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GECKOS

Banded velvet gecko

Homopholis fasciata

A sturdy, velvety gecko from the savannas of East Africa with dark bands across the back and both adhesive lamellae and claws on the toes. It is most active at night, hides in holes in large trees and plays dead when threatened. Care is described only in broad outline.

Family: Gekkonidae Former name: *Platypholis fasciata; Homopholis erlangeri*

KEY FACTS

THE ANIMAL

Adult size	**9-11 cm** total length incl. tail
Lifespan	**8-12 years**
Active	**At dusk and at night**
Lifestyle	**Arboreal**
Habitat	**Savanna**
Difficulty	**Intermediate**

CARE

Min. enclosure	**40 × 40 × 60 cm** L × W × H for 2 adults
Temperature, day	**24-28 °C**
Basking spot	**28-32 °C**
Temperature, night	**19-24 °C**
Humidity	**60-80%**
UVB	**Optional**
Winter rest	**19-23 °C** 12-16 weeks
Diet	**Insects**
Kept	**In pairs or one male with several females**

BREEDING

Reproduction	**Egg-laying**
Clutch size	**2 eggs**
Clutches per year	**4-5**
Incubation	**60-80 days** at 26-29 °C

PROTECTION AND PAPERWORK

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

About the species

Homopholis fasciata is a robustly built gecko with a short, round head and a long, evenly thick tail that does not taper towards the end. The skin is soft as velvet. The colour ranges from green through grey to brown, and across the back lies a pattern of dark bands or chevrons. The tail is ringed in grey and white. Under the toes there are adhesive lamellae, and the toes also have claws. At night the animal becomes paler. Adults grow to about 9-11 cm including the tail.

The species was described in 1890 by Boulenger under the name *Platypholis fasciata*, with Mombasa in Kenya as the type locality. The species name comes from the Latin *fascia*, band, and refers to the bands across the back. An eastern form, *H. f. erlangeri*, has been described from the Juba River, but is today regarded as a synonym. In the wild the species is common in both towns and the countryside.

The gecko can bite and hold on, but seldom does so. Its main defence is to lie completely still and play dead, and a threatened animal can remain motionless for two to three days. The species is rare in captivity, and there is little reliable information on long-term care, so much of the care below is a cautious starting point. Lifespan in captivity has not been documented; 8-12 years is an estimate based on geckos of the same size.

Distribution and habitat

Homopholis fasciata lives in East Africa: in southern Somalia, southern Ethiopia (at the Juba River), Kenya and Tanzania. The type locality is Mombasa on the Kenyan coast, and the species is also known from northern Kenya.

The range is large, and the species is not regarded as threatened. Records on the map outside the area may be misidentifications.

> **Native range:** Ethiopia, Kenya, Somalia and Tanzania.

HABITAT

The species is found in savanna biomes, both humid and dry, where large trees stand. It lives in holes and crevices in the trunks and under loose bark and has been found from sea level to at least 1,300 metres. It also uses houses, walls and gardens, where it can be seen climbing on walls.

The gecko is most active at night, but also shows itself by day and hides in the shade when the sun is highest. The savanna climate has a distinct rainy and dry season. Actual measurements of temperature and humidity from the habitats have not been documented, so the figures in the care sections are based on experience from captivity and not on measurements in the wild.

Read more: Humidity, misting and ventilation

Care

THE ENCLOSURE

Homopholis fasciata climbs, so a pair needs a tall enclosure of at least 40 × 40 × 60 cm (length × width × height). Larger is always better, especially if you keep more than two animals.

Furnish the enclosure like a small forest with many hides. Slanted cork slabs, cork tubes and branches with loose bark give the animal holes to sit in by day and places to lay eggs, and sturdy live plants provide climbing routes and shade. An upturned saucer from a flowerpot makes a good hide at the bottom. There must be hides in both the warm and the cool end.

Use a substrate of sphagnum, peat and sand that can hold a little moisture. The enclosure must have two ventilation openings, so that the air can circulate without it drying out completely.

TEMPERATURE

By day the temperature should be 24-28 °C, and there should be a warmer spot of 28-32 °C, for example under a small 10-20 W halogen bulb or over a heat mat. At night it may fall 3-6 °C, to about 19-24 °C.

