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GECKOS

Spearpoint leaf-tailed gecko

Uroplatus ebenaui

Uroplatus ebenaui is the smallest of the leaf-tailed geckos, only 9-10 cm long including the tail. With its short, pointed tail, the small horns above the eyes and the black mouth lining, it resembles a withered leaf. It lives on Nosy Be and in northern Madagascar and requires cool, humid and stable care.

Family: Gekkonidae Former name: *Uroplates ebenaui*

KEY FACTS

THE ANIMAL

Adult size	**9-10 cm** total length incl. tail
Lifespan	**5-10 years**
Active	**At dusk and at night**
Lifestyle	**Arboreal**
Habitat	**Dry forest and rainforest**
Difficulty	**Experienced**

CARE

Min. enclosure	**45 × 45 × 45 cm** L × W × H for 1 adult
Temperature, day	**22-28 °C**
Temperature, night	**16-20 °C**
Humidity	**60-100%**
UVB	**Recommended** Ferguson zone 1
Diet	**Insects and worms/snails**
Kept	**Singly or in pairs**

BREEDING

Reproduction	**Egg-laying**
Clutch size	**2 eggs**
Incubation	**90-120 days** at 20-25 °C

PROTECTION AND PAPERWORK

CITES	**Appendix II**
EU annex	**Annex B**
IUCN	**Vulnerable (VU)**

About the species

Uroplatus ebenaui is the smallest species in the genus and reaches only about 9-10 cm including the tail. It belongs to a group of small, leaf-like leaf-tailed geckos in which the body has almost no skin fringes. It does, however, have a short, narrow and pointed tail that resembles a leaf, small horn-like supraocular spines above the eyes and an almost straight ridge of skin between them. The black mouth lining is an important distinguishing feature.

The species was described in 1879 by Oskar Boettger, and the scientific name honours the German zoologist Karl Ebenau. The taxonomy has been confused. Animals sold as *U. ebenaui* were for a time in fact another, still undescribed species with a pink mouth lining, and the two species can be told apart almost only by the colour of the mouth lining. *Uroplatus fiera* also resembles a large *U. ebenaui*. If you are in doubt about what you have, look in the mouth: a black mouth lining points to *U. ebenaui*. The relationship of the species to *Uroplatus phantasticus* has not been finally resolved, and *U. ebenaui* may be a complex of several species.

In the males of the species group, the tail often resembles a leaf with insect damage, and they may have a white tear-shaped mark under the eye. The females' tail resembles a fresh leaf. By day the animal sits almost motionless, flattened against bark or curled up like a withered leaf, and then it is almost impossible to spot. It is a delicate display animal and not an animal for handling.

Distribution and habitat

Uroplatus ebenaui occurs in Madagascar. The type locality is the island of Nosy Be off the north-west coast, and the species also occurs on the small neighbouring island of Nosy Komba. On Madagascar itself it is recorded from the northern and north-eastern parts of the country, from sea level up to about 500 m.

The range is limited, and the species is listed as vulnerable on the IUCN Red List because the forest in Madagascar is disappearing. Several closely related species have been confused with it, so not all the older records are reliable.

> **Native range:** Madagascar.

HABITAT

The species lives in tropical rainforest and in dry deciduous forest from sea level to about 500 m. It is tied to shrubs and low plants and lives closer to the ground than the large leaf-tailed geckos, which sit on tree trunks. That is why it resembles withered leaves rather than bark.

It is active at night and at dusk and hunts insects. By day it rests among foliage and branches, where its camouflage hides it. The eggs are laid on the ground. Few measurements have been made of the climate at the species' own sites. In leaf-tailed geckos in general, nights are cooler than days, and humidity is highest at night.

