

HIDEBOX HERPS



New Owner's Guide to
**African Fat-tailed
Geckos**

Welcome the wonderful world of Herps.

We want to congratulate you on your new purchase of a ***Hemitheconyx caudicinctus*** or otherwise known as an **African Fat-tailed Gecko**. We at HideBox Herps hope that you will consider this as a new addition to your family, and not just a novel exotic pet. Every animal that we raise, we raise as if it is our own pet and not just merchandise to sell off the shelves. So please take care of your new animal and give it the care and love it deserves.

- Ron Phillips
HideBox Herps

About your new gecko

We would like to take this time and introduce you to your new gecko, Bud as we have come to know him here at HideBox Herps. The following are some vital statistics that will let you get to know your new gecko.

Species Identification: *Hemitheconyx caudicinctus*

Common Name: African Fat-tail Gecko

Phase Selection: Stripe

Breeding: Captive Breed

Gender: Male

Hatch Date: April 17, 2000

Veterinary Care: N/A

Breeders: Ron & Kelly Phillips

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General Information

The African Fat-tail Gecko, a close cousin to the popular Leopard Gecko (*Eublepharis macularius*), is part of the unique family of geckos known as Eublepharidae or eye-lidded geckos. Other geckos in this unique family include such animals as the Desert Banded Gecko (*Coleonyx variagatus*) found native in the South Western United States, the Japanese Leopard Gecko (*Goniurosaurus kuroiwa*), and occasionally African Clawed Gecko (*Holodactylus africanus*). Other traits indigenous to the Eublepharida family are that they are nocturnal (active during the night), they are terrestrial (ground dwelling), and have clawed toes with no lamellae (sticky toe pads).

Of the family Eublepharidae, the African Fat-tail or *Hemitheconyx caudicinctus* is only second in popularity to the Leopard Gecko and is becoming one of the fastest growing hobbyist Eublepharid in the United States.

Originating in West Africa, occurring in Nigeria west to Senegal, the African Fat-tailed Gecko found in most pet stores around the country are those which have been imported and are wild caught. Because of this a large percentage die as a result of parasitic infection and poor handling. In the last couple years more and more breeders have been breeding this species and provide a heartier and healthier animal.

The African Fat-tailed Gecko is a thick bodied species of Eublepharidae, and appears to be a stout hearty specimen, however like the wild caught ancestors the captive bred animals are also susceptible to parasitic infections and should have yearly check-ups to ensure the health and well being of the animal.

A healthy African Fat-tailed Gecko makes an ideal first time herp pet as it is easy to maintain, nice to observe, and tolerates mild moderate handling. These beautiful animals when well maintained will grow to be an average of 8 to 10 inches in length with a life span of 15 to 20 years.

Housing:

The first thing you need to do before you purchase your first African Fat-tailed Gecko is to ensure you have the proper housing and to be aware of the needs of the animal.

The natural home of the African Fat-tailed Gecko ranges from the savannahs, the rocky hillsides, the dry open woodlands and along the rivers' edge. While it is impossible to give them the full range of habitat in captivity, the ideal enclosure would range from dry to semi-humid.

While there are several different ways to set up an enclosure, we recommend setting up a terrarium based habitat in a glass aquarium no smaller than 10 gallons for a single animal, though larger sizes would be preferred such as a 20 gallon long. Once you have decided what size enclosure to go with, you will need the following items.

Substrate: Substrate is the material that will cover the bottom of the tank and which your terrestrial gecko will have the most contact. Because African Fat-tailed Geckos use their tongue to "taste" their surroundings, it is important that you choose a substrate that will not endanger your animal. Such a danger is impaction. For adult geckos the following substrates are recommended: T-Rex Bone Aid CalciSand, Bed-a-Beast, Reptile Carpet, dry Vermiculite, or paper towels. For hatchlings and juveniles it is recommended to keep them on plain paper towels as impaction is a great danger for the smaller digestive systems of geckos under 6 months old.

