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GECKOS

Rüppell's semaphore gecko

Pristurus flavipunctatus

A small, diurnal gecko from the countries around the southern Red Sea, with a tall, serrated tail and yellow spots. It grows to about 8 cm in total length including the tail, and almost nothing is known about its care.

Family: Sphaerodactylidae Former name: *Pristurus percristatus; Pristurus gasperetti*

KEY FACTS

THE ANIMAL

Adult size	**7-8 cm** total length incl. tail
Lifespan	**5-8 years**
Active	**By day**
Lifestyle	**Rock-dwelling**
Habitat	**Semi-desert and rocky terrain**
Difficulty	**Intermediate**

CARE

Min. enclosure	**40 × 30 × 30 cm** L × W × H for 1 adult
Temperature, day	**28-30 °C**
Basking spot	**40-45 °C**
Temperature, night	**20-22 °C**
Humidity	**30-40%**
Water	**Water dish**
UVB	**Essential** Ferguson zone 3
Diet	**Insects and small invertebrates (springtails, fruit flies)**
Kept	**Singly or in pairs**

BREEDING

Reproduction	**Egg-laying**
Clutch size	**1 eggs**
Incubation	**70-90 days** at 28 °C

PROTECTION AND PAPERWORK

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

About the species

Pristurus flavipunctatus is a small gecko with a slender body, long, thin legs and a tail that is longer than the head and body, strongly compressed from the sides and with a serrated keel along the upper and lower side. In males the upper keel forms a true crest. The upper side is light greyish brown with more or less distinct darker cross-bands and a dark stripe through the eye. The total length is about 8 cm including the tail; the figure is based on a single measured animal.

The species was described by Eduard Rüppell in 1835 from the coast at Massawa in Eritrea and is the type species of the genus *Pristurus*. The genus name comes from Greek *pristos*, sawn, and *oura*, tail, and the species name from Latin *flavus*, yellow, after the yellow spots. The species split from the species complex around *Pristurus rupestris* about 21 million years ago. *P. percristatus* and *P. gasperetti* are now synonyms.

The species of the genus are diurnal and signal with the tail and body posture.

Distribution and habitat

Pristurus flavipunctatus lives on both sides of the southern Red Sea. On the African side it is known from Eritrea, Ethiopia, Djibouti, Somalia, Sudan, South Sudan (the Neberet Valley) and the Red Sea coast of Egypt, and on the Arabian side from western Saudi Arabia, including the Farasan Islands. The type locality is Massawa in Eritrea. Records from Jordan are uncertain: animals from southern Jordan were formerly assigned to *P. flavipunctatus* but are now placed in *Pristurus guweirensis*. They are not included on the map.

The species has a large range and is assessed as not threatened.

> **Native range:** Eritrea, Ethiopia, Djibouti, Somalia, Sudan, South Sudan, Egypt and Saudi Arabia.

HABITAT

Pristurus flavipunctatus lives in the hot, dry lowlands and low mountains around the Red Sea and has been found up to at least 460 m above sea level. Little rain falls, and daytime temperatures are high for most of the year. The habitat is only sparsely described; the species of the genus live on the ground, on stones and rock faces or in trees and bushes, and the animals stay close to cover. Temperature and humidity in the habitat have not been measured for the species.

Read more: Humidity, misting and ventilation

Care

THE ENCLOSURE

Almost nothing is known about the care of *Pristurus flavipunctatus*. The care advice is based on the climate of its range and on *Pristurus carteri*, the best-known species of the genus in captivity. The figures for temperature, lifespan and incubation are borrowed from *P. carteri*.

An adult needs an enclosure of at least 40 × 30 × 30 cm. Furnish it with flat stones, slate and roots, so that crevices and basking spots at several heights are created, and put down a base layer of fine sand mixed with soil. Stones must lie stably and preferably be glued. The enclosure needs good ventilation and a tight-fitting lid, because the animal is small and fast.

Read more: Incubating eggs

TEMPERATURE

Create a gradient with 28-30 °C at the cool end and a basking spot of 40-45 °C under a spotlight. At night the temperature may fall to 20-22 °C. Use thermometers at both ends and an infrared thermometer for the basking spot, and control the heat with a thermostat. If the animal keeps seeking shade, the basking spot is too hot.

Read more: Heat and temperature

HUMIDITY AND WATER

The air must be dry, about 30-40 %. Offer a very shallow dish of fresh water, or put stones in the dish so the animal cannot drown, and mist the enclosure lightly once a week so the animals can drink droplets.

LIGHTING AND UVB

P. flavipunctatus is diurnal and needs strong daylight and UVB over the basking spot, e.g. a T5 tube. Ferguson zone 3 is an estimate for a diurnal desert gecko. Keep the light on for 12 hours a day in summer and 9-10 hours in winter, and replace the UVB tube according to the manufacturer's instructions.

Read more: Lighting and UVB

FEEDING

The species eats small arthropods. Offer springtails, fruit flies, small crickets and other small insects, no wider than the animal's head. Feed adults every second or third day and juveniles daily, and remove leftovers after 15-20 minutes. Dust the food with calcium and vitamins at every second feed. The natural diet has not been studied.

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

BEHAVIOUR AND HANDLING

Pristurus flavipunctatus is fast and wary and is not suited to handling, and the tail can break off. The behaviour of the animals towards each other in captivity is not documented. Keep them singly or as a pair in a spacious enclosure with many hides, and never keep two males together.

Breeding

SEXUAL MATURITY AND SEXING

Age and size at sexual maturity are not documented for *P. flavipunctatus*. Wait with breeding until the animals are fully grown and the female is in good condition.

MATING

Mating in captivity has not been described for *P. flavipunctatus*. Males of the genus signal with the tail and with push-ups, but what role the signals play in mating has not been studied. Watch the first contact, and separate the animals if the male chases the female persistently.

EGG-LAYING AND CLUTCHES

How many eggs the female lays, and how often, is not documented for the species; in the other species of the genus one hard-shelled egg is laid at a time. The female can store sperm, so she can lay fertilised eggs long after a mating. Provide a small lay box with damp sand, and make sure she gets plenty of calcium.

INCUBATION

At 28 °C the eggs hatch after about 70-90 days; the figures are borrowed from *P. carteri*. Move the eggs carefully, without turning them, to slightly damp vermiculite, and keep the temperature steady.

REARING THE YOUNG

Rearing of the young is not documented. The young are very small and need the tiniest feeder insects, such as fruit flies and newly hatched crickets, as well as calcium and UVB.

Health and common mistakes

No diseases specific to *Pristurus flavipunctatus* in captivity have been documented. The typical mistakes for small, diurnal desert geckos are:

- Too little UVB and calcium, which can cause soft bones and tremors.
- Humidity that is too high and poor ventilation.
- Overheating under a lamp that is too strong, with no cool area.
- Lost tail through stress or restraint.

A healthy animal is quick and alert with clear eyes. See a vet with reptile experience if the animal loses weight or lies 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.