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GECKOS

Blaesodactylus boivini

A large, tree-climbing gecko from northern Madagascar with soft, velvety skin. It is regarded as nocturnal, but often sits out in the open and basks by day, and it does well in a dry, airy enclosure. It is rare in captivity, and experience with it is limited.

Family: Gekkonidae Former name: *Platydactylus boivini; Homopholis boivini*

KEY FACTS

THE ANIMAL

Adult size	**14 cm** snout-vent length
Lifespan	**10-15 years**
Active	**At dusk and at night**
Lifestyle	**Arboreal**
Habitat	**Dry forest**
Difficulty	**Intermediate**

CARE

Min. enclosure	**45 × 45 × 60 cm** L × W × H for 1 adult
Temperature, day	**22-27 °C**
Basking spot	**30-32 °C**
Temperature, night	**18-22 °C**
Humidity	**45-60%**
Water	**Water dish**
UVB	**Recommended** Ferguson zone 2
Diet	**Insects and complete diet**
Kept	**Singly or one male with several females**

BREEDING

Reproduction	**Egg-laying**
Clutch size	**1-2 eggs**
Incubation	**120-180 days** at 25-28 °C

PROTECTION AND PAPERWORK

CITES	**Not listed**
EU annex	**Not listed**
IUCN	**Vulnerable (VU)**

About the species

Blaesodactylus boivini is a heavily built, tree-dwelling gecko with soft, velvety scales. The belly is pale and marbled with dark areas, and the granular scales on the throat are uneven in size, which distinguishes it from related species. It was described in 1856 by Auguste Duméril under the name *Platydactylus boivini* and has since stood in the genus *Homopholis* before being moved back to *Blaesodactylus*. The species name honours the French botanist Louis Hyacinthe Boivin, who collected in Madagascar.

The species is regarded as nocturnal, but in captivity it often sits openly and basks by day instead of hiding, as many other nocturnal geckos do. It is a good animal to watch and readily climbs high up on cork and branches.

At up to 14 cm from snout to vent it is one of the largest in the genus. The total length including the tail is not documented. Lifespan is not documented either; 10-15 years is an estimate based on other large geckos. The species is not common in captivity, and there is only little collected knowledge about its care and breeding.

Distribution and habitat

The species is endemic to Madagascar and occurs in the northern part of the island. It is also known from the two islands Nosy Be off the north-west coast and Sainte-Marie (Nosy Boraha) off the east coast. The type locality is given only as Madagascar.

The distribution is poorly known, and the map therefore shows only a centre in the northern part of the island. Records outside Madagascar come from captive animals.

> **Native range:** Madagascar.

HABITAT

The habitat is forest from sea level up to about 563 metres. In north-western Madagascar the species lives in semi-dry forest and scrub, away from the wettest, tropical areas, but it is also known from the more humid island of Sainte-Marie off the east coast. The animals climb in trees and hide behind loose bark.

In the enclosure, a drier and airier environment suits it better than the one for most geckos from Madagascar's rainforests. Exact temperature and rainfall figures from the individual localities are not documented.

Care

THE ENCLOSURE

A single adult needs a tall enclosure of at least 45 × 45 × 60 cm (length × width × height). Two animals can be kept in about 60 × 60 × 90 cm and three in about 90 × 90 × 120 cm. The species is tree-dwelling and likes to sit high, so height matters more than floor area.

An enclosure with mesh on the sides, or at least good ventilation, suits the species, because it does not need the humidity that many other geckos from Madagascar require. If it is kept in glass, the air must not become too stagnant and humid.

Furnish it with plenty of cork pieces and long branches or stumps reaching almost to the ceiling, so the animal can climb and bask. Also provide some hides, but expect the animal to sit out in the open often. As substrate, either kitchen roll, optionally with a small tray of soil and sand, or a mixture of coconut fibre and sand works.

Read more: Humidity, misting and ventilation

TEMPERATURE

Blaesodactylus boivini is kept at ordinary room temperature with a warm spot high up on a cork ledge at about 32 °C. The animal basks here, and the ledge is used often. Aim for 22-27 °C in the rest of the enclosure by day and 18-22 °C at night. The night temperature is a cautious estimate.

