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GECKOS

Festive gecko

Narudasia festiva

Narudasia festiva is a tiny, slender rock gecko from southern Namibia with a purple-brown body and a yellow-orange tail. The genus is the only reptile genus found only in Namibia. It sits on rocks and waves its tail, and it needs warm, dry rock crevices and cool nights. Little is known about its care, so it is a species for the experienced keeper.

Family: Gekkonidae Former name: *Quedenfeldtia festiva*

KEY FACTS

THE ANIMAL

Adult size	**5-8 cm** total length incl. tail
Lifespan	**5-10 years**
Active	**By day**
Lifestyle	**Rock-dwelling**
Habitat	**Semi-desert and rocky terrain**
Difficulty	**Experienced**

CARE

Min. enclosure	**40 × 30 × 40 cm** L × W × H for 2 adults
Temperature, day	**24-30 °C**
Basking spot	**32-34 °C**
Temperature, night	**16-20 °C**
Humidity	**30-50%**
UVB	**Recommended** Ferguson zone 2
Diet	**Insects and small invertebrates (springtails, fruit flies)**
Kept	**Singly or in pairs**

BREEDING

Reproduction	**Egg-laying**
Clutch size	**1-2 eggs**
Incubation	**60-90 days** at 24-28 °C

PROTECTION AND PAPERWORK

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

About the species

Narudasia festiva is one of the smallest geckos in southern Africa. The body is slender and flattened, and the head is long and flat. The ground colour is purple-brown with dark, wavy crossbands, and the tail is yellow-orange. The dorsal scales are small, smooth granules. The eyes have a vertical pupil with a serrated edge, and the toes are long, slender and free, without adhesive pads, so the gecko climbs on rough rock with strong claws rather than with adhesive pads like many other geckos. The female lays two hard-shelled eggs.

The body measures about 3 cm snout-vent length, and with the long, pointed tail the animal reaches 5-8 cm in total. Weight is not documented. Lifespan is not documented either; the 5-10 years in the box are borrowed from *Afroedura africana*.

The species was described in 1914 by Paul Methuen and John Hewitt. The species name *festiva* is Latin for cheerful or festive and alludes to the animal's habit of sitting on a rock and waving its yellow tail in the air. The genus name comes from the type locality Narudas Süd in the Karas Mountains. *Narudasia* has only this one species, and it is one of the few reptiles wholly confined to Namibia.

The species is rarely kept and is known mostly from the wild, and much of its care is based on other small rock geckos from southern Africa.

Distribution and habitat

Narudasia festiva occurs only in Namibia, in the central and southern parts of the country. Most records lie in and around the Karas Mountains, the Khomas Hochland, the Huns Mountains and the mountain areas of the Orange River, the Naukluft Mountains and the rocky areas around the Swakop and the Khan. The type locality is Narudas Süd at the foot of the great Karas Mountains. It is possible that the species also occurs in north-western South Africa, but this is not confirmed.

Records lie between about 22 and 29 degrees south and at 200-1,300 m elevation. The species is thus not confined to the highlands but occurs both on low rocky hills and in the mountains.

> **Native range:** Namibia.

HABITAT

The species lives on rocks and among stones and moves mostly on the ground in rocky terrain: it sits on stones and in the crevices between them, and it is diurnal. It also lives in dry riverbeds with rock crevices at the foot of the mountains. The habitat is semi-desert and rocky country with very little rainfall, large temperature swings between day and night, and sunlit rock surfaces.

The climate of southern Namibia is hot and dry by day with cooler nights, and the dry rock crevices allow the animals to escape both heat and cold. This is the pattern to imitate in the enclosure: dry, sun-warmed rocks by day and cooler hides at night.

Care

THE ENCLOSURE

Little is known about the care of *Narudasia festiva*. The advice draws on the climate and habitat and on other small rock geckos from Namibia such as *Afroedura africana* and *Pachydactylus rangei*. The figures are estimates.

A pair needs an enclosure of at least 40 × 30 × 40 cm (length × width × height), and larger is an advantage, since it gives both more heat gradient and more hides. The enclosure should have vertical surfaces and crevices. Build a back wall of cork, slate or cut stone with narrow crevices of 1-2 cm, and lay flat stones and cork slabs so that there are both sunlit spots and cool hides. Everything must be firmly fixed, so nothing can slip down onto the animals. It should be easy for the animals to move around the stones, because the species often sits out in the open on a rock in bright light.

The substrate is a thin layer of fine sand or a mix of sand and soil. The enclosure needs a lid or mesh, because the gecko is small and can squeeze through tiny openings. A front-opening enclosure makes it easier to reach the animals without frightening them.

TEMPERATURE

The daytime temperature should be 24-30 °C, and a basking spot on a stone under a lamp should be 32-34 °C, measured on the surface of the stone. The rest of the enclosure should be cooler, so the animal can choose. At night the temperature should fall to 16-20 °C. Switch the heat off at night, so the difference between day and night is maintained.