Read more: Humidity, misting and ventilation

Care

THE ENCLOSURE

One adult can be kept in an enclosure of at least 45 × 45 × 45 cm (length × width × height), preferably with a front opening. The species lives close to the ground in bushes, so an enclosure that is as wide as it is tall suits better than a narrow, tall one. A pair or a small group needs a larger enclosure, and the larger the enclosure, the easier it is to keep temperature and humidity stable. Young animals can be kept in small boxes until they eat on their own and are half grown.

Furnish with many thin branches, about the thickness of a pencil, vertical and slanting, so that the animal can rest on them during the day. Live plants such as ficus, pothos and dracaena provide cover and retain humidity, and a layer of dry leaves in part of the floor provides a laying site. Use 5-8 cm of damp peat moss or sphagnum as substrate, which holds water without turning boggy. The enclosure needs good cross-ventilation so that the air does not become stagnant. Glass holds humidity best in dry rooms, and mesh enclosures require a humid room.

TEMPERATURE

Uroplatus ebenaui does not tolerate heat. By day it should be 22-28 °C, preferably at the cooler end, and the enclosure must never exceed 28 °C. At night the temperature should fall to 16-20 °C. In winter, from November to February, the daytime temperature can be lowered slightly to 20-23 °C, and the night to 13-18 °C.

A local warm spot of 32-38 °C is optional. It must be small so that the animal can always retreat to cooler parts. In a small enclosure a warm spot is not safe, because the species overheats easily. Use a white or clear low-wattage heat bulb and never coloured light, and control it with a thermostat. Measure the temperature with a digital thermometer both high up and low down. Summer heatwaves are more dangerous than cold winter days. An animal that is too hot becomes restless and moves constantly instead of sitting still.

Read more: Heat and temperature

HUMIDITY AND WATER

Humidity should swing between about 60 % by day and 80-90 % at night: let the enclosure dry out to 60-70 % in the afternoon, and mist heavily to 85-90 % in the evening. The daily swing inhibits mould and keeps the airways healthy. Mist with lukewarm water, never cold, and do not let the substrate stand in water. Ordinary tap water is better than distilled or softened water, because it contains minerals. An automatic misting system is a great help if you cannot mist several times a day yourself.

The animal drinks droplets from leaves and glass after misting and does not need a water dish. Sunken eyes and a folded tail point to dehydration and demand immediate action. If the animal sheds in one piece with no remains, the humidity is right.

LIGHTING AND UVB

Provide UVB, because in the wild the animals rest openly by day and get a little sun. This is Ferguson zone 1, so only a little is needed. Aim for a UV index of 1-2 at the resting place, e.g. with a T5 tube of 5 % or 7 % above the mesh lid, so that the rest of the enclosure lies in shade. Leaf-like species probably get less UV in the wild than bark-like ones, so stay at the low end.

Keep the light on for 11-14 hours a day, longest in summer, and control it with a timer. At night it must be completely dark, because the animals' eyes are very sensitive to light. If you need to work in the room, use a dim torch. Live plants may require an LED plant lamp.

Read more: Lighting and UVB

FEEDING

Uroplatus ebenaui eats insects, and meat or plant matter is refused or makes the animal ill. Give crickets, dubia roaches and other small roaches, grasshoppers and occasionally caterpillars. Feeder insects must be smaller than the animal's head, and for such a small species that means small insects. It is better to give a few suitably sized prey items than many small ones. Snails are natural food and are especially important for breeding females: with several clutches the females often become calcium-depleted, and small snails in a very shallow dish with just enough water to keep them alive and moving can help.

Juveniles are fed daily and adults every other day, as much as they can eat in one night. Weigh the animals every week so you can see whether the weight is stable. Feed in the evening after misting, so the calcium is not washed off. Avoid hard feeding dishes, because the animals throw themselves at the prey and can hurt themselves. The feeder insects should have been fed a proper diet at least 24 hours beforehand. Dust them lightly with calcium at every other feeding and with multivitamin at regular intervals. If you use UVB, the calcium should contain little or no D3. Without UVB it must contain D3. Too much supplement causes fat deposits under the jaw and in front of the hind legs.

