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GECKOS

Chinese leopard gecko

Goniurosaurus luii

A slender, nocturnal tiger gecko from the forested limestone mountains on the border between southern China and northern Vietnam, with orange eyes and narrow yellow bands on a light brown ground colour. It lives hidden in rock crevices and wants it cool and damp. In the wild it is Vulnerable, so only captive-bred animals belong in the terrarium.

Family: Eublepharidae Former name: *Goniurosaurus kadoorieorum* Published 15 November 2026

KEY FACTS

THE ANIMAL

Adult size	**18-24 cm** total length incl. tail
Lifespan	**10-20 years**
Active	**At dusk and at night**
Lifestyle	**Rock-dwelling and terrestrial**
Habitat	**Rainforest and rocky terrain**
Difficulty	**Intermediate**

CARE

Min. enclosure	**60 × 45 × 60 cm** L × W × H for 1 adult
Temperature, day	**22-26 °C**
Temperature, night	**18-22 °C**
Humidity	**60-90%**
UVB	**Optional** Ferguson zone 1
Diet	**Insects**
Kept	**Singly, in pairs or one male with several females**

BREEDING

Reproduction	**Egg-laying**
Clutch size	**1-2 eggs**
Clutches per year	**1-4**
Incubation	**45-80 days** at 24-27 °C

PROTECTION AND PAPERWORK

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

About the species

Goniurosaurus luii belongs to the tiger geckos, a genus of eyelid geckos from southern China, Vietnam and Japan. It is slender and lightly built, with long, thin legs, a triangular head and large eyes with vertical pupils and movable eyelids. The iris is bright orange, and above the eyes sits a row of distinctly enlarged scale knobs, which is one of the species' hallmarks.

The head, body and legs are light brown to greyish brown with small dark spots. Across the body lie narrow, unspotted bands in yellow or orange-brown, each with a thin dark edge: a V-shaped nuchal band, three bands between the fore and hind legs and one at the base of the tail. The tail is almost black with three to six white bands. Juveniles look different from adults, and the colours change gradually as they grow.

In a large survey of animals from Vietnam and China, adult males measured on average 109 mm from snout to vent and females 112 mm, with a tail of about 72 mm. With the tail the species thus reaches about 18-24 cm, and the sexes are almost equal in size. Males are recognised by a row of pores in front of the vent and a distinct thickening at the base of the tail. The tail can be shed if the animal is seized. It grows back, but looks different.

The species was described in 1999 from animals from Pingxiang in the Chinese province of Guangxi and is named after Wai Lui, who spent six years tracking down the populations. In 2006 it was also found in Vietnam. The closely related *Goniurosaurus kadoorieorum*, described in 2015, is now regarded as the same species, because it cannot be distinguished by reliable characters. The genus has been revised many times, and in the hobby tiger geckos are often mixed up, so experience with other species should be taken with reservations.

Relatively little has been published about the care of this particular species. Several figures in this guide are therefore borrowed from the closely related *Goniurosaurus huuliensis*, which has been bred in captivity since 2019 and whose care is well described. This is stated alongside the individual figures.

The gecko is shy and cautious and not an animal for daily handling. On the other hand it is fascinating to follow in a well-furnished terrarium when it comes out after dark.

Distribution and habitat

The species lives in a small area of limestone mountains on both sides of the border between southern China and northern Vietnam. In China it is found in south-western Guangxi, where the type locality is at Pingxiang, and in Nonggang Reserve north-east of the Zuojiang river. In Vietnam it is known from the provinces of Cao Bang and Lang Son, including from Ha Lang district in Cao Bang. The first Vietnamese record was reported in 2006, and Lang Son was added in 2016.

The island of Hainan is sometimes also given as part of the range, but the more recent field surveys know the species only from the mainland, and Hainan is therefore not on the map. The populations are small and scattered. At the type locality the species has not been found again, probably because it has been collected for the pet trade.

> **Native range:** China and Vietnam.

HABITAT

The gecko lives in limestone mountains (karst) covered with evergreen broadleaf forest, at around 100-700 metres above sea level. In Cao Bang it has been found at about 364 metres elevation. Most animals are seen on rock walls and large boulders, only a few on the forest floor or in branches. By day they hide in crevices and caves, and at night they come out to hunt insects and other small animals. In Nonggang Reserve the species prefers to sit on south-facing slopes.

The climate has not been measured for this particular species. For the closely related *Goniurosaurus catbaensis* on the Cat Ba islands in Vietnam, 70-99 % humidity and 22-28 °C have been measured in the summer months on the surface where the animals sat. That gives a good picture of what the genus is used to: high humidity and moderate warmth. Tiger geckos are active in the summer half of the year and take a cool pause in winter, and that rhythm must be imitated in the terrarium if the animals are to breed.

