KEY FACTS

THE ANIMAL

Adult size	**15-18 cm** total length incl. tail
Lifespan	**10-15 years**
Active	**At night**
Lifestyle	**Arboreal and rock-dwelling**
Habitat	**Savanna and rocky terrain**
Difficulty	**Intermediate**

CARE

Min. enclosure	**45 × 45 × 60 cm** L × W × H for 1 adult
Temperature, day	**22-27 °C**
Basking spot	**30-33 °C**
Temperature, night	**16-22 °C**
Humidity	**40-65%**
UVB	**Optional** Ferguson zone 1
Diet	**Insects**
Kept	**Singly or in pairs**

BREEDING

Reproduction	**Egg-laying**
Clutch size	**2 eggs**
Clutches per year	**3-5**
Incubation	**60-65 days** at 27-29 °C

PROTECTION AND PAPERWORK

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

About the species

Amalosia robusta is a sturdily built gecko that grows to about 8 cm from snout to vent and 15-18 cm including the tail. The colour is grey to dark brown with pale, irregular spots across the back, and the pattern varies a good deal from animal to animal. The tail is flat and broad, especially when it has regrown. Fingers and toes end in broad adhesive pads that give grip on almost all surfaces, including glass. The eyes have no lids, and the gecko cleans them with its tongue.

The species was described in 1885 as *Oedura robusta*. In 2012 it was given its own genus, *Nebulifera*, "the cloud-bearer", after the pale spots on the back. In 2023 *Nebulifera* was merged with *Amalosia*, because genetically the species belongs among the genus's other species, and it is now called *Amalosia robusta*. It is the largest species in the genus.

The gecko is territorial. The males defend a hunting area and can fight so fiercely that loud, squeaking sounds are heard. If it bites when caught, the bite is weak and does not draw blood.

Distribution and habitat

Amalosia robusta lives in eastern Australia, from the coast around Newcastle and the inland south of Dubbo in New South Wales north to the coast around Rockhampton and the inland around Emerald in Queensland. Older records as far north as the Atherton Tableland are uncertain. The species is common in the outer suburbs of Brisbane, and a large population lives on the rock faces at Kangaroo Point in the middle of the city.

The range is large and continuous, and the species is not considered threatened.

> **Native range:** Australia.

HABITAT

Amalosia robusta is flexible and lives in warm temperate to subtropical forest and open woodland. It is found both on trees, where it sits under loose bark on eucalypts, and on rock ledges and in rock crevices. It also copes in remnants of nature inside towns and often moves into houses close to forest, where it sits behind shutters and under eaves.

The gecko is nocturnal. During the day it hides in crevices, and at night it hunts close to its hiding place. Its food is insects and other invertebrates, and it also licks plant sap and nectar. It is eaten by owls and other nocturnal birds, snakes and large spiders.

Temperature and humidity at the gecko's hiding places have not been measured. The climate is warm and humid in summer and mild and drier in winter.

Read more: Humidity, misting and ventilation

Care

THE ENCLOSURE

The care of *Amalosia robusta* is only sparsely described, and the figures in the guide are borrowed from the closely related *Oedura castelnaui*, *Oedura monilis* and *Oedura tryoni*, which live in almost the same way. A single adult needs a tall enclosure of at least 45 × 45 × 60 cm (length × width × height). A pair can be kept in 60 × 45 × 60 cm.

Furnish with cork bark, flat cork tubes and slanted branches, so the gecko can crawl in under something that presses lightly against back and belly. A back wall of cork or stone with crevices provides good hiding places, and a shelf with pieces of rock suits the species' natural habitat. A mix of unfertilised soil and sand, covered with dry leaves, is used as a substrate.

The enclosure should have good ventilation and a dry end. Lid and doors must close tightly, because the species climbs on glass and finds every gap.

