

Leopard Gecko

(Eublepharis macularius)

Native Range:

Most of the Leopard Geckos in captivity are captive-bred from stock collected in Pakistan and adjacent India in the 1980s. They inhabit dry areas of desert and scrub-land, preferring rocky areas which provide suitable cover. They spend daytime underground, where conditions are cooler and moist, emerging at night to hunt.

Size:

Approximately three to four inches long at birth, they average about eight inches in length as adults. Occasional specimens may exceed ten inches in length, and there are a few records of twelve inch specimens.

Handling:

Leopard Geckos rarely attempt to bite, although they may do so if restrained. Handle gently, without pinching or squeezing. Remember that the tail may break off if handled roughly, and although it will regenerate, it will not appear original. Until accustomed to handling; the gecko should be handled inside the cage or while sitting on the floor. A frightened gecko may leap out of the keepers' hand and take a fatal fall if held while standing.

Caging:

Just about anything can be used, with a ten gallon aquarium being adequate for a pair. Leopard Geckos cannot climb smooth surfaces, so a screen cover is not needed – although it may keep out the family cat!

Substrate:

Leopard Geckos will ingest particles of substrate to use as grit, similar to birds. Therefore, use caution in choosing a substrate or impaction may result. Commercial breeders prefer to maintain their specimens on plain paper, plastic or tile flooring.

Food:

A variety of small insects and arthropods are eagerly accepted by Leopard Geckos. Hatchlings will feed on two to three week crickets and wax-worms. As they grow, provide larger crickets, wax-worms, and mealworms. Adult specimens will take an occasional pinkie mouse. Dust food with a calcium powder about twice a week to provide additional calcium for growing bones. Adults may be supplemented once weekly, unless females are producing eggs. This uses huge amounts of calcium, and supplements should be made daily.

Humidity & Water:

Provide clean water in a shallow dish, about the same height as the Leopard Gecko. Humidity should be kept low, or respiratory problems can result. Due to the variance in cages and home environments, some

geckos may experience shedding problems, particularly the toes. If this is noticed, provide a small plastic container with lid (cut an access hole in the side) filled with damp sphagnum moss. This will allow the animal to shed properly. Stuck sheds on toes may harden and constrict the blood flow to the toes, causing loss of the toes.

Heating & Lighting:

Provide a thermal gradient by placing a heat pad under one end of the cage. This should allow the gecko to choose from higher temperatures (about 90-95F) at the warm end, and cooler temperatures (about 78-83F) at the cooler end. Provide suitable hiding areas at both warm and cool areas, so the lizards can feel secure at any temperature. Temperatures below 75F should be avoided. No special lighting is required for these nocturnal animals.

Reproduction:

Males are larger than females, and can be distinguished by the presence a V-shaped row of pre-anal pores and a pair of prominent hemipene bulges. Do not keep more than one male per cage as they will fight. Eggs are laid in pairs, usually every three to four weeks. This will continue until the females' fat and calcium reserves are depleted. Some females lay up to sixteen eggs in a season, although most produce eight to twelve. Incubation can take from 45 to 65 days, depending on temperature. Interestingly, the sex of the hatchling is dependent upon temperature, with only males being produced at over 89F, and only females at under 83F.

Colour and Pattern Phases:

Originally, Leopard Geckos were patterned with dark spots on a pale tan or pale yellowish background. Juveniles are banded in dark brownish black on yellow. Over the years, breeders have selected for various traits, and a wide variety of colour and pattern types are being produced. Most breeders have selected for brighter yellow, and the average Leopard Gecko is now considerably more yellow than wild types. In the past this was known as 'High-Yellow', but this term is now used indiscriminately. Tyrosinase positive albinos of three different types are being produced, as are several other mutations. A solid yellow variety, known as 'Leucistic' or 'Patternless' is particularly attractive, as are the newer 'Hypomelanistic' varieties. These have the dark spots replaced with pale tan, and fewer in number, and are usually very bright yellow. 'Tangerine' morphs are lovely indeed, with the yellow pigmentation so intense that it appears bright orange on the flanks and back of the lizard. Many pattern types are also available, usually consisting of stripes or broken stripes, and are variously referred to as 'Striped', 'Jungle', 'Designer', etc. Many pattern types are not genetic, or are at least difficult to reproduce consistently.