

Gargoyle Geckos by Larissa Lurid

Gargoyle geckos (*Rhacodactylus Auriculatus*) are a 6-8 inch lizard from the island of New Caledonia. Their name was given to them because of the two little “horns” that their skull forms. They live 15-20 years and are an arboreal species that spends much of their time in the trees. Being nocturnal they are found hiding in tight, dark places for safety during the day and come out to jump through the branches, hunting for small insects, nectar, and soft fruits at night. They also have a semi-prehensile tail that can wrap around objects to help them balance. As a defense mechanism it can be dropped and will grow back, but will not look as nice as the original or be as strong. They also change colors which is referred to as being “fired up” or “fired down. When fired up they show more color and when fired down they will show less. This is caused by many factors such as humidity, mood, temperature, etc. Gargoyle geckos are the ideal reptile for beginners to expert keepers due to their extremely simple care requirements, docile demeanor, and beautiful range of color morphs. If you are looking for your first reptile, this is the species for you!

Temperature, Humidity, Lighting

Gargoyle geckos require 70-80 degree temperatures, which means they are basically a room temperature lizard and don't require any special heating unless your house is very cold during the winter. In this case you can use a very low wattage heat mat attached to a thermostat or very low wattage heat bulb to keep their environment in this range. Below 68 and their metabolism will slow and they won't eat as much or grow as well. Temperatures above 82 will easily kill them, so it's important to make sure your house or any heating elements you use if your house is cool do not get their cage above this temperature. Too many times have people bought geckos and brought them outside in the sun, put them on a warm piece of concrete in the shade, left in the car, or let their house get too hot and they can die within minutes. Temperatures can be

measured with digital temperature probes or digital thermometers that attach to the side of the cage. Avoid analogue gauges since they are not as accurate, which can put your gecko's health at risk. As for humidity, their enclosure needs to be sprayed with water about once or twice per day. If you are using a heating element and the cage dries out fast you can do it a bit more often. They require about 60% humidity and you want the cage to stay humid all day and dry out by the same time the next day. If it stays constantly very wet it can cause mold or other problems. Misting is also important because this is how they drink water. They lick the water



droplets off the leaves or sides of the cage. Lastly, another reason that they make such simple and cheap to care for pets is that they don't need any UV lighting since they are nocturnal.

Feeding

Another reason that gargoyle geckos make great pets is that they have the simplest diet of any lizard (along with crested geckos). For people who don't want insects or meat in their house this species is perfect. Gargoyle geckos eat Repashy powdered gecko diet, which provides 100% of the nutrition that they require. This food is kept in a bag or sealed container in the fridge which stays fresh for a year and is mixed with water when time to feed. You can also supplement the diet with calcium dusted dubia cockroach nymphs and crickets. This can't be the whole diet, but is good to add in a few times a week. This is not necessary though and not all gargoyles will be interested in eating insects.

NEVER feed baby food! Some people try to say that using baby food mixed with calcium and multivitamin powder is “healthy” for gargoyle geckos and crested geckos, etc., but it's something that should never be eaten. For one, baby food has sugars, preservatives, chemicals, and fruit or veggies mashed up aren't even a complete diet. Also baby food is much more expensive than the powdered diet

created for them and lasts about 2 days in the fridge unlike the powdered gecko diet which lasts 1 year fresh in the fridge. When fed baby food they will have stunted growth from lack of nutrients as well as how they will develop metabolic bone disease (MBD) which is a disorder that severely twists and deforms their bones in horribly painful ways as well as shutting down their organs. It's an extremely torturous, slow, death for them and can easily be avoided by giving them a proper diet.



Crested Gecko with MBD courtesy of Jennifer Kim

Housing

Gargoyle geckos can live in various types of enclosures. Many people use plastic bins with a small amount of screen or some holes for ventilation, krittter keepers when they are younger, or glass/acrylic enclosures can be used as well. Size of the enclosure depends on the size of the gecko; the cage size must grow with the gecko. If they are put in an enclosure that is too large they can become stressed as well as not able to find their food. Getting a gram scale is important to be able to keep track of the size of the gecko to be able to tell when they need a larger enclosure as well as keep track of their health. (Also to make sure they are proper size to breed since females need to be at least 45 grams before breeding or they will get stunted growth or can become egg bound and die.) For babies you will start out with a small krittter keeper and move to medium, large, and then a 10 gallon tank stood on it's side. Height is important in their enclosure since they are arboreal. As for bins you can start out with a 6 quart, then move to 12 quart, 15 quart, then 24 quart. Gargoyle geckos should never be housed together as hatchlings or adults. They are solitary and will be aggressive to

any other animals in the cage with them. Housing multiple geckos together will lead to fighting which will caused stressed geckos, bitten off toes and tails, or even death. In the wild they actually hunt other small lizards sometimes so it's important to never keep them together unless they are up to proper breeding size and it's a male and female together only for breeding season if you are

looking to have babies. Breeding pairs should still be watched since they can be aggressive towards each other as well.

There are two styles of enclosures that can be used. The simplest is having paper towel substrate with plastic leafy vines, fake plants, branches, etc. This is the safest as well since there are no worries about substrate being ingested. Cork bark is another great addition which they can climb on or hide behind. Another type of setup is more naturalistic with coco fiber or organic soil substrate and animal safe plants such as pothos, sansevieria, asplenium, or philodendron. Never feed insects inside setups with loose substrate as it can accidentally be eaten which will cause impaction (a blockage in their digestive system) which will lead to death.

Handling

These geckos are known for being docile and easy to handle. They will rest on your hand or shoulder and jump from hand to hand. When holding, just put one hand in front of the other and let them walk or jump to the other. It's best not to disturb them while they are asleep during the day as well. Also be sure to handle gently and never grab at the gecko (especially by the tail, which can break off) because it can scare them.