Measure the temperature both at the top and at the bottom with a digital thermometer, and use a thermostat for the heat source. Never let the animal come into direct contact with the heat bulb.

Read more: Heat and temperature

HUMIDITY AND WATER

The humidity is 45-55 % for most of the day, corresponding to ordinary room air, and rises briefly when the enclosure is misted. Mist lightly in the evening, so there are droplets on the leaves, and make sure the substrate and the air dry out again.

Put a dish of fresh water in the enclosure. The animals drink from it regularly. Change the water every day or every other day.

LIGHTING AND UVB

Because the animals sit out in the open and bask by day, they need UVB light. A UVB tube for shade-dwelling species or moderate sun (Ferguson zone 2) over one side of the enclosure, so the animal can choose to sit in the shade, suits this behaviour. The choice of zone is an estimate, since there are no documented UV measurements for the species.

Keep the light on for 11-12 hours a day, controlled by a timer, and let it be dark at night.

Read more: Lighting and UVB

FEEDING

A prepared diet for fruit-eating geckos, mixed with water into a thick paste, is the staple diet, and the animals take it readily. Serve it in a small dish high up in the enclosure, and remove leftovers after a day.

In addition, give live insects such as crickets, grasshoppers or mealworms about once a week. How readily the animals take them varies from animal to animal. Dust the insects with calcium with vitamin D3, and choose insects smaller than the distance between the animal's eyes. Amounts and frequency are not documented for the species, so follow the animal's weight and condition and adjust accordingly.

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

BEHAVIOUR AND HANDLING

Blaesodactylus boivini is a large and calm gecko, but it is not intended for daily handling. The animals often sit openly in view, including during the daytime.

The safest approach is to keep each animal separately. Females can be kept together in a large enclosure with many hides, and sisters can be kept together from hatching, but it becomes harder the older the animals get. Never keep more than one male in the same enclosure. Watch for bites, scrapes and dropped tails, and separate the animals if there is unrest.

Breeding

SEXUAL MATURITY AND SEXING

The sexual differences have not been described in detail for the species. Age and weight at sexual maturity have not been documented. Females can have large, distinct calcium sacs and be ready to mate as early as half-grown, but wait until the female is fully grown and in good condition before she is put to breeding.

MATING

The species can be bred with one male and two females in a large, airy enclosure. The male is put with the females when they are mature. Season, rest period and mating behaviour have not been documented for the species, so watch the animals and separate them if there is biting or stress.

EGG-LAYING AND CLUTCHES

The female lays 1-2 eggs at a time, often in a hide with a narrow opening. The number of clutches per year has not been documented. Offer several hides and a laying box with slightly damp substrate, and look for eggs without disturbing the female unnecessarily.

INCUBATION

Incubation is long, probably about 4-6 months (120-180 days); the figure has not been measured. The eggs mould easily; a dry substrate in an incubator with high humidity, about 80 %, works well. Eggs can also be left in the enclosure if they are laid somewhere that is hard to reach.

The incubation temperature has not been documented for the species; 25-28 °C is borrowed from related geckos. Keep the temperature stable.

Read more: Incubating eggs

REARING THE YOUNG

The hatchlings manage on their own from hatching, and the parents do not eat them. They can therefore stay in the enclosure, but a small hatchling box makes it easier to check that they are eating. Give them the same prepared diet as the adults and small insects dusted with calcium with vitamin D3. Growth and first feedings are not documented for the species. Keep only females together from hatching, and only if there is plenty of space and hides.

Health and common mistakes

There is only limited experience with the species, and known diseases have not been described. Follow the general advice for large geckos:

- Too little calcium and vitamin D3 causes brittle bones. Dust the insects, and provide UVB.
- Conditions that are too wet in a closed enclosure can cause skin problems and fungus. Use mesh or good ventilation.
- Dropped tails after fights or handling. Separate the animals if there is unrest.
- Shed skin stuck on toes and tail tip after shedding. Provide a humid hide.

See a vet experienced with reptiles if the animal loses weight, does not eat for several weeks or seems 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/blaesodactylus-boivini