



*Photo Credit: Monaco Nature Encyclopedia

Crocodile or Moorish Wall Gecko (*Tarentola mauritanica*)

Armored Geckos!

Also known as the Moorish wall geckos, or common wall geckos, the crocodile gecko is a large, nocturnal to crepuscular arboreal gecko species ranging from the western and southwestern Mediterranean region, through Northwestern Africa and much of Europe. Crocodile geckos are a robust species with broad heads, and ground coloration can range from grayish, to brownish, or grayish brown with paler, irregular dorsal cross-banding, spots, or other markings. This species earns their name of “crocodile” gecko from their enlarged dorsal scalation and tubercles, particularly on their hind limbs and tails, giving them a rough, armored, or spiny appearance. They are an adaptable species of gecko, often being found in and near rural to suburban human habitations. These geckos are known for being quite territorial, and also can use their vocalizations to signal their territory as well as when threatened or in distress. As with many other geckos, this species also have sturdy, semi-prehensile tails, and large prominent toe pads with lamellae coated with tiny, microscopic setae, which they use to adhere to surfaces using weak van der Waals forces. Crocodile geckos are growing in popularity as less commonly seen and unique reptile pets, but are better suited for the slightly more knowledgeable and experienced pet owner or enthusiast, as these geckos have strong jaws and can deliver a painful bite if handled carelessly.

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

Genus: Tarentola

Species: *Tarentola mauritanica**

*Taxonomy subject to change and revision.

Lifespan and Longevity

If provided the proper care, Crocodile geckos can attain longevity of at least 7 to 10 years or more.

Distribution and Habitat

The crocodile, or Moorish wall gecko, is a medium sized to large species of arboreal to semi-arboreal gecko indigenous to a fairly broad range of the western Mediterranean region of northwestern Africa to Europe. More specifically, this species occurs from the coastal Mediterranean regions of Portugal, Spain, Italy, Sardinia, France, and Corsica, to coastal Crotona, Greece, Albania, Morocco, and other Mediterranean localities. This species also occurs from the Western Sahara into Algeria, Egypt, and Sinai. Introduced populations also occur in some other areas of the world as well. Within this range, crocodile and Moorish wall geckos occupy primarily arboreal to semi-arboreal environments, including the mesic, coastal, desert to semi-arid deserts, although they are also often found in and around human habitations including buildings and other manmade structures, as well as rock walls, trees, and other rocky habitats.

Origin/History

Tarentola mauritanica (Linnaeus, 1758).

The exact timeline for when Moorish geckos were first imported or appeared in the pet trade are not known, although they probably have for many decades since at least the 1960's where they would become established in Florida and California due to accidental pet releases or escapes or as transplants or stowaways.

Moorish Geckos in California probably originated as escaped pets but some of them could have been transported from wild populations, probably from Florida originally, and then they could have been transported from already established California populations to new locations. The first published report of this species being established in California was a 1998 Geographic Distribution Note in Herp Review that puts the introduction as most likely in or before 1995. (Californiaherps.com)

Experience Level Required

Novice/Beginner to Intermediate/Moderate.

Size

Crocodile geckos are large geckos that begin and range from about 1.5 to 2.5 inches in total snout-to-tail length as hatchlings and juveniles, and typically up to 5.0 to 7.5 inches or slightly larger as adults in snout to tail length. Average snout-to-vent length is about 3.3 inches (SVL).

Housing and Enclosure

Enclosure System: Primarily Arboreal. Housing must be sealed and escape proof, and the size of the enclosure recommended will depend on the age and size of the gecko. For hatchlings up to 6 months or so, a 5 gallon tall aquarium, terrarium, or similar enclosure is recommended. Once a gecko reaches or exceeds six months or so, a 15 to 30 gallon tall terrarium or enclosure should be used. Crocodile geckos are arboreal, and height is more important than floor space. Provide plenty of live or artificial plants, branches, cork bark, or other furnishings for ample climbing and hiding opportunities. Substrates that retain and hold humidity well are recommended, and naturalistic substrates can include sphagnum moss and fir shavings, natural moss, or similar substrates. To maintain humidity and hydration, daily or regular misting is necessary. They will drink the condensation from the enclosure's furnishings and walls, and a small water dish can also be provided, and must be kept clean, but will usually be seldom used.

Temperature, Lighting, and Humidity

Ideal temperatures for Crocodile geckos range from 78 to 85 degrees F ambient temperature and an 82 to 85 degree F basking spot. Nighttime temperatures can drop to 70-75 degrees F. Be sure to provide a daily photoperiod or light cycle of at least 10 to 12 hours. Crocodile geckos are primarily crepuscular to nocturnal, and thus do not require 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. Crocodile, or Moorish wall geckos require moderate levels of humidity, and should be maintained at, or within about 60 to 70%.

Feeding, Diet, and Nutrition

Insectivorous to Carnivorous; In the wild, Crocodile geckos are insectivorous, and eat primarily insects and other invertebrates, although other smaller vertebrates may also be eaten. In captivity, feed Crocodile geckos a variety of appropriately sized feeder insects such as crickets, roaches, mealworms, superworms, fruit fly cultures, or waxworms. Feeder insects should be gut-loaded in order to increase their optimal nutritional value. These 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. Other feeder items, such as small, pre-killed rodents, and even house geckos and anoles can also be given on occasion, but sparingly. Overall 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

Crocodile geckos can initially be somewhat nervous and skittish geckos. Most wild caught or unhandled geckos may be prone to biting and attempting to escape when handled. Captive bred and born geckos may be at least somewhat more tolerant of handling, however. Handle any of these geckos gently and deliberately but do not drop or injure the animal. As with many geckos and other lizards, Crocodile geckos can drop their tails when frightened. Take care to not grab your gecko by its tail or it may detach if your gecko perceives you as a predator or a threat.

****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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