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GECKOS

## Symmetrical gecko

# *Eurydactylodes symmetricus*

*Eurydactylodes symmetricus* is a small, nocturnal and rare gecko from scrub and forest in southern New Caledonia, with large, symmetrically arranged head scales and a prehensile tail. It is far less well known than its relatives *Eurydactylodes agricolae* and *Eurydactylodes vieillardi*, but its care is probably almost identical.

Family: Diplodactylidae  Former name: *Eurydactylus symmetricus*

KEY FACTS

### THE ANIMAL

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|---|---|
| Adult size | **10-13 cm**<br>total length incl. tail |
| Lifespan | **10-15 years** |
| Active | **At night** |
| Lifestyle | **Arboreal** |
| Habitat | **Rainforest** |
| Difficulty | **Intermediate** |

### CARE

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|---|---|
| Min. enclosure | **45 × 45 × 60 cm**<br>L × W × H for 1 adult |
| Temperature, day | **22-26 °C** |
| Basking spot | **27-29 °C** |
| Temperature, night | **20-23 °C** |
| Humidity | **60-80%** |
| UVB | **Recommended**<br>Ferguson zone 1 |
| Diet | **Insects, fruit and complete diet** |
| Kept | **Singly, in pairs or one male with several females** |

### BREEDING

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|---|---|
| Reproduction | **Egg-laying** |
| Clutch size | **1-2 eggs** |
| Incubation | **50-90 days**<br>at 22-26 °C |

### PROTECTION AND PAPERWORK

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|---|---|
| CITES | **Not listed** |
| EU annex | **Not listed** |
| IUCN | **Near Threatened (NT)** |

## About the species

*Eurydactylodes symmetricus* is a small, slender gecko with a triangular head, large lidless eyes and vertical pupils. The head scales are large, plate-like and arranged symmetrically with no small granules in between, and on the nape there is a cross of raised knobs. The body scales are otherwise fairly uniform without particularly large, flat scales, and this distinguishes the species from *Eurydactylodes vieillardi* and *Eurydactylodes agricolae*. From the corner of the mouth a yellow groove runs back past the ear opening. The body is typically pale with darker marbling that sometimes forms cross-bands, and the belly is white.

The body (snout to vent) measures up to about 6 cm, and the prehensile tail is 100-107 % of the body length, so the total length is about 10-13 cm. The weight is not documented.

The species was described by the Swedish zoologist Lars Gabriel Andersson in 1908 as *Eurydactylus symmetricus*. It is rare in the wild. The genus has four species.

Lifespan is not documented. *E. vieillardi* and *E. agricolae* can live at least 10 years.

## Distribution and habitat

*Eurydactylodes symmetricus* lives only in the southern part of the main island of Grande Terre in New Caledonia. The range extends from Pic Ningua in the north to Prony in the south and includes Rivière Bleue and the Goro plateau in the southern highlands, among other places.

> **Native range:** New Caledonia.

### HABITAT

The species lives in maquis, a dense scrub on the nutrient-poor ultramafic soils of southern New Caledonia, and in closed, humid forest, from about 20 to 1,050 metres elevation. It is nocturnal and lives in bushes and trees. The climate is subtropical with a warm, humid season and a cooler, drier season of the year.

The species is Near Threatened (NT). In the forests it is declining where the invasive ant *Wasmannia auropunctata* is abundant, and the scrub is being degraded by repeated fires and mining.

## Care

### THE ENCLOSURE

Little is known about the care of *Eurydactylodes symmetricus*. The figures here are borrowed from *Eurydactylodes vieillardi* and *Eurydactylodes agricolae*, which have the same size and way of life. For one adult the enclosure should be at least 45 × 45 × 60 cm (length × width × height). Larger is always better, and height is more important than floor area, because the species climbs. A pair, or a male with two females, can be kept together; without breeding there is no reason for more than one animal. A glass enclosure with mesh in the lid suits it well.

Furnish with many thin branches of various thicknesses, lianas, cork and leaves, so that the animal can climb and sleep in the foliage. There must be hides at all heights. Live plants help retain humidity. A mix of 60 % organic topsoil and 40 % coconut fibre with a thick layer of leaves on top works as substrate. Remove droppings daily, and replace the whole substrate every three to four months.

Read more: Humidity, misting and ventilation

### TEMPERATURE

Provide a warm spot under a lamp of 27-29 °C and a cool zone of 21-24 °C. By day the temperature in most of the enclosure is 22-26 °C, and at night it falls to 20-23 °C. A weak heat bulb of about 40 W above a branch at the top of the enclosure is the simplest heating. Heat is highest at the top, so there must be branches and foliage at all heights. Above 30 °C is too hot.

