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GECKOS

Rock semaphore gecko

Pristurus rupestris

A small, diurnal rock gecko from the Hajar Mountains in Oman and the coast of Iran, which curls its tail over its back and signals with it. It reaches only 5-7 cm in total length including the tail, and very little is known about its care.

Family: Sphaerodactylidae Former name: *Pristurus rupestris iranicus*

KEY FACTS

THE ANIMAL

Adult size	**5-7 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	**30 × 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 rupestris is a very small gecko with a slender body and a tail that is longer than the head and body, compressed from the sides, and in males carries a distinct crest of enlarged scales along the upper edge and a smaller one along the lower edge. In females the crest is weaker or absent. The back has no enlarged central crest. The body measures at most 27 mm from snout to vent. The length of the tail has not been measured in recent studies, because many animals have lost or regrown the tail, so the total length of 5-7 cm is an estimate based on the body length.

The species was described in 1874 by William Blanford. For a long time *P. rupestris* was regarded as one widespread species from Arabia to Iran and East Africa, but in 2025 the species complex was split into five species: *P. rupestris* in the strict sense and the four new species *Pristurus ali*, *Pristurus assareen*, *Pristurus feulneri* and *Pristurus omanensis*. The populations in Iran, formerly regarded as the subspecies *P. r. iranicus*, belong to *P. rupestris*. Animals in the trade under the name *P. rupestris* may belong to the separated species, and information in older literature may concern another species in the complex. The species name comes from Latin *rupes*, rock.

The species is diurnal and communicates with visible signals: it curls its tail over its back, does push-ups, and inflates its body and compresses it from the sides.

Distribution and habitat

Pristurus rupestris in the strict sense lives in the Hajar Mountains in north-eastern Oman, from Ras al Hadd in the east to about 40 km north of the Wadi Jizzi pass close to the border with the United Arab Emirates, and along the coast of Iran from Bushehr and Kharg Island in the north to almost the border with Pakistan. Its occurrence in south-western Pakistan is uncertain. In Oman it has been found from sea level up to 2,115 m above sea level on Jabal Shams.

Scattered populations in Qatar, Bahrain, eastern Saudi Arabia and on the coast of the United Arab Emirates have probably been introduced with stones and building materials, and it has not yet been studied which species in the complex they belong to. They are not included on the distribution map. The species is abundant and is assessed as not threatened.

> **Native range:** Oman and Iran.

HABITAT

Pristurus rupestris lives on rock faces, large stones, tree roots and trunks and on man-made structures such as walls. It is mainly diurnal but can be active after sunset. The climate is dry and hot with large swings between day and night, and in the highest parts of the mountains it is markedly cooler than in the lowlands. The animals seek cover in crevices and under stones. Temperature and humidity in the habitat have not been measured for the species.

Read more: Humidity, misting and ventilation

Care

THE ENCLOSURE

Very little is known about the care of *Pristurus rupestris*. The advice is based on the species' way of life, the climate in its range and the closely related *Pristurus carteri*, which has the same requirements for heat, light and dryness. The figures for temperature, lifespan and incubation are borrowed from *P. carteri*.

An adult animal can be kept in an enclosure of 30 × 30 × 30 cm, but a larger enclosure gives a clearer temperature gradient and more basking spots. Furnish it with stacked flat stones, slate and roots, so that crevices are created at several heights. Stones must lie securely and preferably be glued, so the animal is not crushed if it digs under them. Use a substrate of fine sand mixed with soil.

The enclosure must have good ventilation and a tight-fitting lid, because the species is very small and fast and can squeeze through small openings.

Read more: Heat and temperature Read more: Incubating eggs

TEMPERATURE

Provide a gradient with 28-30 °C at the cool end and a basking spot of 40-45 °C under a small spotlight. At night the temperature may fall to about 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 constantly seeks shade, the basking spot is too hot.

HUMIDITY AND WATER

The air must be dry, around 30-40 %. Provide a very shallow dish of fresh water, or put stones in the dish so that a small gecko cannot drown. The animals also drink water droplets, so mist the furnishings lightly once a week and let them dry out again.

LIGHTING AND UVB

P. rupestris is diurnal and basks, so it needs strong daylight and UVB over the basking spot, for example a T5 tube with a low UVB output. Ferguson zone 3 is an estimate for a small, diurnal rock species that basks; the zone has not been measured for the species. Provide shade in the rest of the enclosure. Keep the light on for 12 hours a day in summer and 9-10 hours in winter, controlled by a timer, 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, newly hatched crickets and other very small insects that are no wider than the animal's head. Feed adults every second or third day and juveniles daily with as much as they can eat in 15-20 minutes, and remove the rest. Dust the food lightly 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 rupestris is fast and wary and is not suited to handling, and the tail can break off if the animal is grabbed. The species signals with its tail and with push-ups and is clearly visible during the day. How the animals behave towards each other in captivity is not documented. Keeping them singly is the safest option. If a pair is kept together, the enclosure must be larger and have many hides, and two males must not be kept together.

Breeding

SEXUAL MATURITY AND SEXING

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

MATING

Mating in captivity is not documented for *P. rupestris*. Males 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

The female lays one hard-shelled egg at a time and in the wild lays eggs throughout the year. How often she lays is not documented. Provide a small lay box with damp sand, and make sure she gets plenty of calcium.

INCUBATION

Incubation is not documented for *P. rupestris*. Expect 70-90 days at 28 °C. 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 springtails, fruit flies and newly hatched crickets, as well as calcium and UVB, so they do not develop bone disease.

Health and common mistakes

No diseases specific to *Pristurus rupestris* 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, which cause skin and respiratory problems.
- Overheating under a lamp that is too strong, with no cool area.
- Lost tail through stress or restraint.
- Drowning in water dishes that are too deep.

A healthy animal is quick and alert, has clear eyes and a plump tail. 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.

The full guide with map and updates: herpy.org/en/geckos/pristurus-rupestris