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LACERTIDS

Gran Canaria Giant Lizard

Gallotia stehlini

Gallotia stehlini is one of the largest lizards in Europe and is endemic to Gran Canaria. It grows to 80 cm, the males have powerful jaws, and the diet is omnivorous with a lot of plant food. The animals are very aggressive towards each other and are best kept as a pair in a large, sunny enclosure with many hiding places.

Family: Lacertidae Former name: *Lacerta stehlini*

KEY FACTS

THE ANIMAL

Adult size	**50-80 cm** total length incl. tail
Lifespan	**10-15 years**
Active	**By day**
Lifestyle	**Rock-dwelling and terrestrial**
Habitat	**Semi-desert and rocky terrain**
Difficulty	**Intermediate**

CARE

Min. enclosure	**150 × 70 × 60 cm** L × W × H for 2 adults
Temperature, day	**25-31 °C**
Basking spot	**35-45 °C**
Temperature, night	**15-21 °C**
Humidity	**40-60%**
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	**4-16 eggs**
Clutches per year	**1-2**
Incubation	**65-86 days** at 28-32 °C

PROTECTION AND PAPERWORK

CITES	**Appendix III**
EU annex	**Annex C**
IUCN	**Critically Endangered (CR)**

About the species

Gallotia stehlini is among the largest lizards in the Lacertidae and grows to 80 cm in total, including the tail. The males are larger than the females and have a heavier head and distinctly full cheeks. The colour is grey, brown or reddish brown, and young animals have a distinct V-shaped marking on the pale throat. Newly hatched young measure about 13 cm in total, of which 4-5 cm is body.

The species is fast and wary but becomes more confident in the enclosure with time. The animals are very aggressive towards each other, and even young can injure one another seriously. Young animals make squeaking sounds. The species can live to a great age: in the wild the animals reach 10-11 years, and in captivity they can breed for more than 13 years.

Distribution and habitat

Gallotia stehlini is endemic to Gran Canaria in the Canary Islands. The species has been introduced to Fuerteventura, but that is not counted here. On Gran Canaria it occurs from the sea up to about 1,850 m. The species is listed as critically endangered on the IUCN Red List. The introduced snake *Lampropeltis californiae* has spread on the island and preys on the species, and where the snake occurs there are more than 90 % fewer animals than in areas without it.

> **Native range:** Spain.

HABITAT

Gallotia stehlini lives in dry, open terrain with many rocks and hiding places: Mediterranean-type scrub, stony slopes, rocky coasts and pasture. The species is diurnal and moves on the ground and among stones.

The diet is mixed. Young animals take mostly invertebrates, soft fruit and a little plant matter, and with age plant food becomes an ever larger part of the diet. The female lays eggs in the summer half of the year, and the clutches are larger than in the other Canarian lizards.

Care

THE ENCLOSURE

Gallotia stehlini moves mostly on the ground and is large and active, so floor area matters more than height. A pair needs an enclosure of at least 150 × 70 × 60 cm (length × width × height). Bigger is better, and the species thrives in an outdoor run in full sun in summer. In the cold part of the year the animals must be indoors. The enclosure needs a tight lid.

The substrate is a mixture of sand and soil, and part of it must be dry, because the species lives in dry terrain. Offer flat stones, rock piles, pieces of root and pieces of bark as hiding places and basking spots, with cover at both ends so that a subordinate animal can retreat.

Keep only one pair together. The species is very aggressive towards its own kind, and groups of several animals result in bite wounds and lost tails. If the female does not have a suitable laying site, she lays her eggs in the dry soil, and the eggs can be lost. Provide a box or dish with a damp mixture of peat and sand, partly covered with a piece of flowerpot. Keep the boxes damp with daily misting.

TEMPERATURE

The daytime temperature is 25-31 °C, and a spotlight over a flat stone gives a surface temperature of 35-45 °C. At night the temperature falls to 15-21 °C, and night-time heating is not necessary. The basking temperature, the humidity and the UVB requirement are borrowed from *Gallotia galloti*.

