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GECKOS

Malaysia bent-toed gecko

Cyrtodactylus elok

A slender, nocturnal forest gecko from the rainforests of Malaysia with a prehensile tail, webbing between the toes and camouflage that makes it vanish against bark. It is rare in captivity, needs stable humidity and cool nights, and suits the experienced keeper.

Family: Gekkonidae

KEY FACTS

THE ANIMAL

Adult size	**6-8 cm** snout-vent length
Lifespan	**5-10 years**
Active	**At night**
Lifestyle	**Arboreal**
Habitat	**Rainforest**
Difficulty	**Experienced**

CARE

Min. enclosure	**45 × 45 × 60 cm** L × W × H for 1 adult
Temperature, day	**22-27 °C**
Temperature, night	**20-22 °C**
Humidity	**70-85%**
Water	**Water dish**
UVB	**Optional**
Diet	**Insects**
Kept	**Singly or in pairs**

BREEDING

Reproduction	**Egg-laying**
Clutch size	**1-2 eggs**
Incubation	**60-90 days** at 24-27 °C

PROTECTION AND PAPERWORK

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

About the species

Cyrtodactylus elok is a slender gecko in the genus *Cyrtodactylus*. It belongs to the group within the genus that has a spined, prehensile tail. The tail is square in cross-section, has a double row of spines along the sides, and the outer third is paler, almost white. Between the toes there is a web at the base, and the front lamellae under the toes are enlarged. The species has no enlarged scales on the thighs and no femoral pores.

The body is greyish brown with a V-shaped marking on the nape, six paler crossbands on the body and dark bands on the tail. This is described from preserved animals, and the colours of living animals are not thoroughly documented. The pattern works as camouflage on bark.

The largest recorded body length from snout to vent is about 83 mm, and most animals are smaller. An adult therefore typically reaches 6-8 cm without the tail. The tail is about 1.2 times as long as the body, so the total length can reach about 18 cm. The species name is Malay for beautiful.

The species was described in 1979 by Dring from animals from northern Terengganu and Gunung Benom in Malaysia. It is still little known, and there are no established care guidelines based on long-term breeding. Everything stated here about care is based on the species' habitat and on experience with it and related species, and should be taken with caution.

The animal is shy and vulnerable and is best suited as a display animal, not as an animal to be handled.

Distribution and habitat

Cyrtodactylus elok is tied to Peninsular Malaysia on the Malay Peninsula, where it lives in the mountains and lowlands along the Titiwangsa range and the eastern mountains. The type locality is Gunung Benom in Pahang. The species is also known from Gunung Lawit in Terengganu, Batu Papan in Kelantan, Sungai Sedim in Kedah, the Cameron Highlands and Fraser's Hill, and Gunung Besar Hantu in Negeri Sembilan.

In 2018 the species was found in Thailand for the first time, in the Hala-Bala reserve in Narathiwat province in the far south, and it probably occurs in several places in the lowlands at the northern spurs of the Malaysian mountain ranges. The distribution is, however, known only from scattered records.

> **Native range:** Malaysia and Thailand.

HABITAT

The species is arboreal and is found in lowland and hill forest with dipterocarp trees in hilly terrain, at about 100-800 metres. The type locality lies at 215 metres.

The camouflage and the prehensile tail suggest that the animal hides by day in crevices in bark and in hollow trees, and that it hunts at night on trunks and branches. The climate is tropical and humid, with small temperature fluctuations over the year. Juveniles and gravid females have been seen in March in Negeri Sembilan, so the eggs are probably laid in the first part of the year. No measurements of temperature and humidity are available for the individual localities, so the figures in the care sections are estimates based on general rainforest conditions.

Read more: Humidity, misting and ventilation

Care

THE ENCLOSURE

The animal uses height and needs a tall enclosure. A pair can be kept together, but only if there is space and many hides. One animal needs at least 45 × 45 × 60 cm (length × width × height), and a pair at least 60 × 45 × 60 cm. Bigger is always better.

Furnish with many thin branches, cork tubes and cork bark at several heights, so that the animal can both climb and hide. Plant densely with live or artificial plants to create hides and shade. The animal needs at least one hide where it feels safe, and a spot with moist sphagnum.

Moist coconut fibre and sphagnum, or a bioactive mix with springtails and woodlice, works as substrate. Good air circulation is important, so that the air does not become stagnant. Use an enclosure with mesh openings in the top and front, but with closed sides, so that the humidity stays in.

Read more: Terrarium construction and bioactive substrate Read more: Feeder animals: keeping and breeding

TEMPERATURE

Cyrtodactylus elok is not a sun-loving species and should not have a heat lamp. By day 22-27 °C is suitable, and at night the temperature should fall to about 20-22 °C. There should be no hot spot, and the species should not be exposed to 28 °C or above. Keep the enclosure cool in summer, away from sun and radiators.

In many homes room temperature is enough in the summer months. If it is colder than 20 °C in winter, a low-output heat mat on the side or a ceramic heat bulb controlled by a thermostat can be used. Measure the temperature with a digital thermometer both at the top and at the bottom of the enclosure.

