



**Photo Credit: Kayleigh?*

Cuban False Chameleon (*Anolis/Chamaeleolis barbatus*)

New World Anoles in a Chameleon's Skin!

Also sometimes known as the Western Bearded Anole, the Cuban False Chameleon is a relatively large anole species indigenous to Cuba and its surrounding islands within the Caribbean. As with true species of Old World chameleons which they are named after, and were initially believed to be classified as, this species has mobile, independently movable eyes, giving them excellent stereopsis, or depth perception allowing them to hunt and locate potential threats much more effectively. These large anoles are very cryptic, ambush predators of snails and other gastropods, insects, and other invertebrates, and also like chameleons, will sway while moving among branches or twigs to further mask their presence towards prey. These large anoles have fairly compact bodies typically ranging in color from varying shades of grayish, grayish-brown, or even blackish, and darker mottling, speckling, or cross-banding. Their heads are quite disproportionally large and wedge shaped, and a soft row of spines is usually located on the throat and dewlap. While Cuban false chameleons have yet to reach the levels of popularity and captive breeding seen with some other lizard species, they are nevertheless a very unique, personable, and enjoyable species that should be a must addition to have for any intermediate level enthusiast.

Taxonomy

Life: All living, physical, and animate entities

Domain: Eukaryota

Kingdom: Animalia

Phylum/Sub Phylum: Chordata/Vertebrata

Class: Reptilia

Order: Squamata

Suborder: Lacertilia

Infraorder: Iguania

Family: Dactyloidae

Genus: *Anolis/Chamaeleolis*

Species: *Anolis/Chamaeleolis barbatus**

**Taxonomy subject to change and revision*

Lifespan and Longevity

Cuban false chameleons may attain potential longevity of 5 to 10 years or slightly more under the proper care.

Distribution and Habitat

The Cuban false chameleon is indigenous to western Cuba, the Caribbean, and surrounding

islands. Within this range, these large, and unusual arboreal to semi-arboreal anoles may be found amongst the low branches, twigs, and foliage to low canopies of tropical to sub-tropical rainforests, forests, and woodlands, where they thermoregulate, forage for food, and avoid predation.

Origin/History

Anolis barbatus Garrido, 1982.

Cuban “False” Chameleons are a new species to herpetoculture, and in being first described in general in 1982. They would be called “chameleons” due to their appearance and color changing abilities, but are actually a species of large anole.

While an exact year that these large anoles would be first imported from the Caribbean is not known, it would only be the mid to late 2010’s that they would hit the pet market. They had an unusual diet of snails, although they could be induced to eat other food items as well. These anoles would also tend to be calmer than the Cuban knight anole (*Anolis equestris*) that has been widely available for many more decades as well.

Experience Level Required

Intermediate/Moderate.

Size

The Cuban false chameleon is a large species of anole, reaching reaches 6.0 to 8.0 inches in total snout-to-tail length making them one of the largest species of anoles. Males and females are slightly dimorphic in their sizes as well. Average snout-to-vent (SVL) length is about 7.0 inches or less.

Housing and Enclosure

Enclosure System: Primarily Arboreal. Provide a sturdy and secure enclosure that is escape proof. A minimum of a 20 to 30 gallon tall glass or other enclosure should be provided for these large, active, and arboreal anoles. Pairs or trios of one male and two to three females may also be housed together in appropriately larger quarters. Use a substrate that can retain moderate levels of humidity such as slightly dampened peat moss, untreated potting soil, orchid bark substrates, or sphagnum moss. Cuban false chameleons are arboreal lizards that will appreciate added climbing, basking, and hiding opportunities including natural or artificial foliage, rocks, vines, or branches. These large anoles can be misted periodically for humidity and hydration or can be provided a shallow water dish that can be cleaned and replaced regularly at least two to three times weekly. Maintaining proper hydration and humidity are important components to keeping this species.

Temperature, Lighting, and Humidity

Create a sufficient day/night thermal gradient with full spectrum UV lighting with ambient temperatures in the low 80’s to mid-90 for a basking spot during the day, and mid 60-mid 70 degrees F at night. Providing the correct amounts of UVA/UVB overhead incandescent and florescent lighting, and calcium-to-phosphorus ratios is essential for ensuring the health and overall well-being of Cuban false chameleons in captivity. Without UVA/UVB, or adequate amounts of it, they can be susceptible to the abnormal bone growth and development known as Metabolic Bone Disease (MBD), and other health and development maladies. Also be sure to 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. Cuban false chameleons require moderate to high levels of relative humidity, which should be maintained at, or around 60 to 70%.

Feeding, Diet, and Nutrition

Insectivorous to Carnivorous; Cuban false chameleons are primarily insectivorous in the wild, and a significant portion of their diets consist of snails, and other hard shelled gastropods, which are crushed and consumed by their large heads and powerful jaws. Other insects and invertebrates, as well as occasionally small vertebrates may also be eaten. In captivity, feed Cuban false chameleons a variety of appropriately sized feeder snails that are pesticide free, as well as insects such as crickets, roaches, mealworms, superworms, and waxworms. Other feeders, such as appropriately sized pre-killed rodents can also be given, but sparingly. Feeder insects should be gut-loaded in order to increase their optimal nutritional value. These anoles 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

While Cuban false chameleons are seldom bred in captivity to date, captive keeping and propagation of this species is slowly on the rise. While any large anole species can deliver a strong bite, the Cuban false chameleon is a docile species that is not quick to bite, and can become accustomed to and tolerate gentle and deliberate handling in captivity. They may open-mouth display if disturbed, however. Care should also be taken not to drop, or allow this species to fall, however.

****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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