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GECKOS

Okavango dwarf gecko

Lygodactylus chobiensis

One of the largest dwarf geckos in the genus, up to 44 mm from snout to vent. *Lygodactylus chobiensis* is bluish grey with large pale spots and a yellow belly, lives on trees in the savanna along the Chobe and Zambezi rivers and can be kept in a small, tall and secure enclosure.

Family: Gekkonidae Former name: *Lygodactylus picturatus chobiensis*

KEY FACTS

THE ANIMAL

Adult size	**3-4 cm** snout-vent length
Lifespan	**5-10 years**
Active	**By day**
Lifestyle	**Arboreal**
Habitat	**Savanna**
Difficulty	**Intermediate**

CARE

Min. enclosure	**30 × 30 × 45 cm** L × W × H for 2 adults
Temperature, day	**25-30 °C**
Basking spot	**30-35 °C**
Temperature, night	**18-22 °C**
Humidity	**40-65%**
Water	**No water dish**
UVB	**Recommended** Ferguson zone 2
Diet	**Insects and small invertebrates (springtails, fruit flies)**
Kept	**In pairs or one male with several females**

BREEDING

Reproduction	**Egg-laying**
Sexually mature	**9 months**
Clutch size	**2 eggs**
Incubation	**125 days** at 24-27 °C

PROTECTION AND PAPERWORK

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

About the species

Lygodactylus chobiensis is a relatively large dwarf gecko. Adults normally measure 25-30 mm from snout to vent, but the largest males reach 44 mm and the females up to about 37 mm, so the males grow somewhat larger than the females. The back is bluish grey with large, pale spots, and the belly is yellow. The male's throat can be black or pale yellow and has two dark, chevron-shaped markings.

Under the toes sit fine adhesive lamellae, and the tail tip has, as in other species of the genus, an adhesive pad, which the animal uses as a fifth foot when climbing.

The species was described by Vivian FitzSimons in 1932 as a subspecies of *Lygodactylus picturatus* and was later raised to a separate species. The name refers to the type locality Kabulabula on the Chobe River at the eastern end of the Caprivi Strip. In the wild the animals live to only about one and a half years. Lifespan in captivity is not documented, and the 5-10 years in the data box is an uncertain borrowing from *L. picturatus*. The species is rare in captivity.

Distribution and habitat

Lygodactylus chobiensis is found along the Chobe and Zambezi rivers and into the Okavango Delta. The range includes the eastern part of the Caprivi Strip in north-eastern Namibia, northern Botswana, Zambia, Zimbabwe, Malawi and Mozambique.

Angola is also counted as part of the range, but there are no published, precise records from there, and the country is not shown on the map. The species is not assessed as threatened.

> **Native range:** Namibia, Botswana, Zambia, Zimbabwe, Mozambique and Malawi.

HABITAT

Lygodactylus chobiensis lives on trees in tropical savanna and on the grassy plains along the rivers that flood in the rainy season. It prefers to forage high up and is often seen on acacias, baobabs and mopane trees, occasionally on walls and buildings too. When disturbed, it hides behind loose bark and in crevices.

The climate has a hot rainy season in summer and a long, dry and cooler winter. There are no measurements of temperature and humidity from the species' own habitats.

Read more: Humidity, misting and ventilation

Care

THE ENCLOSURE

Little is known about the care of *Lygodactylus chobiensis*. The climate in the range is hot with a long dry season, and care follows the closely related *Lygodactylus picturatus*, of which the species was formerly regarded as a subspecies. Most of the figures in this guide are borrowed from it.

A pair can be kept in an enclosure of at least 30 × 30 × 45 cm (length × width × height), and larger is better. For a male and two females, 40 × 40 × 60 cm is suitable. Height counts for more than floor area, because the animal lives on trunks and branches.

The enclosure must be completely escape-proof for such small animals and their feeder insects. Use fine mesh in the lid and ventilation grilles at the bottom and top. The back and side walls must be sealed so that no small animals can squeeze in behind them. Use a base of sand and soil over a drainage layer, and furnish with thick branches at varying angles, cork bark and hardy plants with stiff leaves such as *Sansevieria*. Pieces of bark and cork tubes serve as hides and egg-laying sites. The savanna climate argues for a somewhat drier set-up than for rainforest species.

Read more: Terrarium construction and bioactive substrate

TEMPERATURE

Lygodactylus chobiensis is a heat-loving diurnal animal, and the enclosure must have a clear temperature gradient. By day the background temperature should be 25-30 °C, and under a small spot or halogen lamp there should be a basking spot of 30-35 °C. At night the temperature falls to 18-22 °C. In winter, which corresponds to the dry season, the days can be slightly cooler, around 23-28 °C.

The spot lamp must suit the size of the enclosure. A powerful lamp in a small enclosure quickly raises the whole temperature. Use a thermostat or dimmer, and measure both high up and low down in the enclosure. Animals that sit motionless at the warmest spot with their mouths open are too hot.

