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LACERTIDS

Atlantic Lizard

Gallotia atlantica

Gallotia atlantica is a small, diurnal lizard from Lanzarote, Fuerteventura and the surrounding islets. Males grow up to 29 cm and have large blue spots on the flanks. The species is aggressive towards its own kind and is best kept as a pair in a dry, sunny enclosure with many hiding places and a cool winter rest. The young are delicate and are reared separately.

Family: Lacertidae

KEY FACTS

THE ANIMAL

Adult size	**20-29 cm** total length incl. tail
Lifespan	**5-10 years**
Active	**By day**
Lifestyle	**Rock-dwelling and terrestrial**
Habitat	**Semi-desert and rocky terrain**
Difficulty	**Intermediate**

CARE

Min. enclosure	**80 × 40 × 40 cm** L × W × H for 2 adults
Temperature, day	**25-31 °C**
Basking spot	**35-45 °C**
Temperature, night	**15-21 °C**
Humidity	**30-50%**
Water	**Water dish**
UVB	**Recommended** Ferguson zone 3
Winter rest	**12-15 °C** 8-9 weeks
Diet	**Insects, fruit and plants**
Kept	**In pairs**

BREEDING

Reproduction	**Egg-laying**
Clutch size	**1-5 eggs**
Clutches per year	**1-3**
Incubation	**64-87 days** at 28-31 °C

PROTECTION AND PAPERWORK

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

About the species

Gallotia atlantica is one of the smaller Canary Island lizards. The body is slender, and males reach up to 29 cm in total and up to 11 cm from snout to vent. Females are smaller, up to 20 cm in total and 7 cm from snout to vent. Males have blue spots on the flanks, most often larger than three lateral scales, which can merge into a blue longitudinal band.

Hatchlings are 3 cm without the tail and 8 cm in total. They are clearly striped lengthways but lack the light eel stripe seen in the larger Canary Island lizards, and the cheek and throat are light and unmarked. Many have a yellow colour around the vent and on the underside of the hind legs.

The species is quick and alert and very aggressive towards its own kind. Males are territorial, and females are bitten if there is not enough space and cover. Lifespan is not documented. Adults have lived and laid eggs for at least five years in captivity, and 5-10 years is an estimate.

Distribution and habitat

Gallotia atlantica lives on the eastern Canary Islands of Lanzarote and Fuerteventura and on the smaller islets of La Graciosa, Montaña Clara, Alegranza, Roque del Este and Lobos. Animals from Fuerteventura and Lobos are placed in the subspecies *G. a. mahoratae*; animals from Lanzarote belong to the nominate form. An introduced population lives near Arinaga on Gran Canaria.

The species is regarded as not threatened and is common on its islands.

> **Native range:** Spain.

HABITAT

Gallotia atlantica lives in open, sunny, dry country: stony and scrub-covered slopes, rocky coasts, sandy beaches, lava fields, farmland and gardens. On Lanzarote the species also occurs on the young lava fields and on the surrounding islets. The animals move on the ground and among stones and scrub and shelter in crevices and holes.

The diet is mixed. The species eats fruit and seeds from shrubs such as *Lycium intricatum*, *Rubia fruticosa* and *Asparagus nesiotes* and disperses their seeds, but also takes arthropods. The species itself is eaten by birds such as shrikes and kestrels.

Care

THE ENCLOSURE

Gallotia atlantica moves mostly on the ground, so floor area matters more than height. A pair needs an enclosure of at least 80 × 40 × 40 cm (length × width × height). Bigger is better, and an outdoor enclosure in full sun is the best solution in summer when the temperature allows it. The enclosure needs a tight lid and a dry substrate of sand and soil deep enough for the animals to dig.

Furnish it with flat stones, stone piles and pieces of bark as hiding places and basking spots. There must be plenty of hiding places at both ends so that a subordinate animal can retreat. Keep only one pair, and do not keep several females together: when females are kept in groups they bite each other, and some lay no eggs. The species should not be kept with other species.

For egg laying, place a shallow container about 8 cm in diameter and 6 cm high with a slightly damp mixture of peat and sand in the enclosure and cover it halfway with a piece of flowerpot. The female then does not dig in random places. Keep it damp by misting daily throughout the season.

TEMPERATURE

The daytime temperature in the enclosure is 25-31 °C, and a spotlight above a flat stone gives a surface temperature of 35-45 °C, measured with an infrared thermometer. At night the temperature drops to 15-21 °C. The heat for the basking spot can come from a spotlight, which is switched off at night.

