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GECKOS

Ebenavia boettgeri

Ebenavia boettgeri is a small, slender gecko from the lowland rainforest along the east coast of Madagascar, about 6-8 cm including the tail. For many years it was counted as part of *Ebenavia inunguis* and has only been a separate species again since 2018. Little is known about its care.

Family: Gekkonidae

KEY FACTS

THE ANIMAL

Adult size	**6-8 cm** total length incl. tail
Lifespan	**5-8 years**
Active	**At night**
Lifestyle	**Arboreal and terrestrial**
Habitat	**Rainforest**
Difficulty	**Intermediate**

CARE

Min. enclosure	**30 × 30 × 30 cm** L × W × H for 2 adults
Temperature, day	**26-28 °C**
Temperature, night	**18-22 °C**
Humidity	**70%**
Water	**Water dish**
UVB	**Optional**
Diet	**Insects and small invertebrates (springtails, fruit flies)**
Kept	**In pairs or one male with several females**

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

Ebenavia boettgeri is a small, slender gecko with a pointed snout. The body measures 29-38 mm from snout to vent. The tail is probably about half of the total length, as in *Ebenavia inunguis*, so the animal reaches about 6-8 cm in total.

The species was described in 1885 by the British zoologist George Albert Boulenger and is probably named after the German zoologist Oskar Boettger. As early as 1887 it was regarded as a synonym of *E. inunguis*, and only in 2018 was it reinstated as a separate species, when a revision of the genus split *E. inunguis* into several species. *E. boettgeri* is told from *E. inunguis* by the rostral scale, the front scale on the snout, not touching the nostril.

Distribution and habitat

The species occurs in the lowland rainforest along the east coast of Madagascar, from Sainte Luce in the south-east to Ambodivoahangy and possibly Ambohitralanana on the Masoala Peninsula in the north-east. It has been found from sea level up to about 425 m above sea level. The type specimen is labelled simply "Madagascar", so the type locality is unknown.

A population on Mauritius is regarded as introduced. It is not shown on the map, which shows only the native range.

Native range: Madagascar.

HABITAT

The habitat is warm, humid lowland rainforest from sea level to about 425 m above sea level. Like *E. inunguis*, the species probably lives mostly in the trees, hides by day under bark, in dead wood and between the leaves of screw pines and *Ravenala*, and hunts at night.

The climate along the east coast is warm and very rainy all year. In Toamasina, in the middle of the range, the mean temperature is 25-31 °C by day and 17-23 °C at night, the relative humidity is around 84 %, and more than 3,000 mm of rain falls a year. It is a little cooler from June to August and driest from September to November.

Read more: Humidity, misting and ventilation

Care

THE ENCLOSURE

Little is known about the care of *Ebenavia boettgeri*. The figures in this guide are borrowed from *Ebenavia inunguis*, the closest and best-known relative, and they fit the climate in the species' range.

A pair can be kept in an enclosure of 30 × 30 × 30 cm (length × width × height). In a larger enclosure one male can be kept with several females. Larger is an advantage, because it provides more hides and a more stable climate.

Cover the back and side walls with natural cork so that the animals get more climbing surface, and lean pieces of cork bark at an angle against the walls as hides. The substrate is a mixture of two parts soil and one part sand. It is kept slightly damp, but there must also be a dry area. Small live plants such as *Selaginella* and small bromeliads provide cover and hold the moisture. A small water bowl and a small dish of crushed cuttlebone complete the setup.

The enclosure must have a tight lid, because the animals are small and can escape through narrow gaps. At the same time there must be ventilation so that the air does not become stagnant.

TEMPERATURE

During the day the enclosure should be kept at 26-28 °C. At night the temperature drops to about 22 °C in summer and 18 °C in winter. A fluorescent tube normally gives enough warmth. If the temperature cannot be reached, a heat mat or heating cable can be placed under the front ventilation opening, controlled by a thermostat.

Keep the enclosure away from south-facing windows, and measure the temperature at the top and at the bottom with a digital thermometer. Above 30 °C the enclosure must be cooled down. The species is nocturnal and does not need a basking spot.

