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## Common Leopard Gecko (*Eublepharis macularius*)

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### **Long-Running and Popular Beginner Geckos**

Leopard geckos are a genus of small to medium sized, primarily nocturnal to crepuscular genus of geckos found in dry, rocky arid to semi-arid environments of the Middle East, Pakistan and other areas of southern and southeastern Asia. Unlike most other gecko species, leopard geckos are fairly small, terrestrial geckos lacking enlarged toe pads and have moveable eye lids. They can be further identified by their lumpy or warty yellowish skin, bead like scales and many black to chocolate brown spots, cross-banding, and blotches giving them the name “leopard” gecko. Cross-banding also has bluish to purplish bands across the back and tail that is more prominent in juveniles. As with several other species of geckos found elsewhere in the world, leopard geckos also have a thick fleshy tail that are used to store fat during prolonged dry periods. Their tails can also be lost through caudal autotomy as a means of startling and/or distracting predators long enough for the gecko to escape. Within several weeks to months, a new tail will then regrow, but will remain somewhat more vestigial and limited in function. As with many other geckos, leopard geckos are also able to vocalize by creating squeaking or clicking sounds when they are defensive, handled, or become territorial. Leopard geckos are docile and undemanding pets with a few basic husbandry requirements, making them among the most widely kept and sold reptile pets.

### **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:** Eublepharinae

**Genus:** Eublepharis

**Species:** *Eublepharis macularius*\*

*\*Taxonomy subject to change and revision.*

### **Lifespan and Longevity**

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

### **Distribution and Habitat**

Leopard geckos occur in south-central Asia and the Middle East, where they may be found throughout Afghanistan, Iraq, Iran, Pakistan, and northwestern India. Within this range, leopard geckos occupy primarily terrestrial environments, including dry, semi-arid and/or rocky grasslands, scrublands, open forests and savannahs, and semi-deserts, where they shelter during the day underneath rocks, other debris, or in burrows.

### **Origin/History**

*Eublepharis macularius* (Blyth, 1854).

Leopard geckos have been kept and imported for the pet trade for many decades, as far back as at least the 1950's or 1960's. They have been considered by some sources to have been the world's first domesticated pet lizard species. Now, leopard geckos have become a pet trade staple, with hundreds of thousands being bred in captivity in the U.S. and Europe in many different color and pattern morphs and mutations.

### **Experience Level Required**

Novice/Beginner.

### **Size**

Leopard geckos range from about 2.8 to 4.5 inches in total snout-to-tail length as hatchlings, and about 7.1 to 11.0 inches in total snout-to-tail length as adults. Some bloodlines can become slightly larger as well. Maximum adult snout-to-vent length is about 6.4 to 6.5 inches snout-to-vent (SVL).

### **Housing and Enclosure**

***Enclosure System: Primarily Terrestrial.*** Housing must be sealed and escape proof. Hatchling leopard geckos can be housed in a 5 to 10 gallon or similar sized terrarium or enclosure, while adults will require at least a 15 to 20 gallon long enclosure. These active, nocturnal to crepuscular geckos are primarily terrestrial, and floor space is more important than height. Provide a substrate that holds humidity reasonably well but is not readily ingestible such as play sand and organic topsoil mixtures, or fine grain sands. Provide a hide box and artificial foliage, driftwood, rocks, or logs for ample basking and hiding opportunities. A humid hide can also be provided for additional humidity. For moisture, provide a small bowl or dish of fresh water two to three times per week and mist once to twice weekly.

### **Temperature, Lighting, and Humidity**

Create a thermal gradient, or a warm side to the enclosure, and maintain these geckos at ideal temperatures ranging from 75 to 80 degrees F on the cool side and ambient temperatures, and 88 to 90 degrees F on the warm, basking side. Leopard geckos are primarily crepuscular to nocturnal, 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). 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. Leopard geckos should be maintained at relatively low to moderate humidity levels of 30 to 40%, with an additional humid hide being strongly recommended.

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

***Insectivorous***; In the wild, leopard geckos are primarily insectivorous, meaning they eat insects and other invertebrates. In captivity, feed leopard geckos a variety of appropriately sized feeder insects such as crickets, roaches, mealworms, superworms, and waxworms. Feeder insects should be gut-loaded in order to increase their optimal nutritional value. Leopard 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. 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**

Many leopard geckos are generally tolerant of moderate levels of handling and interaction even as juveniles. Handle your gecko gently and deliberately, but do not drop or injure the animal. Do not grab your gecko by its tail or it may detach if they perceive you as a predator or threat. Most adult leopard geckos will settle down considerably and become quite docile and easily handled. Allow them to walk in between or 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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