



*Ryan Boyd

Gargoyle Gecko (*Rhacodactylus auriculatus*)

Living Miniature Replicas of Statues

The gargoyle gecko is a medium to large gecko species indigenous to New Caledonia which is named for its cranial knobs and projections above the eyes and nose that give them their name in bearing resemblance to a gargoyle or statue. Gargoyle geckos are a medium to large sized gecko that can be identified by their small, distinctive knobs and projections on the head. They range in color from shades of tan, gray, brown, reddish, orange, or yellowish sometimes with spots, stripes, or dashes. This species also has a long, thin prehensile tail for climbing and gripping as well. Once thought to be extinct in the wild, gargoyle geckos (as well as other members in the genus *Rhacodactylus*) were re-discovered in 1994, and have now become prevalent due to captive breeding. As with many other geckos, gargoyle geckos lack eyelids, and use their thick, fleshy tongues to clean their eyes and pupils. Also as with many gecko species, gargoyle geckos possess enlarged toe pads consisting of several rows of lamellae covered in millions of microscopic hairs known as setae. These setae enable the gecko to cling to, adhere, and climb a wide variety of surfaces with ease. Gargoyle geckos are a unique, hardy, and easily maintained species of gecko that has rightfully earned its popularity in herpetoculture.

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: *Rhacodactylus*

Species: *Rhacodactylus auriculatus**

*Taxonomy subject to change and revision.

Lifespan and Longevity

If provided the proper care, gargoyle geckos can attain longevity of 10 to 12 years or more.

Distribution and Habitat

The gargoyle gecko is a relatively small to medium sized, arboreal species of gecko indigenous only to the island of New Caledonia, near the southeastern coast of Australia. More specifically,

they are found within southern New Caledonia. Within this range, gargoyle geckos occupy primarily arboreal to semi-arboreal environments, being found among the highest peaks and elevations of the islands' tropical rainforests to tropical scrub-forests. During the day, these geckos occupy the thick vegetation near the forest floor, while at night, while they spend more of their time basking and foraging in the shrubs and lower canopy at night.

Origin and History

Rhacodactylus auriculatus (Bavay, 1869).

Gargoyle geckos are indigenous only to the southern region of the island of New Caledonia, which is also known as 'Grande Terre', the "Mainland", or as "Le Caillou" meaning "The rock" by locals. Once rare in captivity, gargoyle geckos were first acquired and imported into Europe during the mid to late 1970's, with the first captive-bred offspring reaching the U.S. sometime during the mid-1980's. They were subsequently first bred in captivity in the U.S. by Tim Tyle in 1987, where those which were first imported were of the classic "reticulated" phenotype. Gargoyle geckos subsequently then became much more widely bred and available in captivity.

Experience Level Required

Novice/Beginner to Intermediate/Moderate.

Size

Gargoyle geckos are fairly medium sized to large geckos which can range from 8.0 to 9.0 inches on average as adults in total snout-to-tail length. Average snout-to-vent length is about 4.9 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 10 to 20 gallon tall terrarium or enclosure should be used. Gargoyle 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

Gargoyle geckos have fairly simple and undemanding heating and lighting requirements in captivity, 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). Ideal temperatures for these geckos range from 72 to 80 degrees F, or otherwise at room temperature. Do not keep them at over 85 degrees F or below 65 degrees F. Also be sure to provide a daily photoperiod or light cycle of at least 10 to 12 hours. 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. Gargoyle geckos require moderate levels of relative humidity, and should be maintained at, or around 50 to 70%.

Feeding, Diet, and Nutrition

Omnivorous to Frugivorous; In the wild, gargoyle geckos are omnivorous to frugivorous, meaning they eat insects and various fruit and other plant matter. In captivity, many commercially available diets are available that contain most, if not all of the essential nutrients, vitamins, and minerals required for their optimal health and nutrition. These diets are quite simple to use and prepare for your animal(s) as instructed. Feeder crickets, or other small insects of appropriate size can also be given, but should be no larger than the animal's snout to eye. Feeder insects should be gut-loaded in order to increase their optimal nutritional value. Food should be offered in a small dish mounted off of the enclosure's floor, particularly for largely arboreal species that seldom come to the enclosure floor. Be sure that calcium and vitamin D3 supplementation needs are still being met with any diets used 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

Gargoyle geckos generally tolerate moderate levels of handling even as hatchlings. Handle them gently and deliberately but do not drop or injure the animal. 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. Most adult gargoyle geckos will settle down considerably and become quite docile and easily handled. Allow them to walk or jump 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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