Use a thermostat for the heat source, and measure with a thermometer whose probe is placed at the basking spot. The animals must not end up sitting close to a lamp with no way of moving away.

Read more: Heat and temperature

HUMIDITY AND WATER

Keep the air dry and well ventilated, around 30-50 % relative humidity. Mist lightly a few times a week, so the animals can drink droplets from stones and the background, and let the enclosure dry out again. A shallow dish of water is not necessary, but does no harm. The sand must not become wet, as this causes mould and cold, damp hides.

A hygrometer shows whether the air stays dry. Keep one part of the enclosure slightly more humid, for example under a hide with slightly damp substrate, so that shedding can go without problems.

Read more: Humidity, misting and ventilation

LIGHTING AND UVB

The species is diurnal and sits on sunlit rocks in the wild, so UVB is recommended. Use a weak UVB tube over part of the enclosure (Ferguson Zone 2, UV index around 1-2 at the basking spot), and make sure there is shade and hides where the animals can withdraw from the light. The light should be on for about 12 hours a day and off at night.

Read more: Lighting and UVB

FEEDING

The gecko is insectivorous and takes small prey. Offer newly hatched and small crickets, fruit flies, small mealworms, firebrats, springtails and small cockroaches. Prey must be smaller than the distance between the animal's eyes. Feed often, because the animal is so small: every other day or more often, and a little at a time.

Gut-load the insects well beforehand and dust them lightly with calcium. Give calcium with D3 and a vitamin supplement regularly. Remove uneaten live feeder insects from the enclosure afterwards, as they stress the animals.

Juveniles need the very smallest insects, such as fruit flies and newly hatched crickets, and food should be available every day.

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

BEHAVIOUR AND HANDLING

The gecko is small and fragile and is best suited to being watched. It waves its tail when sitting on a rock and may lose the tail if it is grabbed. Avoid handling it, and never grab it by the tail. Move it only in a small container.

The animals can be kept singly or as pairs in a spacious enclosure with plenty of hides. Do not keep several males together. Separate the animals if there is chasing, biting or animals that keep away from the food.

Breeding

SEXUAL MATURITY AND SEXING

Age and size at sexual maturity are not documented. Sex differences are not documented; a female carrying eggs is broader across the hindbody. The species has no preanal pores, so the sex cannot be read from them. Keep the sexes apart until the animals are fully grown, and put a female in breeding only when she is in good condition.

MATING

Mating season and winter rest are not documented. A reasonable starting point is a cooler, drier period in winter, matching the climate of southern Namibia, with lower temperatures (around 14-18 °C at night) and a shorter day for one to two months, before the animals are warmed up again. As temperature and day length rise, mating may begin. Keep an eye on the animals and separate them if the male harries the female too hard.

EGG-LAYING AND CLUTCHES

The female lays two hard-shelled eggs at a time. Where the eggs are laid in the wild, and how many clutches she lays per year, is not documented. In other geckos with hard-shelled eggs, they are often laid in a narrow crevice or glued to a rock. Provide narrow, dry crevices and a small hide with slightly damp sand in the enclosure. Give the female calcium and plenty of insects throughout the season.

INCUBATION

Incubation time and temperature are not documented for the species; 60-90 days at 24-28 °C are borrowed from *Afroedura africana*. Hard-shelled eggs are incubated dry. If the eggs are stuck fast, they are left where they were laid and covered with a small tub with air holes, so the adults do not disturb them. Otherwise they are moved carefully, without being turned, to a container of dry vermiculite. Never mist directly onto the eggs.

Read more: Incubating eggs

REARING THE YOUNG

The young are very small and fragile. Keep them as the adults, with fine insects, hides, a warm zone and light misting. Size at hatching and growth are not documented, so keep an eye on growth, and divide them by size if any fall behind. Provide food every day and remove leftovers.

Health and common mistakes

Little is known about disease in the species. The advice draws on experience with other small desert geckos. The typical faults are:

- Overheating. Always provide a cooler part of the enclosure where the animal can withdraw from the heat.
- Too much moisture. Wet substrate causes mould, skin problems and respiratory infections. Keep the air dry.
- Dehydration. The signs are sunken eyes and lethargy. Mist lightly so the animals can drink droplets.
- Retained shed on the toes and tail tip. Provide a hide with a little damp substrate, and loosen the remains carefully.
- Calcium deficiency, especially in young animals and breeding females. The signs are tremors, bent limbs and a soft jaw. Use calcium and D3, and provide UVB.
- Dropped tails. The tail regrows but rarely regains its original shape.

See a vet with experience of reptiles if the animal loses weight, does not eat for several weeks, breathes with its mouth open, trembles or is 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.