

Roger's Aquatics & Pet Supplies: African Fat Tailed Geckos

Hemitheconyx caudicinctus is a cute, nocturnal species from Western Africa. They stay relatively small, reaching only 7 – 8" in total length, and can live 10 – 15 years under proper care. They are easily tamed down and make great pets for beginning reptile hobbyists. They are crepuscular, meaning they prefer to come out in the evenings.

Enclosure: Size, Substrate, and Accessories

A 10 gallon tank is the minimum size enclosure for a single gecko, although a 15 gallon is more ideal for creating a proper gradient and giving the gecko ample space to climb around.

Cypress bedding (ex. Forest Floor by Zoo Med), coco coir (ex. Plantation Soil by Exo Terra or Eco Earth by Zoo Med), or a mixture of coco coir and sand (never full sand), and reptile carpet are all appropriate choices for substrate for these geckos. Younger geckos should be housed on carpet or paper towel to prevent them from accidentally ingesting their substrate. It is important to note that there is a risk of impaction with any animal that is being housed on loose substrate. Typically, impaction only occurs to animals that are dehydrated, not receiving adequate lighting or diet, or in some other way are unhealthy, and it is much rarer than people think, but if you choose to keep your animal on loose substrate you should familiarize yourself with the signs of impaction and see what local vets deal with reptiles.

The gecko should be provided with a couple of different hides in different areas of the tank to allow it to thermoregulate while also remaining hidden. One of these hides should be a humid hide, which will give the gecko an area of higher humidity to shed in. Hides can be made up of almost anything – caves, cork rounds, and half logs are all good examples. Plants and logs can also be added to give the gecko more space to climb around.

Lighting and Heat

African fat tailed geckos should be provided with a basking area of around 88 – 92 F, with a cool side of 80 F. This can be achieved using an under tank heat pad that is hooked up to a thermostat, a ceramic heat emitter, or a daylight basking bulb. At night, can comfortably drop to 70 – 75 F. A proper thermometer should always be used. Too hot, and you could burn or over heat your gecko. Too cold and the gecko will not grow properly, or digest properly. Digital thermometers are preferred, since they are more accurate.

While UVB is not considered essential for this species, it has proven to be beneficial to the health of the gecko. This type of lighting maintains proper vitamin D3 levels, which allows them to properly absorb and metabolize calcium, regulates the immune system, and promotes proper organ development. Since these lights are aren't quite the same as the sun, providing a calcium with added D3 once a week is beneficial. If provided to the African fat tails, a low level such as a 5.0 bulb is acceptable.

Diet and Supplements

African fat tailed geckos will accept crickets, mealworms, and small super worms on a regular basis, and wax worms, horn worms and butter worms as treats. Babies and juveniles should be fed daily, while adults can be fed every second day. All feeders should be gut loaded 1 – 24 hours before being fed to the gecko. Feeder insects should be dusted with a calcium without D3 every 2 – 3 feedings, and a multivitamin every 1 – 2 feedings. It can be beneficial to provide a calcium supplement with D3 once a week as well.

Hydration and Humidity

A shallow water dish should always be provided to the gecko. The water should be replaced every second day, and bleached once a week to prevent the growth of bacteria. The humidity should be maintained between 40 – 60%. Pouring a small amount of water into the substrate as needed will help maintain the humidity, as well as a light misting. The humid hide should provide an area that is in the higher end of their humidity needs. The hide should have a little moss or paper towel in it, and be misted daily. A proper hygrometer should be used to measure the humidity levels. Digital is preferred since it is more accurate.

Cohabitation

This species thrives when housed individually, so it is not recommended to house them together. There are some general rules to follow if they are going to be housed together. Two males should never be housed together, since they will fight, usually to the death. Male-female groups or pairs sometimes work, but more often than not will breed. Many keepers will let the animals breed and freeze the eggs so they do not have to deal with the responsibility of the babies – this is not an acceptable solution if you knowingly let your animals breed with no intent of raising the babies. Each time the female lays eggs, she is depleting her fat and calcium stores needlessly, and if she is not replenished properly she is at risk for things like metabolic bone disease, and in extreme cases death. If she does not have a suitable lay box, she may hold onto the eggs until they are too big for her to lay, resulting in egg binding. When this happens, the animal needs immediate surgery. Female pairs or groups can sometimes be aggressive towards each other, and will usually compete for resources.

Sexing

Males have a set of V-shaped pre-anal pores and prominent hemipenal bulges.

Checklist of Supplies

- ✓ Minimum of a 10 gallon tank
- ✓ Secure lid with clips
- ✓ Thermometer
- ✓ Hygrometer
- ✓ Minimum of t-wo hides
 - One should be a humid hide
- ✓ Water dish
- ✓ Decorations
 - Wood
 - Plants
- ✓ Heat source
 - Heat pad with appropriate wattage bulb OR
 - Heat pad hooked up to a thermostat
- ✓ 5.0 UVB bulb (optional)
- ✓ Calcium without D3
- ✓ Calcium with D3
- ✓ Multivitamins
- ✓ Insect keeper
- ✓ Insect gut load
- ✓ Insect diet