Read more: Heat and temperature

HUMIDITY AND WATER

The humidity should be high, 70-85 %. Mist the enclosure thoroughly every day, preferably once in the evening, so that there are water droplets on leaves and branches for the animal to drink from. Let the substrate and the top dry out a little between mistings, so that mould does not develop.

Good ventilation is just as important as humidity. If the air is stagnant and constantly wet, it causes mould and skin problems. A hygrometer shows whether the humidity holds. There should always be a shallow dish of fresh water. Change the water daily.

WATER AND WATER QUALITY

Place a shallow, stable dish of fresh water on the floor or on a low branch. The water should be no more than 1-2 cm deep, so the animal does not drown, and be changed every day. Use water without chlorine, for example boiled or filtered tap water, and clean the dish at every change. Some animals drink only from the leaves, but the dish helps to keep the humidity up.

LIGHTING AND UVB

The species is nocturnal and lives on trunks and branches in the shade of the forest. Strong UVB is not necessary, but a weak UVB source probably benefits the animal. If you use UVB, choose a weak tube for shade-dwelling species, and position it so that there are many shaded areas in the enclosure.

Keep the light on for 11-12 hours a day, preferably controlled by a timer. Use a weak moonlight or no light at night. It should be dark for at least most of the night, so that the animal's daily rhythm is maintained.

Read more: Lighting and UVB

FEEDING

Cyrtodactylus elok eats live insects. Give small, varied feeder insects such as crickets, small roaches, fruit flies and moths. The size should suit the animal's head: the insects should be smaller than the distance between the eyes. Give feeder insects that have themselves been fed well, and dust them with calcium with vitamin D3 at every second feeding and with a multivitamin once a week.

Feed adults 2-3 times a week and juveniles more often. The animals hunt actively at night, so give the food in the evening, and remove dead insects in the morning. Fruit-based food and prepared diets for geckos have not been described for the species.

Read more: Calcium, vitamins and supplements

BEHAVIOUR AND HANDLING

The species is shy and vulnerable, and the animal is best suited as a display animal. Handling stresses it and should only happen when necessary. The animal can drop its tail if grabbed. Choose to observe the animal in the evening rather than picking it up.

Social housing is poorly documented. Males of the genus are territorial and should not be kept together. A pair can be kept together in a large enclosure with many hides if the animals do not fight. Otherwise keep the animals separately. Newly bought animals may be stressed and carry parasites, so give them peace for several weeks, and have a faecal sample examined by a vet.

Breeding

SEXUAL MATURITY AND SEXING

In many species of the genus, the male has pores in front of the vent. In *Cyrtodactylus elok* there are no femoral pores, and the number of pores in front of the vent is not clearly described, so the sex is hard to determine in young animals. Age and weight at sexual maturity are not documented for the species. Only breed animals when they are fully grown, in good condition and have had plenty of calcium.

MATING

There is no documented information about mating in the species. Records of gravid females and small juveniles in March in the wild suggest that the season begins in the winter months or early spring. Keep the animals in pairs, and give the female many hides so she can withdraw from the male. Remove the male if he chases the female without pause or if she is scraped.

EGG-LAYING AND CLUTCHES

The species is egg-laying. The clutch is probably small, about 1-2 eggs, as in most species of the genus, but this is not documented for this particular species. Give the female a lay box with damp sphagnum or coconut fibre at least 8-10 cm deep, placed in a dark, quiet corner of the enclosure. Otherwise she buries the eggs in the substrate under a hide.

Females of the genus are prone to calcium deficiency during egg-laying. Give plenty of calcium and vitamin D3, and stop breeding if the female loses weight.

INCUBATION

Move the eggs carefully to a small box with slightly moist substrate such as vermiculite or perlite, without turning them. The box needs a couple of small ventilation holes and should stand at 24-27 °C. The substrate should be moist, not wet, so that the eggs do not go mouldy. The eggs hatch after about 60-90 days. The figure is an estimate, and at lower temperature it can take considerably longer.

An egg that collapses or goes mouldy is usually dead. Leave the eggs until you are sure.

REARING THE YOUNG

The hatchlings are small and should be kept singly in a small plastic box with kitchen roll or damp sphagnum, a hide and a branch. Mist daily, and keep the temperature at 22-25 °C. They shed their skin within the first day and begin to eat after a few days.

Give small insects such as fruit flies, springtails and newly hatched crickets, dusted with calcium. Feed them daily. Weigh and measure them regularly. Growth and time to adult size are not documented for the species, and captive breeding is still rare.

Read more: Buying animals: captive-bred, wild-caught and transport

Health and common mistakes

There is almost no documented information about diseases in *Cyrtodactylus elok*, so the following is based on experience with species of the genus in general:

- Heat above 28 °C and air that is too dry cause stress, dry sheds and loss of appetite.
- A constantly wet substrate and poor ventilation cause mould, fungus and skin problems.
- Wild-caught animals often carry parasites and can be hard to acclimatise to captivity. Have a faecal sample examined.
- Calcium deficiency, especially in females, causes soft bones, tremors and egg-laying problems. Dust the food and provide vitamin D3.
- Handling stresses the animal and can make it drop its tail.

A healthy animal has clear eyes, a plump tail and is active in the evening. See a vet experienced with reptiles if the animal loses weight, does not eat for several weeks or lies 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.