Hides: A hide is an inner chamber inside your geckos enclosure that it will use for housing and security. It is important that you provide one or more hides for your gecko, and that should be increased if you have multiple geckos. While you can purchase pre-made hides, it is relatively easy and inexpensive to make them from small flower pots, tupper ware or other plastic containers. You will need to cut at least a one inch hole for an entrance, and you may want to place vermiculite, bed-a-beast or shredded paper-towels in the enclosure to provide a damp medium for the

them to rest in.

Moisture Chamber: A moisture chamber is a secondary hide that provides adequate humidity and moisture that will allow your gecko to shed. Gravid Females may also use this as an Egg Chamber for laying eggs. The substrate for the Moisture Chamber should be at least half an inch deep, consisting of Vermiculite, Bed-A-Beast, Sphagnum Peat Moss or any other non-toxic substrate that can promote humid conditions. The box should be sealed except for a one hole in the top or side for an entrance.

Food/Water Dish: It is necessary to provide water for your gecko at all times, the best way is to use a shallow dish which your gecko will be able to lap water from. While it is not necessary to have a food dish as your geckos should be primarily eating live crickets, it is good to have a dish in which to place calcium+D3 supplement which is a necessity to keep your gecko alive and healthy. The dish can also be used to serve Mealworms, Superworms, and Wax Worms.

Rocks, Plants & Furniture: While it is recommended that you keep your gecko in a Spartan enclosure, you can add Rocks, Plants and other Terrarium Furniture. Rocks provide multiple uses to geckos. The most common is exercise, even though your gecko is terrestrial they will climb if given the opportunity. Rocks also provide a great medium for the gecko to rub against when shedding especially if it is one with a coarse grain. You can also find some rocks which are calcium based, and the gecko will instinctually lick the rock for supplementation. Plants, while they do make a cage look aesthetic there are a number of reasons to not use them. They can be poisonous to your gecko if you are not familiar with them, the chore of maintaining them, keeping them clean of defecation, the live prey often use them as shelter and your gecko can use them to climb out of the enclosure. Furniture can also be bothersome, but also interesting to see your animals interact. The only worry is to keep the furniture clean and to make sure it's not in a location that will assist your animal in escape.

Screen Top or Hood: Even though an African Fat-tailed Gecko is a terrestrial animal, it is recommended that you keep a top on your enclosure at all times. They can climb objects that you have within your enclosure and in some cases have been known to jump high

enough that they were able to climb out. If you don't want to stay up nights worrying about your gecko, get a screen top or hood.

Lighting: Because African Fat-tailed Geckoes are nocturnal, it is not necessary to have lighting for their enclosure. They are unable to utilize the UV rays in the light or sun, so it would be useless to use these kinds of lighting. Lighting can be utilized if you have inadequate lighting in the room the gecko is housed, you wish to increase the heat inside the enclosure or you wish to be able to view your gecko at night. It is important that the gecko has a normal photo-periods (day and night) so that it can maintain a normal active cycle. Some hobbyist will use lighting to increase the heat during the day, turning off the light at night and further promote the sense of day and night. It is common for hobbyist to use black, blue and red lighting at night to make the gecko visible and undisturbed. Low wattage bulbs of these nature will not increase the tank temperature greatly.

Heating: When heating terrestrial geckos, it is important to realize how and where they generate their body heat. African Fat-tail Geckos like all reptiles are cold blooded and there by need external heat to regulate their bodies. Because they are terrestrial and nocturnal it is more important for their bodies to absorb the heat through high ground temperatures and not ambient air temperatures. So when you heat your enclosures, please keep in mind that the ideal temperatures should be measured close to the ground. The temperatures for your enclosure should range from cool to warm from one end of the tank to the other. Ideal cool temperature should be mid to high 70s, with the warm side rising as high as 90 degrees. The best way to attain these temperatures is to use a UTH (Under Tank Heater) placed at the end of the tank you would like to the warm side. You may use overhead lighting, generally low wattage, as mentioned in the prior section. Along with your heating system it is important to have high range thermometers for either side of your tank to keep track of the hot and cold temperatures.

