



**Adam Christopher/Tropic Exotics Herps*

African Fat tailed Gecko (*Hemitheconyx caudicinctus*)

African Geckos with Built in Advantages

African fat tailed geckos are a medium to large sized terrestrial gecko with a light brown, tan, to orange-brown base color and two to three wide, darker brown dorsal cross bands. There is also often a narrow white dorsal stripe present. Unlike most other geckos, fat tailed geckos have moveable eyelids, lack enlarged toe pads, and are mainly terrestrial (ground dwelling). As with several other species of geckos found elsewhere in the world, fat tailed geckos also have a thick fleshy tail that are used to store fat during prolonged dry periods. Their tails can also be lost through caudal autotomy as a means of startling and/or distracting predators long enough for the gecko to escape. Within several weeks to months, a new tail will then regrow, but will remain somewhat more vestigial and limited in function. As with many other geckos, fat tailed geckos are also able to vocalize by creating squeaking or clicking sounds when they are defensive, handled, or become territorial. African fat tailed geckos are somewhat shy, yet docile and undemanding pets with a few basic husbandry requirements, including slightly higher humidity requirements than the similar leopard gecko, making them still a widely kept and sold reptile pets.

Taxonomy

Life: All living, physical, and animate entities

Domain: Eukaryota

Kingdom: Animalia

Phylum/Sub Phylum: Chordata/Vertebrata

Class: Reptilia

Order: Squamata

Suborder: Lacertilia

Infraorder: Gekkota

Family: Gekkonidae

Subfamily: Eublepharinae

Genus: *Hemitheconyx*

Species: *Hemitheconyx caudicinctus**

**Taxonomy subject to change and revision.*

Lifespan and Longevity

If provided the proper care, fat tailed geckos can attain longevity of 10 to 12 years or more in captivity.

Distribution and Habitat

The African fat tailed gecko is a relatively small to medium sized, terrestrial species of gecko indigenous to a broad area of western Africa. More specifically, this species can range from Senegal, Cameroon, and Nigeria, to Togo, Mali, the Ivory Coast, Gambia, and Niger. This species may also occur in Liberia, Guinea, and Sierra Leone as well. Within this range, African fat tailed geckos occupy primarily terrestrial environments, including rocky, open woodlands, grasslands, to savannahs, scrublands, and semi-deserts, where they shelter during the day underneath rocks, other debris, or in burrows.

Origin/History

Hemitheconyx caudicinctus (Duméril, 1851).

Captive African fat-tails originated from wild-caught lineages mainly imported from Benin, Ghana and Togo. Most wild-caught specimens today come from Benin. They would typically be collected on moonless nights and termite mounds when the fat-tails are out foraging for food and seek shelter (Galewood, Jeff 2014). Now, however, African fat-tails are increasingly common as captive-bred individuals in a growing number of color and pattern morphs and mutations. An exact timeline for when these importation of African fat-tailed geckos to the U.S. first began is not fully known, although it may have occurred sometime during at least the 1980's or 1990's.

Experience Level Required

Novice/Beginner to Intermediate/Moderate.

Size

African fat tailed geckos range from about 3.5 to 4.5 inches snout-to-tail length as hatchlings and juveniles, and about 7.0 to 10.0 inches snout to tail length as adults. Some bloodlines can become slightly larger as well. Average snout-to-vent length ranges from about 4.7 to 6.1 inches (SVL).

Housing and Enclosure

Enclosure System: Primarily Terrestrial. Housing must be sealed and escape proof. Hatchling fat tailed geckos can be housed in a 5 to 10 gallon or similar sized terrarium or enclosure, while adults will require at least a 20 gallon long enclosure. These active, nocturnal to crepuscular geckos are primarily terrestrial, and floor space is more important than height. Provide a substrate that holds humidity reasonably well but is not readily ingestible such as play sand mixtures, crushed walnut shells, or natural bark substrates. Provide a hide box and artificial foliage, driftwood, rocks, or logs for ample basking and hiding opportunities. A humid hide can also be provided for additional humidity. For moisture, provide a small bowl or dish of fresh water two to three times per week and mist once to twice weekly.

Temperature, Lighting, and Humidity

Create a thermal gradient, or a warm side to the enclosure, and maintain these geckos at ideal temperatures ranging from 75 to 80 degrees F on the cool side and ambient temperatures, and 88 to 90 degrees F on the warm, basking side. African fat tailed geckos are primarily crepuscular to nocturnal, and do not require additional UVA/UVB lighting, although providing it in moderated amounts can be greatly beneficial for their health, immune system, and overall wellness. For any supplemental heating that may be needed, use a low wattage incandescent or UVA/UVB bulb, radiant or ceramic heat emitter, or UTH (under tank heating element). Spot clean the enclosure for urates, feces, or uneaten food at least twice per week. Be sure to periodically replace the substrate, clean, and disinfect the enclosure and its furnishings at minimum every 2 to 3 months. More specific lighting, heating, and humidity product suggestions and recommendations that can best suit one's needs, as well as those of one's animals can be given as well. African fat tailed geckos should be maintained at relatively moderate humidity levels of 50 to 70 %, with an

additional humid hide being strongly recommended. African fat-tailed geckos require somewhat higher humidity levels than leopard geckos, but otherwise, much of their care is similar to them.

Feeding, Diet, and Nutrition

Insectivorous; In the wild, fat tailed geckos are primarily insectivorous, meaning they eat insects and other invertebrates. In captivity, feed fat tailed geckos a variety of appropriately sized feeder insects such as crickets, roaches, mealworms, superworms, and waxworms. Feeder insects should be gut-loaded in order to increase their optimal nutritional value. Fat tailed geckos also require additional calcium and vitamin D3 supplementation 1 to 2 times weekly or as otherwise directed for optimal health and development. This is in order to prevent Metabolic Bone Disease (MBD) and other growth and nutritional deficiencies. Their feeding frequency will depend on the age, size, and overall health of your animal. Use care as to not overfeed them, as obesity and other health related issues can become an issue. More specific dietary and supplementary product suggestions and recommendations that can best suit one's needs, as well as those of one's animals can be given as well.

Handling

Fat tailed geckos generally are a somewhat shy species that leopard geckos. Many however, can become tolerant of moderate levels of handling and interaction even as juveniles. Handle your gecko gently and deliberately, but do not drop or injure the animal. Do not grab your gecko by its tail or it may detach if they perceive you as a predator or threat. Most adult fat tailed geckos will settle down considerably and become quite docile and easily handled. Allow them to walk in between or from hand to hand.

****Also be sure to practice basic cleanliness and hygiene associated with proper husbandry after touching or handling any animals or animal enclosures to prevent the possibility of contracting salmonellosis or any other zoonotic pathogens****

Contact

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Disclaimer: Note that the information provided in these, or any care sheets, are not intended to be all-exhaustive, and further research and care should always be sought and provided when it comes to any species one may prospectively be interested in. These care sheets are also not intended to serve as substitutes for professional veterinary medical care and husbandry should any animal require it. Always seek proper and professional veterinary care for any animal should the need arise, and be prepared ahead of time for any and all husbandry costs and expenses that may occur with any animal beyond the initial purchase. Any animal owned is ultimately a matter of personal/individual care and responsibility. We cannot make any claims or guarantees regarding any information in this care sheet therein. This care sheet may be reprinted or redistributed only in its entirety.

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