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

BEHAVIOUR AND HANDLING

Uroplatus ebenaui is a display animal and not one to pick up. The animals stress easily, so handling should be limited to what is strictly necessary and no more than once a week. A calm animal moves slowly and often sits completely still. A stressed animal is in constant motion and may jump, gape, arch its body, curl its tail or scream. The tail is an important signal and is also used during mating.

A single animal does fine alone. Pairs and small groups can be kept together in a larger enclosure, but two males should not be kept together. New animals need time to settle, and a densely planted enclosure with many hides reduces stress. Wild-caught leaf-tailed geckos generally live shorter lives than captive-bred ones, so choose captive-bred animals if you can get them. They are hard to find, because the species is rare in the hobby.

Read more: Buying animals: captive-bred, wild-caught and transport

Breeding

SEXUAL MATURITY AND SEXING

In adults the sex can be seen from the distinct hemipenal bulges at the base of the tail in the male. In young animals it is harder, but the male may have a tail resembling a leaf with insect damage and a white tear-shaped mark under the eye, while the female's tail resembles a fresh leaf. These are tendencies, not reliable features, and there are exceptions. The age and weight for breeding are not documented for *U. ebenaui*. Females should in any case be fully grown and in good condition before they lay eggs, because egg-laying drains them of calcium.

MATING

U. ebenaui is rarely bred in captivity, and the figures for breeding here and for egg-laying and incubation are borrowed from *U. phantasticus*. A cool rest period in winter is essential, because eggs and sperm only mature after it. Lower the temperature as described under Temperature, and make the period neither too short nor too long.

A male placed with females mates repeatedly and forgets food and water. He should therefore be removed again no later than three days after the female has laid her clutch, whether or not it is fertilised. When the females wake after the winter rest, they get plenty of food and snails.

Read more: Incubating eggs

EGG-LAYING AND CLUTCHES

A clutch consists of two round eggs, which are laid on the ground. Clutches come at intervals of about 30 days, and a female lays two to five clutches in a season, occasionally up to seven. Give the female a substrate of damp sphagnum or peat moss and a layer of leaves where she can lay. The eggs are so small that they can easily sit on a coin.

Make sure there is plenty of calcium in the food throughout the season. Small snails help the female's eggs to be properly calcified.

INCUBATION

The eggs hatch after 90-120 days at 24-25 °C by day and 20-21 °C at night. Use a porous, fine-grained substrate and over 70 % humidity. The hatch rate is high when the eggs are well calcified.

The eggs must not be turned. Move them carefully to a small egg box with damp substrate and air holes.

REARING THE YOUNG

The young are fragile right after hatching, especially if the humidity is too low, because they then have difficulty with the first shed and may die if they are not helped. Small animals can be kept in large cups or small boxes with a few thin twigs, a plant cutting and kitchen paper or the same substrate as the adults. Temperature and humidity are as for adult animals.

Young grow quickly under good conditions and should be fed daily with small feeder insects of suitable size. Move them to a larger, naturalistic enclosure when they eat on their own and are at least half grown.

Health and common mistakes

Uroplatus ebenaui is delicate, and most problems are caused by heat, dryness or too little calcium. The typical mistakes are:

- Heat above 28 °C, even for a few hours. This causes stress and can be fatal. Be especially alert on summer days.
- Dehydration, with sunken eyes and a folded tail. Mist and raise the humidity at once.
- Shedding problems, where remnants stick, especially in young. Raise the humidity and moisten gently.
- Calcium deficiency in females after several clutches. Give snails and calcium.
- Too much calcium and vitamin supplement, which shows up as fat deposits.
- Stagnant air and a constantly wet substrate, which cause mould and respiratory problems.

A healthy animal is calm and alert and has a stable weight. Sick reptiles hide it, so weigh weekly and note feeding, shedding and behaviour. Consult a vet with experience of reptiles if the animal loses weight, does not eat, has sunken eyes or is limp.

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.