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IGUANAS

## Knight Anole

# *Anolis equestris*

*Anolis equestris* is the world's largest anole: a powerful, climbing, diurnal lizard from Cuba that grows to 35-50 cm in length and lives high up in the trees. It is green, but can change to greyish brown. The species needs a tall, densely planted enclosure with warmth, high humidity and UVB. It bites hard and is an animal to look at, not to handle.

Family: Dactyloidae  Former name: *Anolius rhodolaemus; Deiroptyx equestris*

KEY FACTS

### THE ANIMAL

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|---|---|
| Adult size | **35-50 cm**<br>total length incl. tail |
| Lifespan | **10-16 years** |
| Active | **By day** |
| Lifestyle | **Arboreal** |
| Habitat | **Dry forest and rainforest** |
| Difficulty | **Experienced** |

### CARE

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|---|---|
| Min. enclosure | **60 × 60 × 120 cm**<br>L × W × H for 1 adult |
| Temperature, day | **24-29 °C** |
| Basking spot | **32-35 °C** |
| Temperature, night | **18-24 °C** |
| Humidity | **60-80%** |
| Water | **Water dish** |
| UVB | **Essential**<br>Ferguson zone 3 |
| Diet | **Insects, fruit and vertebrates** |
| Kept | **Singly, in pairs or one male with several females** |

### BREEDING

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|---|---|
| Reproduction | **Egg-laying** |
| Clutch size | **1 eggs** |
| Incubation | **35-49 days**<br>at 28-30 °C |

### PROTECTION AND PAPERWORK

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|---|---|
| CITES | **Appendix III** |
| EU annex | **Annex C** |
| IUCN | **Least Concern (LC)** |

## About the species

*Anolis equestris* is the largest and most heavily built anole, with a long, wedge-shaped snout, a large head and a slightly compressed tail with a serrated upper edge. Each toe has a broad adhesive pad, so the animal can run up smooth, vertical surfaces. The colour is pale green to emerald green with a white or yellow stripe below the eye and over the shoulder, and it can change to dull greyish brown with stress, cold or during display. Some animals have blue tones on the head.

Adults grow to 35-50 cm in total length. The body measures up to 19 cm from snout to vent in males and about 14 cm in females. Males have a heavier and more angular head, especially with age, and a large pink to white dewlap, which they spread to threaten rivals and attract females. The female's dewlap is smaller. Bulges at the base of the tail show the male's hemipenes. The weight is not documented.

The species was described in 1820 by Blasius Merrem, and about ten subspecies have been described on Cuba and the surrounding small islands. For a time it was placed in the genus *Deiroptyx*.

In the enclosure *A. equestris* is an animal to look at. Most animals in the trade are wild-caught and shy. They bite hard and defend themselves with an open mouth, an extended dewlap and a raised dorsal crest. The species eats smaller lizards and must not be kept with them.

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

## Distribution and habitat

*Anolis equestris* is native to Cuba and the surrounding small islands, from Pinar del Río in the west to Granma in the east. Several subspecies live on the island groups along Cuba's north coast, e.g. Sabana-Camagüey. The species has been introduced to southern Florida, Hawaii and other places, but the map shows only the native range.

> **Native range:** Cuba.

### HABITAT

*Anolis equestris* lives high up in the canopy of tropical and subtropical forest, often in shade beneath large trees. It rarely comes down to the ground, except when the female lays eggs or when males look for a new territory. It is diurnal and basks in bright openings in the foliage.

Males are strongly territorial. Rivals are threatened with the dewlap, head-bobbing and a stiff, sideways posture, and if the dispute continues it can end in fights with open mouths and serious bites. In the wild the species eats insects, spiders, smaller lizards and other small vertebrates as well as a little fruit.

## Care

### THE ENCLOSURE

*Anolis equestris* is a high-climbing species, and the enclosure must be taller than it is wide. An adult needs an enclosure of at least 60 × 60 × 120 cm (length × width × height), and 90 × 60 × 150 cm gives room for several climbing levels. The enclosure should open at the front so that the animal is not disturbed from above, and have good ventilation.

Fill the whole height with solid climbing structures: cork bark, thick branches and bamboo, at an angle and vertical and anchored so that they do not topple. Dense planting is essential: pothos, philodendron, fig, dracaena and bromeliads provide cover, visual barriers and large leaves for the animal to drink from. The substrate is a layer of coconut fibre, cypress mulch or bioactive soil at least 5-8 cm deep, which holds the moisture.

