

Leopard Gecko

Eublepharus macularius

Fact Sheet

Status: Common

Distribution: Iran, Afghanistan, Western India and Pakistan

Habitat: Deserts and arid grasslands

Diet: Wild: insects and fruit, but also spiders, snails, small lizards, birds and bird eggs
Zoo: crickets, meal worms and baby mice, or “pinkies”

Length: 8 to 10 inches

Weight: 50 to 80 grams

Reproduction: Leopard geckos reach sexual maturity at around ten months of age. They generally breed from January to August. First time mothers usually only produce a single egg, though every clutch afterwards generally consists of 2 eggs. Older, more developed females can produce clutches of from 10 to 16 eggs. The eggs are laid in moist soil, and the gender of the offspring depends on the incubation temperature during the first two weeks of development. A peak daytime temperature of below 84 degrees Fahrenheit will result in mostly females, while a daytime high of 90 to 92 degrees Fahrenheit will produce mostly males. The eggs hatch after an incubation period of around 60 days.

Longevity: Up to 27 years, generally around 8 years

General Description: Adults are yellow with dark brown spots, while juveniles have a dark banding pattern as well. Unlike other species of geckos, the leopard gecko does not have sticky pads on its feet, but it does have moveable eyelids.

Behavior: These animals are nocturnal, finding shelter beneath rocks or taking refuge in burrows during the daylight hours. Males are very territorial and will fight other males to the death, while females are non-aggressive.

Did you know? The leopard gecko stores fat in its tail to survive during aestivation periods, or times of food scarcity. If attacked, this lizard can shed its tail to distract the predator while it makes its get away.

Where can you find them? They are popular as pets, in zoos and they can also be found in their natural habitat.



Distribution, Habitat, General Description, and Behavior from:

<http://members.aol.com/msnick1/leopardgeckos.html>

Reproduction, Longevity from: <http://www.leopardgecko.com/emcare.html>

Diet, Did you know and some of Behavior from:

http://www.zoo.org/educate/fact_sheets/day/gecko.htm

Weight from:

<http://72.14.209.104/search?q=cache:ZMOg97JfWuYJ:cluster3.biosci.utexas.edu/faculty/lizard/public/Nora.pdf+Leopard+Gecko+Weight&hl=en&gl=us&ct=clnk&cd=33>

The Leopard Gecko, a Herpetocultural Star

by **Petra Spiess-Rocky Mountain Herpetoculture**

One of the most successful species in the history of herpetoculture is the leopard gecko (*Eublepharis macularius*). The leopard gecko is hardy, prolific, and comes in a wide variety of interesting color and pattern morphs. Few species, with perhaps the exception of the corn snake (*Elaphe guttata guttata*), are bred in such large numbers annually in the United States. Many commercial breeders produce thousands of baby leopard geckos every year, making this species one of the most available, and fortunately suitable, species for the beginning and advanced herpetoculturist alike.

Housing

A pair of adult leopard geckos can be comfortably housed in a standard fifteen-gallon aquarium. Many breeders utilize a "harem" system. A harem system is composed of one male and up to ten females. Often, leopard gecko harems are set up in a sweater box sized rack system. A sweater box Rubbermaid container is approximately one foot in width and two feet in length. Rack systems are custom made cages that look a lot like a chest of drawers, the plastic containers pull out from the frame as a drawer pulls out from a cabinet. Running along the back side of rack systems is usually some type of heat tape, regulated by a thermostat to prevent a fire hazard. One male and four females can be comfortably housed in this type of system. If you are planning on having more than a few leopard gecko colonies, this is one of the most cost effective and space saving ways to keep them. As leopard geckos are nocturnal, they require several hiding spots. Hiding spots can be easily and cheaply constructed out of terracotta plant saucers with an access hole knocked in the side, cardboard boxes, used margarine tubs, or you can purchase commercially sold plastic hiding spots.

Leopard geckos also require a humidity spot in the enclosure so that they may properly shed their skin. Failure to provide such an area will often result in the loss of digits, as the old skin clings to the animal and may cut off circulation to these extremities. To make a humidity spot, obtain an enclosed Tupperware container that will comfortably house all of the geckos in the enclosure at once (the shoebox size works well for up to four adult geckos). Cut an access hole in the side of the container, and fill the container half way with moist peat, sphagnum moss, or even paper towels. This area must always be kept moist.

The substrate (what is on the bottom of the cage) can be several materials. I personally use paper towels because they are cheap and easy to clean. However, other keepers utilize newspaper, sand, lizard litter (a commercially sold product), fine reptile bark, Astroturf, and peat moss. I personally do not like any loose type of substrate, including sand, as I am concerned about excessive ingestion. Many keepers have however, kept their animals successfully for long periods on these substrates, while others have had problems, I prefer not to risk it. One note, some of the commercially sold reptile substrates claim to be "completely digestible", this is a misleading claim because most of these products contain plant by-products (cellulose, lignin) that very few organisms can actually digest (termites are one that can because they contain symbiotic bacteria that do it for them). Whenever purchasing reptile products on the market, consider this: there is no regulation agency out there making sure their claims are actually true so they can say anything they want without fear of punishment-just take the claims with a grain of salt and do your research first.

