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GECKOS

Tiger thick-toed gecko

Pachydactylus tigrinus

A small, sturdily built rock gecko with brown and cream crossbands reminiscent of a tiger's stripes. It lives in savanna and rocky terrain in southern Africa and is nocturnal. Little is known about its care, so the advice is based on habitat, climate and related species.

Family: Gekkonidae Former name: *Pachydactylus capensis tigrinus; Pachydactylus capensis rhodesianus*

KEY FACTS

THE ANIMAL

Adult size	**9-11 cm** total length incl. tail
Lifespan	**5-10 years**
Active	**At night**
Lifestyle	**Arboreal and rock-dwelling**
Habitat	**Savanna and rocky terrain**
Difficulty	**Intermediate**

CARE

Min. enclosure	**40 × 30 × 30 cm** L × W × H for 2 adults
Temperature, day	**24-28 °C**
Basking spot	**30-33 °C**
Temperature, night	**18-22 °C**
Humidity	**30-50%**
UVB	**Optional** Ferguson zone 1
Diet	**Insects**
Kept	**Singly or in pairs**

BREEDING

Reproduction	**Egg-laying**
Clutch size	**1-2 eggs**
Incubation	**55-75 days** at 26-30 °C

PROTECTION AND PAPERWORK

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

About the species

Pachydactylus tigrinus is a small, compact gecko in the genus *Pachydactylus*. The body is stout, the head broad, and the toes short and thick. The pattern is dark brown crossbands on a lighter brown and cream background, and it has given the species its name: *tigrinus* comes from the Latin *tigris*, tiger. The animal measures about 9-11 cm including the tail.

The species was described in 1921 by Van Dam as a variety of *Pachydactylus capensis*, and for a period it was treated as a subspecies of it. Today it is regarded as a distinct species. There is no established English name beyond the one given here.

Care in captivity is only sparsely described. The species is oviparous, and far more females than males hatch at all temperatures at which the eggs can develop. Figures for lifespan, sexual maturity and clutch size are not documented and are borrowed here from closely related *Pachydactylus* species.

Distribution and habitat

The species lives in southern Africa: in Zimbabwe, northern South Africa (the former Northern Transvaal, today Limpopo), eastern Botswana and western Mozambique. The type locality is Blinkwater at Brak River in the Zoutpansberg district of northern South Africa.

On the IUCN Red List the species is assessed as Least Concern.

> **Native range:** Zimbabwe, South Africa, Botswana and Mozambique.

HABITAT

The species is found in open savanna and scrub with rock outcrops, rock piles and trees. By day it sits in rock crevices, under loose bark and behind exfoliating flakes of rock, and it comes out after dark.

The climate is subtropical, with hot, rainy summers and dry, cooler winters. The gecko avoids the sun of the day and stays hidden. Hot days, cooler nights and a dry winter are the pattern the enclosure should imitate.

Care

THE ENCLOSURE

Little is known about the care of *Pachydactylus tigrinus*. The advice is based on habitat and climate and on better-known relatives from the same part of Africa, especially *Chondrodactylus turneri*, which lives in the same area and has similar requirements but grows considerably larger.

A pair can be kept in an enclosure of at least 40 × 30 × 30 cm (length × width × height), and bigger is better. Furnish it with a back wall of cork or stone, flat pieces of rock and pieces of bark, so that the animal can squeeze into narrow crevices. The substrate should be dry, sandy soil or sand in a layer of 3-5 cm. Heavy stones must sit directly on the base so that they cannot slip. Provide several hides, in both the warm and the cool end.

The enclosure must be well ventilated, and the lid must fit tightly, because the gecko is fast and climbs on rocks and the back wall.

TEMPERATURE

The daytime temperature should be 24-28 °C, and under a heat lamp or on a stone under the lamp 30-33 °C. At night the temperature should fall to 18-22 °C. There must always be a cool end so that the animal can choose. The figures are borrowed from related species in the same climate.

A winter rest with slightly cooler and drier conditions of about 15-18 °C at night matches the climate of the species, but it is not documented whether it is necessary to trigger breeding.

HUMIDITY AND WATER

The species lives in dry to semi-arid terrain. Keep the humidity at about 30-50 %, and mist lightly now and then on the back wall in the evening so that the animal can drink droplets. The substrate should dry out again during the day. A small, damp hide (a box with slightly damp moss or vermiculite) helps during shedding.

Always keep a shallow dish of fresh water.

Read more: Humidity, misting and ventilation

LIGHTING AND UVB

The species is nocturnal and stays in hiding by day. UVB is therefore not essential when the food is dusted with calcium and D3. If UVB is provided, it should be a weak tube (Ferguson zone 1) over part of the enclosure, so that the animal can retreat into shade. The light is on for 12 hours a day, and the night must be dark.

Read more: Lighting and UVB Read more: Calcium, vitamins and supplements

FEEDING

Pachydactylus tigrinus feeds on insects. Crickets, small dubia cockroaches, mealworms and locusts of a suitable size make a good staple. Prey should be smaller than the distance between the animal's eyes. Adults are fed two to three times a week, young animals more often.

Dust the food lightly with calcium, and give calcium with D3 regularly, especially if there is no UVB. Remove live leftovers afterwards.

Read more: Feeder animals: keeping and breeding

BEHAVIOUR AND HANDLING

The gecko is nervous and fast and is better suited to being watched than handled. Never grab the tail, which can be shed.

The social life of the species is not documented. Keep the animals singly or in pairs in a spacious enclosure with many hides, and separate them if there is chasing, biting, or an animal that keeps away from the food. Keeping several males together should be avoided.

Breeding

SEXUAL MATURITY AND SEXING

Sexual maturity and sex differences are not documented in detail for the species. In *Pachydactylus* species, males typically have enlarged scales or pores and a thicker tail base, but the sex should be checked in adult animals before a pair is put together. The age at sexual maturity is not documented.

MATING

Mating habits are not documented for the species. In related species, mating typically starts after a cool, dry winter rest, when the temperature is raised again. Put a pair together only when both animals are fully grown and in good condition, and watch whether the female is chased.

EGG-LAYING AND CLUTCHES

The species is oviparous. Clutches are small, typically 1-2 eggs at a time, and the figure is borrowed from related species. The number of clutches per season is not documented. Provide the female with a small box of damp sand or vermiculite as a laying site, and give extra calcium and food while she is carrying eggs.

INCUBATION

The eggs have a hard shell. Move them as little as possible and without rotating them. Incubate them at 26-30 °C in humid air. The time to hatching is not documented for the species; in related species it is 50-75 days, and here it is set at 55-75 days. The sex depends on temperature, but at all temperatures at which the eggs hatch, the great majority of the young are females. So there is no temperature that produces most males.

REARING THE YOUNG

Juveniles need the very smallest insects: newly hatched crickets and small springtails. Keep them singly or in small groups with hides, light misting and calcium in the food. Size at hatching and growth are not documented for the species. Weigh and measure the young regularly to follow their development.

Health and common mistakes

There is no species-specific knowledge about diseases in *Pachydactylus tigrinus*. The typical faults in dryland geckos are:

- Too much humidity. A wet substrate causes mould, skin problems and respiratory infections.
- Calcium deficiency (metabolic bone disease), especially in young animals and breeding females. Use calcium and D3.
- Retained shed skin on the toes and tail tip. Provide a slightly damp hide, and gently loosen the remains.
- Lost tails. The tail regrows but never regains its original shape.

See a vet with experience in reptiles if the animal loses weight, does not eat for several weeks or is listless.

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.