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GECKOS

Taylor's fat-tailed gecko

Hemitheconyx taylori

A calm, ground-dwelling gecko from the dry regions of Somalia and Ethiopia, with velvety skin, a short, fat tail and eyelids. *Hemitheconyx taylori* is rare in vivaria and needs more heat than most geckos of the same family.

Family: Eublepharidae

KEY FACTS

THE ANIMAL

Adult size	**11-14 cm** snout-vent length
Lifespan	**10-20 years**
Active	**At night**
Lifestyle	**Terrestrial and burrowing**
Habitat	**Desert and rocky terrain**
Difficulty	**Intermediate**

CARE

Min. enclosure	**50 × 45 × 45 cm** L × W × H for 2 adults
Temperature, day	**29-32 °C**
Basking spot	**40 °C**
Temperature, night	**25-26 °C**
Humidity	**40-60%**
Water	**Water dish**
UVB	**Optional**
Winter rest	**22-25 °C** 16-17 weeks
Diet	**Insects**
Kept	**Singly or in pairs**

BREEDING

Reproduction	**Egg-laying**
Clutch size	**2 eggs**
Incubation	**43-70 days** at 28-32 °C

PROTECTION AND PAPERWORK

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

About the species

Hemitheconyx taylori is a medium-sized gecko in the family Eublepharidae, whose members, unlike most other geckos, have movable eyelids. The skin is soft and velvety, the body is sturdy, and the tail is short and thick. It serves as a fat store, so a well-fed gecko has a plump tail. The head is rounded at the snout, and the back is covered in small granules with scattered, enlarged, keeled scales. These tubercles are more distinct than in its relative *H. caudicinctus*.

The base colour is light brown, darker on the snout and the sides of the head, and the underside is white. Broad, darker bands run across the neck, the loins, the base of the tail and the middle of the tail. Males have 23-28 enlarged pores in front of the vent, and they are territorial.

The species was described in 1930 by Hampton Wildman Parker from animals from what was then British Somaliland. It reaches 11-14 cm from snout to vent. It is neither as widespread nor as well known in captivity as *H. caudicinctus*, and several of the figures in this guide are borrowed from that close relative.

Distribution and habitat

Hemitheconyx taylori lives in north-eastern Africa, in northern Somalia and eastern Ethiopia. The type locality is the Hegligab district in what was then British Somaliland, at an altitude of about 460 metres.

It is unclear exactly where the range extends, so the map here is only a rough estimate. Records far outside this area may come from captive animals or misidentifications.

> **Native range:** Somalia and Ethiopia.

HABITAT

The species lives in dry, open areas with desert-like landscape at about 640-1,250 metres above sea level. It is nocturnal and ground-dwelling, and by day it stays hidden in small burrows under stones. It is hard to spot in the wild. Its food consists of slow-moving insects.

The warm valleys where the species occurs can reach about 28-38 °C by day. That is much warmer than for most other species in the family, and the enclosure therefore needs to be warm.

Care

THE ENCLOSURE

A pair of adults can be kept in an enclosure of at least 50 × 45 × 45 cm (length × width × height). Bigger is better. If you keep more than a pair, there must be extra space and many hiding places. Males are territorial and should not be kept together.

Clay works as substrate for adult animals. Furnish with stone shelters and bamboo tubes, a shallow water bowl and a humid hide with moss or damp paper, which the animal can use when it needs to shed. The hides give peace by day, and the warm side should have a dry hide. The enclosure should be dry and heated at one end and cooler at the other, so that the gecko can choose its own temperature.

TEMPERATURE

Hemitheconyx taylori needs warmth: by day 29-32 °C in the enclosure and a hot spot just under the heat source of about 40 °C. At night the temperature is kept at 25-26 °C. Use a spotlight of about 40 W as the heat source, along with a thermometer, and switch off the lamp if the temperature in the enclosure gets too high.

In winter the species can be given a rest period of about four months, from November to February. The temperature is then 24-26 °C by day and 22-23 °C at night, with no hot spot. In February the temperature is raised again to the normal values. The species is kept warmer than most other species in the family, so always check that the warm side really reaches 40 °C.