### HUMIDITY AND WATER

Keep humidity at 60-80 %, measured in the middle of the enclosure. It should rise at night and fall during the day, but never drop below 50 %. Mist the enclosure thoroughly every evening and in the morning as needed, so that the animal can drink droplets from the leaves. In addition, provide a dish of fresh water, and let the substrate and branches dry out between mistings.

### LIGHTING AND UVB

The species is nocturnal and can manage without UVB when the food contains vitamin D3, but weak UVB light is an advantage. A UVB tube for shade dwellers (Ferguson zone 1), for example a 7 % T5 tube, is placed 20-30 cm above the mesh or 25-40 cm below the mesh. The aim is a UV index of 1-2 on the topmost branch. There must always be shade in the rest of the enclosure. Keep the light on for 10-12 hours in winter and slightly longer in summer.

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

### FEEDING

The species is probably fruit- and insect-eating like the other species of the genus. Give about half a prepared diet for fruit-eating geckos, mixed to a thick paste in a dish on a wall-mounted ledge, and half live insects. Juveniles up to one year get insects every second day and paste 2-3 times a week; adults get insects and paste 2-3 times a week. Suitable insects are crickets, roaches, locusts, silkworms and wax moths, no longer than the distance between the animal's eyes. Dust the insects with calcium and vitamin D3, and give a multivitamin once a month.

Read more: Feeder animals: keeping and breeding

### BEHAVIOUR AND HANDLING

The species of the genus are small, relatively calm and can be accustomed to handling. Leave a new animal in peace for two weeks, and handle it only if it has eaten. Keep sessions under five minutes, support the feet, body and tail, and never grab the tail. Preferably handle in the evening.

*E. vieillardi* and *E. agricolae* can squirt a sticky, foul-smelling fluid from the tail when startled, and it causes painful irritation if it hits the eyes. Whether *E. symmetricus* can do the same is not documented, but handle the animal in the same way, and wash your hands afterwards.

A pair or a male with two females can be kept together, but two males must not be kept together.

## Breeding

### SEXUAL MATURITY AND SEXING

Age and weight at sexual maturity are not documented for *Eurydactylodes symmetricus*. Males have a distinct hemipenal bulge and waxy, often yellow pores in front of the vent. The animals should be fully grown and in good condition before they are put to breed.

### MATING

In *Eurydactylodes vieillardi* and *Eurydactylodes agricolae*, a rest period of two to three months at 20-22 °C by day and under 12 hours of light stimulates egg-laying, after which light and temperature are raised again. Pairs and small groups with one male and two females can be kept together all year round. This is not documented for *E. symmetricus*.

### EGG-LAYING AND CLUTCHES

The species is egg-laying. Clutch size is not documented; the other species of the genus lay one to two eggs at a time at intervals of three to four weeks. Provide the female with a laying box at least 10 cm deep, filled with a damp mix of peat and vermiculite, so that she can dig. Watch for eggs outside the box. Give her plenty of calcium and insects throughout the season.

### INCUBATION

Incubation has not been described for *Eurydactylodes symmetricus*; the figures are borrowed from *Eurydactylodes vieillardi* and *Eurydactylodes agricolae*. Move the eggs carefully, without turning them, to a box with moist vermiculite, and open the lid every four to seven days so the air is changed. At 22-26 °C the eggs hatch after 50-90 days.

Read more: Incubating eggs

### REARING THE YOUNG

Rearing of young has not been described for *Eurydactylodes symmetricus*. In the other species of the genus the young receive the same care as the adults, with heavy daily misting so that they can drink droplets, and good ventilation. Lack of water is the most common reason why the young do not thrive, but too damp and without air gives respiratory infections.

## Health and common mistakes

There are no health data for *Eurydactylodes symmetricus*. Typical problems in the genus are caused by husbandry:

- Persistently too high or too low humidity, which causes skin and respiratory problems. Keep humidity at 60-80 %, and let the enclosure dry out during the day.
- Too much heat. Keep the temperature below 30 °C.
- Lack of calcium and vitamin D3, especially in breeding females.
- Loss of the tail. Never grab the tail.

Seek a vet experienced in reptiles if the animal loses weight, does not eat for several weeks or seems lethargic.

### 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/eurydactylodes-symmetricus