Read more: Heat and temperature

HUMIDITY AND WATER

Humidity should be around 40-65 %, somewhat lower than for *Lygodactylus picturatus*, because the habitat has a long dry season. The figure is an estimate. Mist the enclosure lightly every day, so that leaves and walls are covered with droplets, and wait for the next misting until the droplets have evaporated.

The animals drink droplets from leaves and walls, so a water dish is unnecessary and is a risk for the smallest animals. Avoid standing water and constantly wet branches, which cause mould and skin problems.

LIGHTING AND UVB

Lygodactylus chobiensis is diurnal and needs strong, even light. Use fluorescent tubes, preferably T5, and combine a UVB tube with a daylight tube so that the enclosure is bright. Which UVB strength suits best is not documented for the species. A moderate UVB tube (Ferguson zone 2) over part of the enclosure is a cautious estimate. Leave shade and hiding places in the rest of the enclosure.

Keep the light on 12-14 hours, controlled by a timer, and let the night be dark.

Read more: Lighting and UVB

FEEDING

In the wild, *Lygodactylus chobiensis* feeds mostly on ants and termites. In the enclosure it needs live small prey: springtails, fruit flies, small crickets, newly hatched bean weevils, small cockroaches and small grasshoppers. Size is the most important thing: the feeder insect must be smaller than the distance between the animal's eyes.

Dust the feeder insects lightly with calcium with vitamin D3, and put a small dish of pure calcium in the enclosure for the animals to take from themselves. Replace it before it becomes wet and hard. Whether the species takes fruit puree is not documented; *Lygodactylus picturatus* does, and it can be tried in a shallow dish high up on a branch. Feed every day or every other day, but avoid overfeeding.

Mealworms and other fatty larvae are too large and too fatty for anything but a rare treat.

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

BEHAVIOUR AND HANDLING

Lygodactylus chobiensis is small and fast. Like other diurnal dwarf geckos, it often sits motionless on a branch and then darts off after a feeder insect.

Keep a pair or a male with one or two females in an enclosure large enough for the females to get away from the male. Two males must not be kept together, because they fight. Watch for bite marks, bitten-off tails and animals that hide or lose weight, and separate them at once. The species is not suited to handling: the tail can be shed, and the animal easily escapes. Open the doors only briefly, and close all gaps through which the animals can escape.

Breeding

SEXUAL MATURITY AND SEXING

The male is recognised by a thicker tail base with hemipenal bulges and by preanal pores in front of the vent, while the female has a slimmer tail base. The male's throat is black or pale yellow with two dark, chevron-shaped markings, and the males grow somewhat larger than the females. In the wild the species becomes sexually mature after about 9 months. Still, wait to pair the animals until they are fully grown, so that the female has the strength for egg laying.

MATING

In the wild, *Lygodactylus chobiensis* breeds all year. Keep a pair or a male with one or two females together, and provide many hides so that the female can get away from the male. Move the male if he chases the female all the time. A female that lays eggs all year easily becomes depleted; if she loses weight, give a break with shorter days and a slightly lower temperature.

EGG-LAYING AND CLUTCHES

The female lays 2 hard-shelled eggs of about 5 × 6.5 mm at a time, in the wild about every eighth week. The eggs are hidden under bark or in abandoned termite mounds. Therefore provide several narrow egg-laying sites that can be taken out of the enclosure, for example cork tubes, bamboo tubes or pieces of bark, and give the female plenty of calcium and small feeder insects.

INCUBATION

In the wild the eggs hatch after about 125 days. The temperature during incubation is not documented; 24-27 °C by day with a slight drop at night suits the climate. The eggs are moved carefully, if necessary together with what they are attached to, to a small box with damp vermiculite and small air holes in the lid. They must not be turned.

Read more: Incubating eggs

REARING THE YOUNG

The young measure about 30 mm including the tail at hatching. Place them in a small, completely escape-proof enclosure or a faunarium with a damp substrate, thin branches and plants, and mist daily. Give them the very smallest feeder insects: springtails, fruit flies and newly hatched crickets, dusted with calcium and vitamin D3. Keep the young separate from the adults, and divide them by sex and size so that they do not start to fight.

Health and common mistakes

Lygodactylus chobiensis is hardy when temperature, humidity and food are right. There is no species-specific knowledge of diseases; the typical problems for small diurnal dwarf geckos are:

- Too little water and an enclosure that is too dry. Small animals dry out quickly, especially in summer heat or under a lamp that is too powerful. Mist daily.
- Too much heat in a small enclosure. Use a thermostat or dimmer, and watch for animals that sit with their mouths open.
- Lack of calcium and vitamin D3, especially in females that lay eggs. Give pure calcium in a small dish, and dust the feeder insects.
- Shedding problems with retained skin on the toes and tail tip. Correct the humidity, and loosen the remains carefully with lukewarm water.
- Fights between males with bites and lost tails.
- Small animals that are crushed or disappear in gaps behind the back wall and furnishings. Seal all cavities.

A healthy animal is lively, has clear eyes and a plump tail base. See a vet with reptile experience if the animal loses weight, sits lethargically or stops eating.

Read more: Common diseases and signs of illness

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.