Always maintain a gradient so that the animal can choose between the warm and cool side. Measure with a digital thermometer at both ends. For breeding, a cool period from late autumn to late winter can help (see breeding).

Read more: Heat and temperature

HUMIDITY AND WATER

Humidity should be moderate to high, 60-80 %, with a gradient from one end of the enclosure to the other. This is achieved by placing the water bowl in the cool end and misting that area, so that the other end is kept slightly drier. Mist 2-3 times a week, and daily if the hygrometer shows below 60 %.

Keep a bowl of fresh water available, and clean and refill it a couple of times a week. Let the substrate dry out a little between mistings, so that mould does not develop.

LIGHTING AND UVB

The species is active at dusk and at night and can be seen in daylight, but hides in the shade in the middle of the day. Use ordinary plant lighting on a timer, 12 hours on and 12 hours off. Seasonal variations in day length are not necessary, but can help to get mating going. A weak night light makes it possible to see the animals in the evening.

UVB is not necessary for the species, but can be used. If so, choose a weak UVB light and provide plenty of shade.

Read more: Lighting and UVB

FEEDING

The staple food is crickets, supplemented with cockroaches, mealworms and other insects of suitable size, so that the diet is varied. Waxworms can be given occasionally. The insects should be able to be swallowed without difficulty.

Dust the insects with calcium and vitamins at every other feeding. Too much calcium makes the calcium sacs on the neck swell up, so hold back if they become clearly swollen. Adults are fed 3-4 times a week and subadults more often; adjust to the animal's weight and tail.

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

BEHAVIOUR AND HANDLING

Homopholis fasciata can bite and hold on, and it plays dead and often lies motionless when frightened, so do not pick it up without reason. Give new animals time to settle in.

One male can be kept with one female, and groups with one male and two females have also been tried. There is little experience of how males behave towards each other, so do not keep them together, and separate the animals if there is unrest, biting or dropped tails.

Breeding

SEXUAL MATURITY AND SEXING

Males have distinct hemipenal bulges at the base of the tail and two pores just in front of the vent, which females lack. The age and weight at sexual maturity have not been documented for the species. Wait to breed a female until she is fully grown and in good condition, because she loses a lot of calcium when laying eggs.

MATING

A cool period from late autumn to late winter or early spring, with the temperature lowered by around 5 °C, promotes breeding. Changes in day length can also help, but are not necessary. Egg laying may occur in winter in the northern hemisphere.

One male can live with the female. Put the animals together in an enclosure with many hides, and watch for bites and stress.

EGG-LAYING AND CLUTCHES

Homopholis fasciata lays two eggs at a time, and there can be 4-5 layings in a breeding season. The eggs have a hard shell and are laid hidden under loose bark, in crevices or buried in a slightly damp place. Give the female cork bark and branches with loose bark and a box with slightly damp substrate so that she has somewhere to lay them.

Give her plenty of calcium and insects throughout the season, and check that she does not lose weight. The interval between layings has not been documented.

INCUBATION

Collect the eggs and put them, for example, in a bottle cap with dry sand, which is placed in a container that is half filled with damp material. The eggs need humidity in the air, but must not stand in moisture. Incubate them at 26-29 °C. Under these conditions they hatch after about 60-80 days.

Whether temperature affects the sex has not been documented for the species. Keep the temperature stable.

REARING THE YOUNG

The hatchlings are set up like the adults, just on a smaller scale: a small faunarium with damp substrate, hides and branches. Give them small insects such as small crickets and springtails dusted with calcium, and mist the box regularly. Growth and first feeding are only sparsely described, so keep an eye on the weight. Separate the hatchlings if any bite or lag behind.

Health and common mistakes

There is no species-specific information on diseases in *Homopholis fasciata*. These general risks for insectivorous geckos apply here too:

- Too little calcium and vitamin D3, especially in breeding females and subadults. Give calcium on the insects, but avoid overdosing, which makes the calcium sacs on the neck swell up.
- Too high a temperature, which causes stress and poor appetite. Maintain a clear gradient.

- A constantly wet substrate and poor air circulation, which cause mould and skin problems.
- Shed skin stuck on toes and tail tip due to poor humidity during shedding.

Keep an eye on the animal's weight and tail. See a vet experienced with reptiles if the animal loses weight, does not eat 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.