TEMPERATURE

By day the enclosure should be 22-27 °C, and under a heat source at one end it can be 30-33 °C. At night the temperature may fall to 16-22 °C. A small heat mat under one corner or a low-wattage heat bulb on a thermostat is normally enough, and in a room at ordinary room temperature extra heat is often unnecessary.

In the cool months the hotspot can be lowered to about 30 °C, and the temperature in the enclosure must not fall below 15 °C. Measure with a digital thermometer at both ends.

Read more: Heat and temperature

HUMIDITY AND WATER

Humidity is kept at 40-65 %. Mist one half of the enclosure thoroughly every second day in summer, so the substrate dries out during the day, and keep it drier in the cool months. Place a shallow bowl of fresh water in the cool end. Constant moisture causes mould and skin problems.

The gecko readily drinks droplets from the walls.

LIGHTING AND UVB

The species is nocturnal and does not require UVB, but a weak UVB tube for shade-dwelling animals (Ferguson zone 1) over one side of the enclosure gives a more reliable calcium metabolism, as long as there is shade and cover. The day length follows the seasons: 12-13 hours in summer and 10-11 hours in winter, controlled by a timer. Do not use coloured night light or strong spotlights.

Read more: Lighting and UVB Read more: Calcium, vitamins and supplements

FEEDING

Amalosia robusta takes any suitable insect food: crickets, grasshoppers, cockroaches and small mealworms. Prey should be smaller than the distance between the eyes.

Adults are fed 2-3 times a week and subadults 3-4 times a week, and in the cool months feeding can be cut down to once every 7-10 days. Dust the food with calcium, and give a multivitamin 1-2 times a month. Insects that are not eaten are removed the next morning.

Read more: Feeder animals: keeping and breeding

BEHAVIOUR AND HANDLING

The species is territorial and is best kept singly or as a pair. Males must not be kept together. The animal is fast and can drop its tail, so it should not be handled more than necessary. Never grab the tail.

The gecko is an animal to look at. During the day it sits in its hiding place and emerges only when the lights are out. It can squeak loudly when it fights with others.

Breeding

SEXUAL MATURITY AND SEXING

The male has distinct bumps at the base of the tail (hemipenial pouches) and pores in front of the vent. Age and weight at sexual maturity are not documented for the species. The females must be fully grown and in good condition before they are put into breeding.

MATING

The breeding season follows the warm months, from October to February, that is, the Australian spring and summer. The male is put into the female's enclosure and removed again if she chases him. A cool, dry period in winter helps condition and breeding.

EGG-LAYING AND CLUTCHES

The female lays two parchment-shelled eggs per clutch. A new clutch follows every 4-5 weeks, 3-5 in all per season. Place a small plastic box with an entrance hole and 3-4 cm of damp sphagnum or coconut fibre in the enclosure. The eggs can lie in damp substrate for a few days without harm.

INCUBATION

Carefully move the eggs, without turning them, to a small box of damp perlite or vermiculite and incubate them at 27-29 °C. At that temperature the eggs hatch after 60-65 days. Eggs that collapse and turn mouldy are infertile or dead. Whether temperature determines sex in *A. robusta* is not documented.

REARING THE YOUNG

The juveniles shed within the first two days and begin to eat after five to eight days. Give tiny crickets dusted with calcium. Several juveniles can be kept together for the first 6-8 months, but the males must be separated as soon as the hemipenial bumps are seen. Juveniles are fed 3-4 times a week and moved to a larger enclosure when they are about half grown.

Health and common mistakes

There is no species-specific documentation of diseases in *Amalosia robusta*. The typical problems in small, nocturnal geckos are:

- Too little calcium and vitamin D3, which causes soft jaws and bent legs. Dust the food.
- Constant moisture and poor ventilation, which cause fungus and skin problems.
- Remnants of old skin on the toes and tail tip. Provide a moist hiding place, and loosen the remnants with lukewarm water.
- Lost tail after handling or fighting. It is not dangerous, but the tail regrows in a different form.

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.