A cool winter rest of 8-9 weeks at 12-15 °C with the heat lamps switched off suits the species, typically from mid-December to mid-February. Only healthy, well-nourished animals may be given a winter rest, and they must be free of mites and internal parasites. After the rest the temperature and day length are raised gradually.

Read more: Lighting and UVB Read more: Humidity, misting and ventilation

HUMIDITY AND WATER

The humidity is 40-60 %. The enclosure is dry and well ventilated; only the laying box is kept constantly damp. Provide a shallow dish of fresh water, changed daily and available at all times.

LIGHTING AND UVB

Gallotia stehlini is diurnal and basks for several hours, so the enclosure needs strong light and UVB. Indoors, use a T5 tube for Ferguson zone 3 above the basking spot, and determine the distance with a UV meter. Glass blocks UVB, so the tube must be inside the enclosure or in an open part of the lid. Outdoors, the UVB comes from the sun. The day length follows the season: 12-14 hours in summer and shorter during the winter rest.

Read more: Heat and temperature

FEEDING

Gallotia stehlini is omnivorous, and adults eat a lot of plant food. Offer fruit such as banana, melon, figs and berries, flowers, leaves and other greens, and in addition insects such as crickets, grasshoppers, cockroaches and fly larvae. Young animals take mostly insects and soft fruit. Dust the food with calcium, and give a vitamin supplement with D3 regularly unless the animal receives UVB. Vitamins can also be given in the drinking water according to the manufacturer's dosage.

Feed adults once or twice a week, as much as the animal eats in a few minutes; young animals are fed daily. Keep fruit as part of the meal, not the whole of it, or the animal becomes fat.

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

BEHAVIOUR AND HANDLING

Gallotia stehlini is wary, fast and powerful, and for the first few weeks the animal needs peace and many hiding places. The males are territorial, and the animals bite each other hard, so the female must be watched closely, especially after the winter rest. If wounds appear, the animals are separated. Avoid grabbing the animal; the tail is shed under stress and regrows without new vertebrae. The species should not be kept with other species.

Breeding

SEXUAL MATURITY AND SEXING

The males are larger than the females and have a heavier head and jaws. The young have a distinct V-shaped marking on the pale throat. The age at sexual maturity is not documented. Animals that come into captivity half-grown can breed in their very first year.

MATING

The timing of mating is not documented, but egg-laying takes place in summer. Watch the pair closely for the first few days, and separate the animals if the female is wounded. A pair that works can breed for more than ten years.

EGG-LAYING AND CLUTCHES

The female lays eggs from late June to mid-August, normally one clutch a year and occasionally two. The clutch is large for a lizard: 4-16 eggs, usually about 10. The eggs measure about 26 × 16 mm. Provide the female with a laying box of slightly damp peat and sand, partly covered with a piece of flowerpot, and check it daily during the season.

INCUBATION

The eggs are removed as soon as they are laid and placed in the same orientation in an incubation box of slightly damp peat and sand without being turned. At 28-32 °C by day and room temperature at night the eggs hatch after 65-72 days. If the temperature fluctuates more, from 34 °C by day to 18 °C at night, it takes 75-86 days. Newly hatched young are 4-5 cm from snout to vent and about 13 cm in total.

Read more: Incubating eggs

REARING THE YOUNG

The young are very aggressive towards each other and must be reared separately from the first days, or they are bitten and some die. The adults must not be kept with the young. Feed small insects and soft fruit daily, dusted with calcium, and provide light and UVB as for 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 sunlight, and dust the food.
- Obesity from too much fruit and too little exercise. Keep fruit to a smaller part of the diet.
- Mites and internal parasites in new animals. Quarantine new animals and check them, and take a faecal sample before the winter rest.
- Wounds from fights and bites. Separate the animals if there are wounds.
- Loss of the tail. It regrows, but without new vertebrae.
- Problems during the winter rest in thin or sick animals. If the animal is sick or underweight, it must not be given a winter rest.

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.