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Leaf Tailed Geckos (*Uroplatus* spp.)

Leaf Tailed “Aliens”

Leaf tailed geckos are a genus of small to large, primarily arboreal, nocturnal geckos, many of which have highly bizarre appearances. Leaf tailed geckos are primarily an arboreal, nocturnal species that use their highly cryptic coloration to assist them in camouflage, or to blend in with tree bark or rainforest mosses and lichens extremely well while hanging or facing downward. These geckos are a nocturnal species with quite cryptic, and variable coloration and appearances. They may range in color from light to dark brown, grayish or grayish brown, tan, blackish, greenish, olive, to yellowish or yellowish brown, or hues of purple, orange, tan, or reddish oftentimes with darker markings on their dorsal surface, and highly adapted webbed toes and feet and an elaborate network of membranes and dermal flaps surrounding their heads, necks, limbs, and tails. As their common names imply, most also have flat, leaf or paddle like tails as well. The skull and head also tends to be heavily ossified as well.

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: Gekkoninae

Genus: *Uroplatus*

Species: *Uroplatus* spp.*

*Taxonomy subject to change and revision.

Lifespan and Longevity

If provided the proper care, leaf tailed geckos can attain longevity of at least 5 to 10 years or potentially more in captivity.

Species

There are about fourteen (14) recognized leaf tailed gecko species in the genus *Uroplatus*. The most commonly kept and bred species include the **Common or Giant Leaf tailed Gecko** (*U. fimbriatus*), **Henkle’s Leaf tailed Gecko** (*U. henkeli*), **Mossy Leaf tailed Gecko** (*U. sikorae*),

Lined Leaf tailed Gecko (*U. lineatus*), and Satanic Leaf tailed Gecko (*U. phantasticus*). The popularly named Satanic Leaf tailed Gecko (*U. phantasticus*) is named for its strong appearance to a dead, curled up leaf with red to reddish orange eyes and irises, and its “horns” or “points” above each eye.

Distribution and Habitat

The leaf tailed geckos are a highly unusual genus of small to large, arboreal geckos, both in appearance and in their natural history indigenous to the island of Madagascar and a few of its surrounding islands, such as Nosey Be. More precise ranges and localities further depend upon the species within this genus. Within this range, leaf tailed geckos occupy primarily arboreal to semi-arboreal environments, where most, if not all species tend to be habitat specialists, being found in tropical, primary to secondary rainforests and other forests, where they occupy the lower to mid-canopy layers in areas of dense foliage, loose bark, tree hollows and cavities, and other branches and trunks of trees to above-ground shrubs.

Origin/History

Uroplatus spp. A.M.C. Duméril, 1806. Specific species would have other authors first describing them at other years.

Because most *Uroplatus* are no longer exported from Madagascar, and those that are have smaller quota numbers, *Uroplatus* became increasingly difficult to find available in the herpetocultural hobby. It was once common to see multiple importers offering large numbers of nearly every known (and unknown) species of *Uroplatus*, most commonly during the 1980's and 1990's.

Unfortunately, the chance of survival for most imported animals would be ill-fated, which gave *Uroplatus* a reputation for being difficult lizards to keep. Wild-caught *Uroplatus* are still offered in small numbers, though captive-bred specimens are usually more frequently seen today. The best way to acquire one would be to purchase directly from reputable breeders. Wild-caught animals would usually best reserved for experienced keepers looking to diversify their current bloodlines.

Many *Uroplatus* that were imported as one species were actually representatives of yet undescribed species, and they have since been reclassified. This may be one reason why earlier breeding attempts were uncommon, as people may have been attempted to breed what they thought were two lizards of the same species, when in fact the animals were different species altogether. (Derek Dunlop 2015).

Experience Level Required

Intermediate/Moderate to Advanced.

Size

Leaf tailed geckos are small to large geckos which can be variable in size depending on the species. They may range from 3.5 inches in total snout-to-tail length for the smallest species up to 12.0 to 14.0 inches snout-to-tail length in the largest members of the species, namely the common or Giant Leaf tailed gecko, *P. fimbriatus*. Snout-to-vent length also varies depending on the exact species, but ranges from about 2.5 up to 7.8 inches (SVL) in the largest species.

Housing and Enclosure

Enclosure System: Primarily Arboreal. All leaf tailed geckos are exclusively nocturnal to crepuscular, and arboreal geckos. Housing must be sealed and escape proof and the size of the

housing provided will depend on the age, size, and particular species. Provide a minimum of a 5 to 10 gallon tall terrarium or enclosure with adequate ventilation for hatchling geckos up to around 4 to 6 months of age, and then an enclosure with the minimum dimensions of roughly 20 to 40 gallons tall depending on the species. Pairs or trios of appropriate gender ratios can be maintained in accordingly larger housing as well. Leaf tailed geckos can be maintained on a naturalistic substrate about three to six inches such as coconut fibers, cypress mulch, sphagnum moss and fir shavings, natural moss, or non-fertilized potting soil that can retain higher levels of humidity these species require. Provide ample, dense live or artificial foliage, driftwood, rocks, cork bark, horizontal and diagonally oriented branches, or logs for ample basking, climbing, and hiding opportunities. For moisture, mist at least twice daily. A small water bowl or dish can be provided, but will usually be seldom used, as these geckos obtain most of their hydration from their food and from the droplets and condensation obtained from misting on the enclosure's furnishings and walls.

Temperature, Lighting, and Humidity

Leaf tailed geckos are a primarily tropical species that require and do best at relatively higher humidity levels between 75 and 100%. Ideal temperatures for leaf tailed geckos range from a gradient of 75 to 80 degrees F ambient temperature and an 85 to 90 degree F basking spot during daytime photoperiods of 12 to 14 hours. Nighttime temperatures can be allowed to drop slightly below this range to 70 to 75 degrees F using a 24 hour under tank heating pad or nighttime infrared spectrum form of lighting and heating. Additional UVA/UVB lighting, although not required for most leaf tailed gecko species, can greatly benefit and improve these gecko's overall health and well-being. 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. Leaf tailed geckos require moderate to high levels of relative humidity, and should be maintained at, or within 65 to 85%, although this may vary somewhat depending on the species.

Feeding, Diet, and Nutrition

Primarily Insectivorous; In the wild, leaf tailed geckos are insectivorous, and will eat a large array of insects, mollusks, and other invertebrates. In captivity, feed leaf tailed 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. These geckos will also eat several of the commercially available meal replacement powders such as crested gecko diets two to three times weekly. Some of the larger species may also eat of chemical or pesticide free snails, particularly gravid females, with shells for added calcium and other nutrients, with the shells being partially digested as well. Leaf tailed geckos typically feed best during nighttime and crepuscular hours. Their 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

Most leaf tailed geckos are a fragile and delicate skinned species and can also be fast moving and skittish. Therefore, handling efforts should be made sparingly or to only periods whenever

necessary. If handling is absolutely required or desired, always handle the animal gently and deliberately but do not drop or injure the animal. As with many geckos and other lizards, leaf tailed geckos can also drop their tails when frightened or handled roughly. 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. Overall, leaf tailed geckos are better left alone with less, rather than more handling.

****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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