Read more: Humidity, misting and ventilation

Care

THE ENCLOSURE

An adult needs an enclosure of at least 60 × 45 × 60 cm (length × width × height). For a pair or a male with two females of *Goniurosaurus huuliensis* at least 80 × 50 × 50 cm is recommended, and for pairs and trios of the luii group 90 cm in length is a good size. The species spends almost all of its active time on the back wall and hunts from above, so it needs both height and something to climb on. Juveniles grow up best in a small plastic box or a small enclosure where they easily find food and water (see rearing).

Furnish the enclosure as a landscape of hides: cork tubes, cork bark, flat stones, roots and branches in front of a back wall of cork or a textured panel that looks like rock. The more crevices and caves, the more secure the animals become, and the more often they show themselves. A damp hide with sphagnum helps them through shedding.

A mixture of fertiliser-free potting soil and sand or coco fibre suits as substrate, ideally with a layer of leaves on top. A drainage layer at the bottom prevents water from standing and causing mould and bacteria. Plants such as pothos, ficus and ferns provide humidity and cover. The geckos often use a fixed toilet spot, which is easy to keep clean. Ensure good ventilation, so the air does not stand still.

Read more: Terrarium construction and bioactive substrate

TEMPERATURE

The species wants it cool and seldom needs extra heat in a Danish living room. In summer 22-26 °C suits by day, and at night the temperature may fall to 18-22 °C. Typical values are 24-26 °C by day and 20-22 °C at night, and *Goniurosaurus huuliensis* is kept at 23.5-26 °C from March to October with a slight drop at night.

Heat is the greatest danger. Tiger geckos do not tolerate prolonged periods above 28 °C, and sustained heat can kill them. The fact box therefore has no basking spot: up to 28 °C locally can be tolerated, but it is not necessary. Place the enclosure away from sunny windows, and measure with a digital thermometer both at the top and the bottom.

If the animals are to breed, they get a cool winter pause of two to three months at 18-22 °C. Both 19-22 °C by day and 18-20 °C by day with 14-16 °C at night have given good results. Afterwards the temperature is slowly raised again (see mating).

Read more: Heat and temperature

HUMIDITY AND WATER

Humidity must be high, but the air must not stand still. Figures for the species are 60-80 %, and *Goniurosaurus huuliensis* is kept at 70-90 %. Mist the enclosure every evening, so that droplets form on the back wall, plants and leaves, and let it dry out a little during the day. The geckos lick water from surfaces, and the mist is often their most important drinking water. Provide a shallow bowl of fresh water all the same, changed daily.

The species tolerates prolonged dryness poorly: the animals are weakened, get problems with shedding and may die. Conversely the substrate must not stay constantly wet either, so use drainage and good ventilation. In winter, mist a little less. A hygrometer shows whether the rhythm is holding.

LIGHTING AND UVB

The geckos are active at dusk and at night and need only weak light from LED strips or T5 tubes, which provide a fixed daily rhythm. *Goniurosaurus huuliensis* is given 11.5 hours of light in summer and 10.5 hours in winter. Use a timer, and let the night be completely dark.

UVB is not necessary when the food is dusted with calcium and vitamin D3, and *Goniurosaurus huuliensis* manages with ordinary lighting. A weak UVB light can, however, benefit tiger geckos, because it can strengthen calcium metabolism. If you choose it, use a tube for shade-dwelling animals (Ferguson zone 1), for example a 5-7 % T5 tube, over part of the enclosure, so that the UV index is at most around 1-2 on the uppermost surfaces and there is always shade and cover.

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

FEEDING

Tiger geckos are pure insectivores. Give crickets, dubia roaches and locusts as the staple diet and now and then mealworms, waxworms or silkworm pupae. The prey must be smaller than the distance between the animal's eyes, and everything is dusted with calcium and a vitamin-mineral supplement. Adults are fed two to three times a week. *Goniurosaurus huuliensis* is fed about twice a week.

Juveniles get small crickets from about three days after hatching and then every other day or three times a week for the first months. A small dish of calcium that the animals can lick from is a good idea. It must be changed often, because the calcium absorbs moisture and goes mouldy. Waxworms and other fatty larvae should only be a treat, because adults easily become too fat.

Read more: Feeder animals: keeping and breeding

BEHAVIOUR AND HANDLING

Tiger geckos are secretive animals that spend the day hidden and come out only when it is dark. They dash for cover if startled and are best observed. Some animals tolerate being picked up, but you should not count on it. Keep handling short, never grab the tail, and give new animals a couple of weeks of peace.