The species is kept singly or as a male with one or more females in a large, densely planted enclosure. Males are fiercely territorial and must never be put together. Never keep the animal with smaller lizards, as they will be eaten.

Read more: Terrarium construction and bioactive substrate

### TEMPERATURE

The air should be 24-29 °C during the day, and at night it may fall to 18-24 °C. The basking spot should be a branch at the top on the warm side with a surface temperature of 32-35 °C, measured with an infrared thermometer. Use a halogen spot on a thermostat, and switch off all lamps at night. If the room falls below 18 °C at night, use a ceramic heater on its own thermostat.

Read more: Heat and temperature

### HUMIDITY AND WATER

The species comes from humid tropical forest and needs 60-80 % humidity. Mist heavily morning and evening so that walls, plants and branches are wet, and use a moisture-retaining substrate. The animal mostly drinks droplets from the leaves and rarely from a bowl, so misting or a drip or fogging system is the most important source of water. A shallow water bowl can be added as a supplement. Let the enclosure dry out a little between mistings so that mould does not grow.

Read more: Humidity, misting and ventilation

### LIGHTING AND UVB

*Anolis equestris* is diurnal and needs warmth, light and UVB. Use a T5 HO tube (Ferguson zone 3) over the warm side so that the animal can bask 25-40 cm from the tube, and provide shade to retreat into. Without UVB the animal cannot make use of the calcium in its food, and bone loss is the result. Replace the tube according to the manufacturer's instructions, because the UVB output falls long before the light fails. The light follows the seasons: 13-14 hours in summer and 10-11 hours in winter.

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

### FEEDING

The species is first and foremost insectivorous. Offer a varied selection of live insects of a suitable size: large crickets, cockroaches, silkworms, mealworms, morio worms and wax moth larvae. Gut-load the feeder insects with a nutritious diet for a day beforehand. Large animals also take newborn mice. The animal also eats plant matter, and a little soft fruit such as papaya, mango or banana can be offered occasionally as a supplement.

Juveniles are fed every day, adults every other day with as much as they eat in 10-15 minutes. Dust the food with calcium without D3 at every feeding, and give a vitamin supplement with D3 every other week when the UVB lighting is in order.

Read more: Feeder animals: keeping and breeding

### BEHAVIOUR AND HANDLING

The male shows off with the dewlap, push-ups and a brighter green sheen. When threatened the animal turns sideways, opens its mouth and spreads the dewlap and dorsal crest. It bites hard, so handling is avoided, and the enclosure is opened from the front with calm movements. Stressed animals turn dark and stop eating. Dense planting and a calm, fixed routine help the animal to settle in.

Reptiles can carry *Salmonella*. Wash your hands after contact with the animal, the enclosure and the food.

Read more: Quarantine and hygiene

## Breeding

### SEXUAL MATURITY AND SEXING

The male is larger than the female, with a heavier head, a larger dewlap and bulges at the base of the tail. The age at sexual maturity is not reliably documented.

### MATING

The mating season is in summer. The male bobs, spreads the dewlap, grips the female by the neck and brings his tail in under hers. One male can be kept with one or more females in a large, densely planted enclosure. The male must be removed if the female is chased hard.

### EGG-LAYING AND CLUTCHES

Like other anoles, the female lays one egg at a time at intervals of a few weeks throughout the season. How many eggs she lays per year is not documented. She needs a laying site with moist soil or coconut fibre at least 10 cm deep.

### INCUBATION

Incubation time and temperature are not documented for the species; 35-49 days at 28-30 °C are borrowed from *Anolis carolinensis*. Place the eggs in slightly moist perlite or vermiculite in a closed container, and check weekly that the substrate is moist.

Read more: Incubating eggs

### REARING THE YOUNG

The young are about 4-5 cm from snout to vent at hatching. They are given small insects every day, dusted with calcium, and need UVB and high humidity. Separate the young if some are chased away from food and the basking spot.

## Health and common mistakes

Most problems are caused by too little UVB, calcium, warmth or humidity:

- Bone loss from too little UVB and calcium. Signs are soft limbs, tremors, difficulty climbing and a deformed jaw.
- Shedding problems and dehydration when humidity is too low.

- Stress and loss of appetite when the animal has no cover.
- Serious injuries and deaths in fights between males.
- Parasites in wild-caught animals.

A dark or dull colour in an otherwise green animal is a sign of stress, illness or the wrong temperature. The species can live 10-15 years, and one animal of 16 years has been recorded in captivity. Find a vet with experience of reptiles before you need one.

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.