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GECKOS

Madagascar clawless gecko

Ebenavia inunguis

Ebenavia inunguis is a small, nocturnal gecko from north-western Madagascar and Nosy Be, only about 8 cm including the tail. During the day it hides under bark and in dead wood. The name means "without claws", although the female has small claws on the hind feet. Care is relatively simple, but breeding in captivity rarely succeeds.

Family: Gekkonidae

KEY FACTS

THE ANIMAL

Adult size	**7-8 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 inunguis is a small gecko in the family Gekkonidae and the type species of the genus *Ebenavia*, which Oskar Boettger described in 1878. The species name is Latin for "without claws". This is misleading, because the female has small claws on the toes of the hind feet, while the male lacks them. The genus name is formed after the collector Carl Ebenau and is neither Latin nor Greek.

The head is distinctly pointed, and the body is covered with fine, granular scales with scattered tubercles. The toes end in small adhesive discs, and the pupil is vertical. The back is brown with a paler stripe along each side from the tip of the snout to the hind legs, and in some populations the stripe continues all the way out onto the tail. The original tail is pointed and banded in black and white, while a regrown tail is thicker and orange. The belly is light brown, and the sexes have the same colours.

Females reach at most about 8 cm including the tail, and the tail makes up about half. Males are slightly smaller. The measurements date from before the genus was divided, and size may vary between populations.

The taxonomy has changed. What was formerly regarded as one widespread species was divided into several in 2018: *E. boettgeri* was reinstated, and *E. robusta*, *E. safari* and *E. tuelinae* were described as new species. *E. inunguis* in the narrow sense is linked to north-western Madagascar and Nosy Be. Older records from Mauritius, the Comoros and Pemba now belong to other species. Animals in the trade can therefore not always be assigned with certainty to the species, and the care experience dates from before the division. The gecko moves slowly and stealthily, and it is egg-laying.

Distribution and habitat

Ebenavia inunguis occurs in the north-western part of Madagascar and on the island of Nosy Be, which is the type locality. The overall range has not been delimited precisely, because the species has been divided up and because many older records have not been reviewed again.

Older records mention the species from Mauritius, the Comoros, Mayotte and Pemba off Tanzania. After the revision of the genus, those populations belong to other species, and the map therefore shows only Madagascar. Records of the species outside Madagascar may be due to misidentifications or animals in captivity.

> **Native range:** Madagascar.

HABITAT

The species is adaptable and lives in both undisturbed rainforest and secondary forest. In some places it is also found in large numbers in huts and gardens. It lives mostly in the trees and hides during the day under bark, in dead wood and between the leaves of screw pines (*Pandanus*) and *Ravenala*. At night it hunts for food.

The climate in north-western Madagascar is tropical with a rainy season and a dry season. The enclosure figures are based on experience from captivity.

Care

THE ENCLOSURE

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, and in some cases two males can also be kept together without problems. 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 and on the floor 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. Live plants are part of the setup, for example small Malagasy species such as *Medinilla sedifolia*, *Kalanchoe uniflora* and *Selaginella*, or small orchids of the genera *Aerangis*, *Bulbophyllum* and *Angraecum*. 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. The fluorescent tube normally gives sufficient 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 should be cooled down.

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.

Read more: Humidity, misting and ventilation

LIGHTING AND UVB

The species is active at dusk and at night 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

The species lives on small insects and other small arthropods. Offer, for example, small crickets, fruit flies, springtails and small woodlice that are smaller than the animal's head. 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. Many animals in the trade are wild-caught and in poor condition and need to be built up with varied, good food.

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 inunguis is small, slow and stealthy, but it is not suited to handling. Animals you try to pick up may flee and drop the tail. Regard the species as an animal to watch in the enclosure, especially at dusk.

A pair or one male with several females can be kept together, and in some cases two males can also be kept together. 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

The sexes can be told apart by the claws: the female has small claws on the toes of the hind feet, while the male lacks them. Males are also slightly smaller. The age and weight at sexual maturity have not been documented, but an animal should be fully grown before it is bred.

MATING

Breeding in captivity succeeds only sporadically, and a specific breeding season has not been documented. The cooler night temperature and the shorter day in winter imitate the seasons and may help. Watch the animals closely the first days after they are put together, and separate them if the female is chased or injured.

Give the female good food and plenty of calcium so that she can lay eggs without being harmed by it.

EGG-LAYING AND CLUTCHES

The female lays two eggs at a time, occasionally only one. In the closely related *E. boettgeri*, females carry one or two eggs. Most eggs in captivity come from wild-caught females that are already gravid, and they rarely lay again in the enclosure. The number of clutches per year is not known.

Provide the female with a damp laying site, for example a small tray of damp soil and sphagnum under a piece of cork bark, and check the substrate and the hides carefully for eggs.

INCUBATION

The 60-90 days at 24-27 °C in the fact box is an estimate based on similar small geckos.

Carefully move the eggs to a small box with slightly damp 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 damp, but not wet, and check the box without disturbing the eggs. Eggs that collapse and go mouldy are usually dead.

REARING THE YOUNG

The young are very small and need a small enclosure or a faunarium with a damp substrate, hides and leaves. Spray daily, and keep the climate the same as for the adults.

The very smallest animals need very small food such as springtails and newly hatched crickets, dusted with supplements. Keep the young singly until it is clear how they get on together, and make sure that they are growing. Growth and age at sexual maturity have not been documented.

Health and common mistakes

Lifespan is not known, and the 5-8 years in the fact box is an estimate. The typical mistakes are the same as in other small, forest-dwelling geckos:

- Too much heat and air that is too dry, which causes 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 cuttlebone available.
- Retained shed on toes and tail tip when the air is too dry. Provide a damp section in the enclosure.
- Wild-caught animals in poor condition. They need to be built up with good food and peace and quiet.
- A dropped tail after handling or fighting. The tail grows back, but it drains the animal's reserves.

Seek a vet with experience in 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.