HUMIDITY AND WATER

The humidity in the enclosure should be 40-60 %. Do not mist, because the species comes from a dry region; a water bowl with fresh water provides enough humidity. Change the water regularly, and keep a humid hide available at all times so that shedding goes easily. Moss or damp paper in the hide holds the moisture without making the rest of the enclosure wet. Measure the humidity with a hygrometer.

Read more: Humidity, misting and ventilation

LIGHTING AND UVB

The species is nocturnal, and the need for UVB is not documented, but a full-spectrum tube above the enclosure is common. During the active period the day length is 14 hours. In winter, during the rest period, light is not necessary. Always provide shade in part of the enclosure, so that the gecko can withdraw from the light.

Read more: Lighting and UVB

FEEDING

Hemitheconyx taylori lives exclusively on insects. Adults are given cockroaches, crickets and other insects, 2 times a week, 4-5 per animal. In addition, give 1-2 white zophobas larvae to each animal once a week. During the rest period they are still fed 1-3 times a week.

Dust the insects with calcium at every feeding, and give a vitamin supplement, preferably with D3, once a week from the age of about two months. Calcium is particularly important for young animals and egg-laying females. Young animals can be hard to get to eat (see Rearing).

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

BEHAVIOUR AND HANDLING

Hemitheconyx taylori is a peaceful gecko, but not much is documented about how well it tolerates handling. Males are territorial, and two males should not be kept together. A pair or a single gecko can be kept without problems. Never grab the tail, because it can be dropped when the animal is in danger and only grows back in a different form. New animals should be allowed to settle in peace for a few weeks.

Breeding

SEXUAL MATURITY AND SEXING

Males are recognised by the enlarged pores in front of the vent, which in this species number 23-28. A reliable age or weight for breeding is not documented for the species. For the close relative *H. caudicinctus*, males are put to breeding from about 7 months and 40 g and females from about 8 months and 45 g, but the figures are borrowed and cannot simply be transferred.

MATING

A winter rest period with lower temperature and without light promotes breeding, which begins when the temperature is raised again after the rest. Put the male in with the female and keep an eye on them for the first few days.

EGG-LAYING AND CLUTCHES

The female probably lays two eggs at a time, as in the relative *H. caudicinctus*, where the female lays three to five clutches a year. For *H. taylori* the number of clutches is not documented. Give the female a lay box with evenly damp substrate of peat and vermiculite, away from the heat source so that it does not dry out. Feed the female generously and give calcium at every feeding throughout the season.

INCUBATION

The eggs hatch after 55-70 days at 28-29 °C and after 43-48 days at 31-32 °C, and the temperature determines the sex. The figures are borrowed from *H. caudicinctus*, because incubation is not documented for *Hemitheconyx taylori*. The eggs are sensitive to too much water. Use an evenly damp substrate of peat and vermiculite that does not drip when squeezed.

Read more: Incubating eggs

REARING THE YOUNG

It is hard to get the hatchlings of *Hemitheconyx taylori* to eat, and this is the greatest challenge in rearing. Keep them in a small enclosure with paper as substrate, the same temperatures and the same humidity as the adults, and give small insects with calcium. Begin feeding a couple of days after hatching. For *H. caudicinctus* the hatchlings are moved to an adult enclosure at about 15 g, but the figure is borrowed.

Health and common mistakes

Hemitheconyx taylori is so rare in vivaria that there is little experience of diseases. The most common problems in husbandry are:

- Young animals that will not eat. Keep them warm and give small, moving insects.
- Calcium deficiency, especially in young animals and egg-laying females. Dust the insects with calcium and give a vitamin supplement regularly.
- Too low a temperature. The species comes from a hot region and does not thrive in a cool enclosure.
- Stuck skin remnants. Provide a humid hide so that shedding goes easily.

See a vet experienced with reptiles if the gecko loses weight, stops eating for several weeks or looks 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.