Water Bottle: Along with keeping the water available at all times, you will need to mist your enclosures about 3 times a week for adults and once a day for hatchlings and juveniles. The best way to do this is with a water bottle that sprays a fine mist.

Care and Diet

African Fat-tailed Geckos like the Leopard Gecko are a low maintenance animal, and their housing can be kept up with relative ease. Once you have their housing set up, you will need to be aware of their basic fundamental needs.

Food: African Fat-tails live on a primary diet of LIVE Crickets, ranging in size depending on age and size of the animal. The rule of thumb is to select crickets that are no longer than the head of the gecko and half the width of the head of the gecko. This is to prevent choking, and smaller crickets tend to digest better in younger geckos, who are still developing their digestive systems. Once you are familiar with your gecko, you can introduce other feeder insects such as mealworms, superworms (for adults only), wax worms (only as treats), silkworms, and trevo worms. If you chose to change the primary diet of your animal, it is recommended that you only do so with meal worms as a regular staple.

You should remember, your gecko's food is only as good as the food supplied to the feeder. Feeding your crickets and other feeder insects good nutritious diets will insure healthier and happier geckos. Feeding your feeder insects high nutritious diets is called gutloading, and the following are good gutload foods: Potatoes, Carrots, Kale, Dry Cat Food, Fish Flakes, and Cricket Chow.

When you feed your gecko it's feeder food, it is important that you powder them with calcium with Vitamin D as well as mixture of minerals. Most common brands to buy are Miner-All and RepCal, both which contain proper content of calcium and minerals. It is also a good idea to leave a small dish with calcium in the enclosure.

Water: Water as with all animals, is a necessary requirement for your gecko. For this reason, you need to have fresh water, changed every day or two. If you find any feces or dead feeders in the water, you need to change immediately. Water is not only important to the gecko to drink, but it should be supplied with a moisture hide in it's enclosure. This is often called the Hot Box or Moisture Chamber. This enclosure in the enclosure should be damp at all times. This aides in shedding and retaining good skin

care. You will also need to mist your enclosure daily for hatchlings and juveniles (under 6 months) and once or twice a week when they are older.

Maintenance: The enclosure is fairly easy to maintain. You will need to keep the water fresh and a regular cleaning schedule. Your fat-tail will choose an area in its enclosure to defecate. If he chooses a watering area or feeding area, simply move the feces to another area, and sometimes that will stimulate him to use to defecate. A healthy gecko feces will be well formed, semi-hard, sometimes containing a white addition, which is the mass of its urine. It should also defecate daily. You should clean the defecation area daily or every other day. Do not allow it to accumulate as it is a breeding ground for bacteria and parasites. A clean enclosure makes for a healthy gecko.

Health: While the African Fat-tail is a fairly hearty gecko, it is necessary to have annual check ups. This may be as simple as a yearly fecal exam, which would require you to provide a fresh sample of feces for your vet to examine for bacteria or parasites. If you keep your enclosure clean and your gecko healthy, you will most likely have a nice check up. The large concern would be from outside sources, such as introducing new animals to the enclosure. If you choose to get a new animal as a companion to your gecko, please remember to quarantine the new animal for a 60-90 period so that you can be sure that it is bacteria and parasite free.

If you see any variance in eating, shedding, or defecating, please call your Vet. Often times it can be treated quickly and easily.

References Material

Web Sites:

[Http://www.kingsnake.com](http://www.kingsnake.com)

[Http://www.hidebox.com](http://www.hidebox.com)

[Http://www.gexfiles.com](http://www.gexfiles.com)

[Http://www.herpcam.com](http://www.herpcam.com)

Books:

The Leopard Gecko Manual

Reptile Keeper's Guide to Leopard and Fat-tail

Geckos