Read more: Heat and temperature

HUMIDITY AND WATER

Humidity should be around 70 %. It is easy to maintain by spraying the enclosure once a day, preferably in the evening, so that leaves and bark become damp. The substrate is kept slightly damp at all times, but there must also be a dry spot, and good ventilation prevents mould.

The animal drinks droplets from plants and bark after spraying. Also provide a small, shallow bowl of fresh water, and change the water every day. A hygrometer shows whether the humidity holds.

LIGHTING AND UVB

The species is nocturnal and hides during the day. The enclosure is lit and heated with a fluorescent tube, switched on 12 hours a day in summer and 10 hours in winter, controlled by a timer. UVB is optional. A weak UVB tube for shade-dwelling animals can be used, and there must always be dark hides where the animal can avoid the light.

At night the enclosure must be completely dark. Live plants thrive better with good light during the day.

Read more: Lighting and UVB

FEEDING

Offer small insects and other small arthropods that are smaller than the animal's head: fruit flies, springtails, newly hatched and small crickets and small woodlice. Offer food every two to three days, and adjust according to how plump the body and the base of the tail are.

Always dust the feeder insects with a vitamin and mineral supplement, and keep a small dish of crushed cuttlebone available so that the females can take extra calcium. Feed in the evening when the animal is active, and remove feeder insects that are not eaten from the enclosure.

Wild-caught animals may be in poor condition and need to be built up with varied, good food and peace and quiet.

Read more: Feeder animals: keeping and breeding Read more: Calcium, vitamins and supplements Read more: Buying animals: captive-bred, wild-caught and transport

BEHAVIOUR AND HANDLING

Ebenavia boettgeri is slow and stealthy and not suited to handling. Animals you try to pick up may flee and drop the tail, and it does not grow back in the same form. The species is an animal to watch in the enclosure, especially at dusk.

A pair or one male with several females can be kept together. Whether two males can be kept together has not been documented for the species, so keep only one male in each enclosure. Provide many hides, watch for biting, missing tails and animals that lose weight, and separate the animals if there is unrest.

Breeding

SEXUAL MATURITY AND SEXING

Sex differences and sexual maturity are not documented for the species. Wait with breeding until the animals are fully grown and in good condition.

MATING

Captive breeding rarely succeeds. In *E. inunguis* the eggs come almost only from wild-caught females that are already gravid, and it is not known what makes the animals breed.

EGG-LAYING AND CLUTCHES

The female probably lays 1-2 eggs at a time, as in *E. inunguis*. Give the female several hidden, slightly moist laying sites, for example cork tubes and pockets of moist soil, and check them without disturbing her. The number of clutches a year is not documented.

INCUBATION

Move the eggs carefully to a small box with slightly moist substrate, for example perlite or vermiculite, without turning them. The box must have small air holes and stand at a stable temperature. Keep the substrate slightly moist, but not wet. Eggs that collapse and go mouldy are usually dead.

At 24-27 °C the eggs probably hatch after 60-90 days, as in similar small geckos.

REARING THE YOUNG

The young are very small and live on micro feeders such as springtails and fruit flies as well as the smallest newly hatched crickets. Keep them in a small, tight enclosure with damp substrate, hides and the same temperature as the adults. Feed every day, lightly dusted with calcium, and keep an eye on growth.

Health and common mistakes

Lifespan is not documented, but is estimated at 5-8 years. The typical problems are the same as in other small, forest-dwelling geckos:

- Too much heat and too dry air, which cause stress, dehydration and loss of appetite.
- A constantly wet substrate and poor ventilation, which cause mould and skin problems.
- Lack of calcium and vitamin D3, which causes soft bones. Dust the feeder insects and keep a cuttlebone available.
- Stuck shed on toes and tail tip in too dry air. Provide a humid part of the terrarium.
- Wild-caught animals in poor condition. They must be nursed up with good food and peace.
- Lost tail after handling or fighting.

See a vet experienced with reptiles if the animal loses weight or will not eat.

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.