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GECKOS

Lygodactylus fischeri

Lygodactylus fischeri is a small, diurnal dwarf gecko from the rainforests of West and Central Africa. It is pale olive green with rows of small black dots, lives hidden on trees in humid forest and is almost unknown in captivity, so this guide is based on the habitat and on related species.

Family: Gekkonidae

KEY FACTS

THE ANIMAL

Adult size	**4 cm** snout-vent length
Lifespan	**5-10 years**
Active	**By day**
Lifestyle	**Arboreal**
Habitat	**Rainforest**
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	**22-24 °C**
Humidity	**60-80%**
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**
Clutch size	**1-2 eggs**
Incubation	**60-120 days** at 22-27 °C

PROTECTION AND PAPERWORK

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

About the species

Lygodactylus fischeri is a dwarf gecko of 35-42 mm from snout to vent. The back is pale olive green with several lengthwise rows of small black dots, and the underside is plain white. As in other species of the genus, fine adhesive lamellae sit under the toes, and the tail tip has an adhesive pad, which the animal uses as a fifth foot when climbing. Sexual differences are not documented.

The species was described by George Albert Boulenger in 1890 and is named after the German herpetologist Johann Gustav Fischer (1819-1889), who worked in Hamburg. The type locality is given as Sierra Leone.

Unlike the East African species of the genus, for example *Lygodactylus picturatus*, the species lives in the rainforests of West and Central Africa. It is rare and lives very concealed, and it is hardly kept in captivity. Lifespan is not documented.

Distribution and habitat

Lygodactylus fischeri occurs in West and Central Africa: south-eastern Nigeria, Cameroon, Equatorial Guinea and Gabon. In addition there is a single, isolated record from Benin.

The records from Sierra Leone, where the species was described from, and from the Congo (Brazzaville) are uncertain, and the map shows only the confirmed countries. The species is not assessed as threatened.

> **Native range:** Nigeria, Cameroon, Equatorial Guinea and Gabon.

HABITAT

Lygodactylus fischeri lives in closed, humid forest and in gallery forest along rivers. It lives on trees and, like other species of the genus, seeks cover behind loose bark and in crevices.

The climate near the equator is hot and humid all year with small fluctuations in temperature. 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 fischeri*. The climate in the range is hot and humid all year, and care is based on *Lygodactylus picturatus*, which is better known, and on *Lygodactylus williamsi*, which also lives in humid forest. Most of the figures in this guide are borrowed from them.

A pair can be kept in an enclosure of at least 30 × 30 × 45 cm (length × width × height), and larger is better. 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. Make the base a drainage layer with 3-4 cm of damp coconut fibre and a little peat on top, and furnish with thick branches at varying angles, cork bark, bromeliads and *Sansevieria*. Cork tubes and bamboo tubes of different thicknesses serve as hides and egg-laying sites.

Read more: Terrarium construction and bioactive substrate

TEMPERATURE

Lygodactylus fischeri comes from a hot climate with no cold season. 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 only slightly, to 22-24 °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 60-80 %, highest at night and just after misting, because the species lives in rainforest. Mist the enclosure lightly twice a day, so that leaves and walls are covered with droplets, and wait for the next misting until the droplets have evaporated and the substrate begins to dry.

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. Good ventilation is important, even though the humidity is high.

LIGHTING AND UVB

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

Dust the feeders lightly with calcium with vitamin D3, and put a small dish of pure calcium in the enclosure for the animals to help themselves. Change it before it gets wet and hard. Whether the species takes fruit paste is not documented; *Lygodactylus picturatus* takes it, and it can be tried in a shallow dish high up on a branch. Feed adults every second day, and avoid overfeeding.

Mealworms and other fatty larvae are too large and too fatty for anything but an occasional treat.

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

BEHAVIOUR AND HANDLING

Lygodactylus fischeri is small, fast and lives very concealed. 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

Sexual differences are not documented for *Lygodactylus fischeri*. In other species of the genus the male has a thicker tail base with hemipenal bulges and preanal pores in front of the vent, while the female has a slimmer tail base. When the species becomes sexually mature is not documented either; in *Lygodactylus picturatus* it happens after 9-15 months. Wait to pair the animals until they are fully grown, so that the female has the strength for egg laying.

MATING

Mating in *Lygodactylus fischeri* has not been described. 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.

EGG-LAYING AND CLUTCHES

The number of eggs is not documented for *Lygodactylus fischeri*, but species in the genus lay 1-2 small, hard-shelled eggs at a time. Provide several narrow egg-laying sites that can be taken out of the enclosure, for example short bamboo tubes or cork tubes high up, and give the female plenty of calcium and small feeder insects throughout the season.

INCUBATION

The incubation time is not documented. In *Lygodactylus williamsi* the eggs hatch after 60-120 days at 22-27 °C, and this is a rough range. 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 of *Lygodactylus fischeri* have not been described, but in the genus they are very small 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 fischeri 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.