A cool winter rest is part of the cycle. It lasts about 8 weeks from mid-December to mid-February at 12-15 °C with the heat lamps switched off. The animals must be healthy and well fed and have an empty gut. After the rest the temperature and day length are raised again.

Day and night temperatures apply to *G. atlantica* itself. The basking-spot temperature is not documented for the species and is borrowed from the closely related *Gallotia galloti* and *Gallotia stehlini*.

Read more: Heat and temperature

HUMIDITY AND WATER

The enclosure is dry, with a humidity of around 30-50 %, and has no damp zones apart from the egg-laying container. Provide a shallow bowl of fresh water that is always full and changed regularly. Ventilation must be good. Humidity has not been measured in the wild and is an estimate based on the dry habitats.

Read more: Humidity, misting and ventilation

LIGHTING AND UVB

Gallotia atlantica is diurnal and basks for several hours, so the enclosure needs strong light. Use a T5 tube for Ferguson zone 3 above the basking spot so that the animal receives a UV index of 3-5 at head height; the distance is decided with a UV meter. The UVB zone is not documented for the species and is borrowed from *G. galloti*. Glass blocks UVB, so the tube should be inside the enclosure or above open mesh.

Day length follows the season: 12-14 hours in summer and around 8 hours during the winter rest.

Read more: Lighting and UVB

FEEDING

Gallotia atlantica is omnivorous. Offer mostly insects: fly larvae, crickets, mealworms and zophobas, cockroaches and small grasshoppers, dusted with calcium. Fruit and greens are offered in small amounts, because the species eats fruit in the wild. Now and then give a little banana, melon or berries. Fly larvae can be given in a small dish so that they do not crawl away into the enclosure.

Feed adults 1-2 times a week. Dust the food with calcium and give a vitamin supplement with D3 unless the animal receives UVB. Vitamins can be added to the drinking water according to the manufacturer's instructions.

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

BEHAVIOUR AND HANDLING

Gallotia atlantica is shy and flees quickly when someone enters the room, and it should not be grabbed. The tail is shed under stress and grows back without new vertebrae. Males are fiercely territorial. A pair can be kept together if there are many hiding places, but the female may be bitten. Check the female for wounds, and separate the animals if there are repeated attacks.

Breeding

SEXUAL MATURITY AND SEXING

Males are larger and have large blue spots on the flanks, which females lack. When *Gallotia atlantica* becomes sexually mature is not documented.

MATING

The mating behaviour of *Gallotia atlantica* has not been described. Egg laying begins at the end of April after the winter rest, so mating takes place in spring when the temperature and day length rise again. Keep the animals in pairs, because in groups the females bite each other and several of them lay no eggs. Watch the animals closely for the first few days after the rest, and separate them if the female gets wounds.

EGG-LAYING AND CLUTCHES

The female lays 1-3 clutches a year between the end of April and the beginning of September. The first clutch averages just under 3 eggs (1-5), the second 2-3 eggs (1-4), and the rare third clutch 1-2 eggs. A female with three clutches lays 7 eggs a year on average, and one with two clutches just under 6. The eggs are 13 × 9 mm. Check the egg-laying container daily. The female may eat the eggs if she has no suitable place.

INCUBATION

The eggs are removed as soon as they are laid and placed without turning in an incubation box with the same damp mixture of peat and sand. Incubate them at 28-31 °C, as for eggs of the closely related *Gallotia galloti*. At a temperature that alternates between 34 °C by day and 18 °C by night, the eggs hatch after 64-87 days, 73 days on average.

Read more: Incubating eggs

REARING THE YOUNG

The young are very delicate and must be reared separately, because otherwise the weakest stop eating. Feed small fly larvae in a small dish so that the food does not run about in the enclosure. Too much moving food stresses the young so that they become lethargic. The young receive light and UVB like the adults.

Health and common mistakes

Most problems are caused by too little heat, too little UVB, a one-sided diet and too little space. The typical ones are:

- Metabolic bone disease from too little UVB and calcium. Provide UVB or sun, and dust the food.
- Wounds from fights and bites. Separate the animals if there are wounds.
- Mites and internal parasites in new animals. Quarantine new animals and have them examined, and take a faecal sample before the winter rest.
- Loss of the tail. It grows back, but without new vertebrae.
- Problems during the winter rest in thin or sick animals. If the animal is sick or underweight, it should not be given a winter rest.
- Egg-laying difficulties without a suitable laying site. The female is restless and digs; see a vet if she is weak.

A healthy animal has clear eyes, a plump tail, smooth skin and a good appetite. See a vet with reptile experience if the animal does not eat, loses weight or breathes with its mouth open.

Read more: Quarantine and hygiene 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.