The species can be kept alone, in pairs or as a male with two females if there is space and many hides. Two males must never be kept together, because they fight. Juveniles can for a time live in small groups of the same size, but must be separated before they become sexually mature. It is entirely normal for the gecko to lick its eyes and mouth clean with its tongue, and like other eyelid geckos it eats its shed skin.

Breeding

SEXUAL MATURITY AND SEXING

Males are recognised by a row of pores in front of the vent and the distinct thickening at the base of the tail, where the hemipenal pouches sit. In *Goniurosaurus huuliensis* the sex can be seen from about six months of age, and the animals are sexually mature at around two years. When *Goniurosaurus luii* reaches sexual maturity is not known with certainty. As little as 6-10 months is mentioned, but that is far too early to put a female to breed, and the fact box therefore has no figure.

Wait until the female is fully grown and in good condition, preferably until she is about two years old. The eggs drain her calcium reserves, and breeding too early can cause calcium deficiency and lost eggs. Only use animals of known origin, and never cross different species or localities of tiger geckos.

MATING

The breeding season begins in spring, when temperature and humidity rise. Beforehand the animals must have a cool winter: two to three months at 18-22 °C with shorter days and food at most once a week. The temperature is then slowly raised to 25-26 °C, and feeding is increased. Without the winter pause many tiger geckos do not come into breeding condition.

Put the male in with the female, and let them stay together as long as there is peace. The species can also be kept permanently as a pair or trio. Remove the male if the female seems stressed or loses weight, and give her breaks during the season.

EGG-LAYING AND CLUTCHES

The female almost always lays two soft-shelled eggs at a time, more rarely only one, and buries them in the substrate. That makes several clutches during the season. In *Goniurosaurus huuliensis* one to three clutches a year is typical and four possible, and in captivity most eggs are laid between June and September. For *Goniurosaurus luii* up to six clutches are mentioned, but the fact box sticks to the better documented one to four.

Place a laying box with at least 5 cm of damp sphagnum, coco fibre or vermiculite in the enclosure. Give the female plenty of calcium and insects throughout the season, and remove the male and give her a rest if she loses weight.

INCUBATION

Move the eggs carefully to a closed plastic box with slightly damp vermiculite and a few small air holes, and place them about a third of the way into the substrate. Mark the top, and do not turn them. The eggs are typically incubated at 25-27 °C. Eggs of *Goniurosaurus huuliensis* can be left at enclosure temperature, about 23.5-26 °C, and 24-27 °C is recommended in an incubator.

The time depends on temperature: at 27 °C the eggs hatch after 45-50 days and at 25-26 °C after 60-80 days. In *Goniurosaurus huuliensis* the average is 70-75 days at a slightly lower temperature. At hatching fluid seeps out of the shell, and the hatchling may take several hours to get out. Whether temperature determines sex in the species is not known.

Read more: Incubating eggs

REARING THE YOUNG

The hatchlings shed shortly after hatching. Once that is over, they are moved to a small plastic box of about 30 × 20 × 20 cm with coco fibre, a damp corner with sphagnum, a piece of cork and a small water bowl. Kitchen paper as substrate for the first weeks makes it easy to see whether the hatchling is eating and passing normal droppings. Two to three hatchlings can be kept together for the first weeks and later moved to enclosures of 40 × 40 × 35 cm up to 60 × 50 × 40 cm. Mist daily.

The first meal is small crickets after about three days, then every other day or three times a week, always dusted with calcium and vitamins. The juveniles change colour as they grow, and juveniles of different tiger geckos are almost impossible to tell apart, so keep track of the origin. Separate the animals before they become sexually mature, especially the males.

Health and common mistakes

Tiger geckos are hardy when the climate is right, and most problems are caused by wrong temperature, humidity or calcium. The typical mistakes are:

- Too much heat. Above 28 °C the animals become stressed, and a longer time at high heat can kill them.
- Dry periods. If the air is dry for a long time, the animals are weakened and may die. Mist daily, and provide a damp hide.
- Retained shed stuck on the toes and tail tip when the air is too dry. A damp hide helps.
- Calcium deficiency, especially in juveniles and females in the breeding season. It causes soft bones and lost eggs and can lead to egg-laying difficulties. Dust all food with calcium and vitamins.

- Mould and bacteria in a constantly wet substrate without drainage and ventilation.
- Parasites. Regular faecal samples are recommended, and new animals should be quarantined.

Warning signs are loss of appetite for several weeks, weight loss, a thin tail and a limp posture. Contact a vet experienced with reptiles if the animal does not eat or seems ill.

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.