Heating

Like most reptiles, leopard geckos generally require some type of supplemental heating. One end of the enclosure should be heated to 86-88 degrees, the other end can range from 70-80 degrees. In aquariums, one of the best ways to provide this thermal gradient is to use an undertank heating pad. Several quality undertank heating pads are on the market. Basically, they are similar to human heating pads but are thin and plastic with one side being adhesive. The adhesive side attaches to the underside of the outside of the aquarium on one end of the cage. I find these heating pads work well because they do not give off light, which can disturb the geckos at night. Other heating options include heat light, but they can be disturbing to the nocturnal behavior of leopard geckos if left on at night (unless a blue or red bulb is used). Providing a correct thermal gradient is essential when keeping leopard geckos, without it, they have problems digesting food and regulating their immune systems.

Feeding

Baby leopard geckos will take crickets that are slightly smaller than their heads, and small mealworms. I feed about 6-8 prey items to my babies and juveniles four to five times a week. The adults will eat adult sized crickets, large mealworms, king mealworms, and occasional pinky mice. Adults receive about 10 food items each four times a week, slightly more during the breeding season. It is important to provide calcium supplementation to prevent nutritional disorders. One method is the "shake and bake", the prey items are put into a plastic bag, some calcium powder is dumped in, and the insects are coated until covered. This method works but is rather labor intensive. Leopard geckos will also consume calcium powder straight from a dish, regulating their own intake, which I find to be the more useful method.

Handling

No reptile likes to be excessively handled, but some species tolerate it better than others. Leopard geckos are generally amenable to limited handling (a few times a week) and rarely bite or evacuate their cloacal contents on their keepers (which is a plus let me tell you-try tegus or most monitors some time). Some

people claim that their animals "like to be held", I consider this anthropomorphizing in that I suppose some of these people believe their animals enjoy their company, most likely they are enjoying the heat of your body, nothing else. Reptiles are not social animals and have not evolved the need for contact and companionship we attribute to other animals, specifically mammals (dogs and cats-cats questionable sometimes). Reptiles are not touched by other living organisms except during sex or combat with conspecifics, or during an encounter when they are the intended prey of some other animal. Consequently, reptiles most likely view large mammals coming towards them and grasping them (us) as predators, which as you can imagine, is probably stressful. Over time, some of the more intelligent reptiles, or reptiles that have evolved without the presence of large, mammalian predators, can become accustomed to limited handling, but I seriously doubt they ever like or need it. This view is based on my graduate education in biological and ecological principles.

Breeding

Leopard geckos are very easy to breed. Obviously the first important factor is to have a male and female leopard gecko. Male leopard geckos are distinguished from females by the presence of large, prefemoral pores right before the vent. While females also have these pores, they are much less pronounced. Male leopard geckos also have a distinguishable bulge just past the vent at the base of the tail where the hemipenes are stored. Males will fight with other males, so it is best to have only one male in a breeding situation. To stimulate breeding, leopard geckos should have a 4-6 week period of reduced temperatures. Two weeks prior to a reduction of temperature, leopard geckos should not be fed in order to allow their digestive tracts to clear, however, water should still be provided. The temperature should be slowly lowered over several days to a low of 60-65 degrees. The geckos should be checked a few times a week during this cool down period for any signs of illness. Any gecko exhibiting signs of illness (puffed out throat pouch, gaping mouth etc..) should be immediately removed from hibernation and warmed slowly over a few days to normal temperatures. If the gecko does not improve over a few days of normal temperatures, it should be taken to a qualified herp veterinarian. After the hibernation period, the geckos should be warmed up over a few days to normal maintenance temperatures and food offered. It is important that the female geckos are fed heavily and of good body weight during this period. A few weeks after they have been warmed up, the geckos will begin breeding.

It is easy to ascertain if a female leopard gecko is carrying eggs. When a gravid female leopard gecko is turned upside down, the developing eggs are visible through the skin just above the vent on both sides of the body. When developing eggs are visible, it is important to include an egg-laying chamber in the enclosure. An egg-laying chamber can be constructed out of a plastic Tupperware container with an access hole cut in the side. The egg-laying chamber should be filled with a moist, loose substrate such as peat moss, vermiculite, or potting soil. The humidity site can often double as the egg-laying site. Female leopard geckos will bury clutches of two eggs each in the substrate at two to three week intervals. If the egg-laying chamber is on top of the heat source, it is important to check the egg-laying chamber often so the eggs do not dry out. After the eggs have been laid, they should be removed and artificially incubated. Leopard geckos are temperature sex dependent, temperatures

between 80-86 degrees produces mostly females, temperatures above 88 degrees produces mostly males. At a temperature of 85-88 degrees F, a mix of sexes is produced. Baby leopard geckos can be set up and maintained in a similar manner to the adults, in a smaller cage of course

From: <http://www.kingsnake.com/rockymountain/RMHPages/RMHeopard.htm>