



\*Jake Scott.

## Cuban Knight Anole (*Anolis equestris*)

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### **Big and Boisterous Anoles**

The Cuban knight anole is a large, arboreal anole that is primarily diurnal (active during the day). The largest species of anole, the Cuban knight anole is green to emerald green with a large, conical shaped head and whitish to yellowish streaks and flecks along their sides. The dewlap is pale pinkish white. They can be quite territorial and aggressive towards other intruders, and will gape, bob their heads, and extend their dewlaps while puffing themselves up to signal dominance and territory. As with most other anoles, Cuban knight anoles can also drop their tails through caudal autotomy when threatened or handled roughly, which temporarily startles and/or distracts the predator long enough for the anole to make its escape. A new tail then regrows over several weeks, but tends to be more vestigial than the original. This is a species that is seldom bred in captivity, and most specimens are wild caught, but they can become acclimated to captivity under the correct conditions and can make for very personable, energetic, and unique pet lizard species for anyone looking for a larger anole species than an American green anole.

### **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*

**Species:** *Anolis equestris*\*

*\*Taxonomy subject to change and revision.*

### **Lifespan and Longevity**

Cuban knight anoles may attain longevity of 5 to 10 years or slightly more under the proper care.

### **Distribution and Habitat**

The Cuban knight anole is indigenous to Cuba and surrounding islands, as well as having been introduced in Florida. This species may be found amongst the trees, branches, twigs, and foliage of tropical to sub-tropical rainforests, forests, and woodlands and human habitations within this range.

### **Origin/History**

*Anolis equestris* Merrem, 1820. *Anolis equestris persparsus* is native to Cuba. Cuban knight anoles were likely introduced to the United States on shipping materials or as escaped/intentionally released pets via the pet trade.

*Anolis equestris* was first introduced in Miami-Dade County, Florida in 1952. The subsequent spread of this species in Florida would then take place. Thus, these large anoles have long been imported for the pet trade since the early 1950's, where most were wild-collected. Now, wild-collection from Florida of these lizards also takes place.

### **Experience Level Required**

Intermediate/Moderate.

### **Size**

The Cuban knight anole reaches 12.0 to 24.0 inches in total snout-to-tail length making them one of the largest species of anoles. Ranges from about 3.9 to 7.5 inches snout-to-vent (SVL) length for males, and 3.5 to 6.3 inches snout to vent length (SVL) in females, with males becoming larger than females.

### **Housing and Enclosure**

***Enclosure System: Primarily Arboreal.*** Provide a sturdy and secure enclosure that is escape proof. A minimum of a 24" x 24" x 36" or 20 to 30 gallon tall glass or other enclosure should be provided for these large, active, and arboreal anoles. 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 knight anoles 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.

### **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 knight anoles 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 knight anoles require moderate to high levels of relative humidity, which should be maintained at, or around 60 to 80%.

### **Feeding, Diet, and Nutrition**

***Insectivorous to Carnivorous;*** Cuban knight anoles are primarily insectivorous in the wild, feeding on insects and other small invertebrates. They may also occasionally eat small rodents and other small vertebrates as well. In captivity, feed knight anoles a variety of appropriately sized feeder 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. Knight 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**

Cuban knight anoles are seldom bred in captivity to date, with most specimens available being of wild caught origin. While this species can deliver a strong bite, they can become accustomed to and tolerate some levels of handling in captivity. In general however, handling these large anoles (as well as other anole species) should be kept to a minimum whenever possible

**\*\*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**

Authored by Eric Roscoe. For any additional questions, comments, and/or concerns regarding this animal, group of animals, or this care sheet, please email and contact:

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