

Banded Gecko Care Sheet

Coleonyx variegatus sp.

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Facts:

The scientific name for the Western Banded Gecko is *Coleonyx variegatus* (*sub-species*), which means "a sheath and nail or claw" in Greek, and "variation" in Latin. They are members of the Gekkonidae-- or Gecko family. Banded Geckos are terrestrial lizards, or ground dwelling, originally from the arid, desert regions in the Southwestern United States. Banded Geckos are mainly "nocturnal" which means they hunt for food at night, and are generally less active during the day.

Description:

Western Banded Geckos are very small lizards with yellow or tan pigment with darker bands or aberrant patterns. The average size of a full-grown adult is approximately 3.5 – 4.5” snout to tail tip.

Housing:

As a general rule, allow a minimum of 18 square inches of surface area per adult Banded Gecko. These geckos like to hide in cave-like dwellings kept on the warm side of their enclosure. Adult male Banded Geckos must *never* be housed together in the same vivarium or they will fight and injure or kill each other. A single male can be kept with several females, and several females can share the same enclosure. However, if Banded Geckos are housed in crowded conditions, they may become territorial and fight over space, and especially food. Larger, older, and more dominant geckos may sometimes bully and intimidate smaller, weaker or younger ones. Do NOT house adult Banded Geckos with babies or any other reptile species under any circumstances.

Substrates:

Banded Geckos come from areas where there is hard-pack sandy soil strewn with granite rocks. For naturalistic enclosures, rocks and gravel may be used if they are a size that cannot be easily ingested by the geckos. Nearly *all* breeders will agree that paper towels or newspaper are the best choice.

Handling:

Western Banded geckos are rather skittish and usually do not tolerate much handling. When you must handle your gecko, it is best to slowly offer your hand, kept low with your palm up, before picking them up. Avoid reaching down from over their head to grab them because they may become startled thinking you are a predator coming down to attack them. Always handle your Banded Gecko with care, and *never* grab it by the tail. Like all lizards, when they are attacked or threatened they can "drop" their tails. When a lizard loses its tail, it becomes vulnerable to disease and infection until it grows a new one. Banded Geckos will eventually grow new tails, but the regenerated ones are never quite as nice as the original. Since they are desert dwellers, they store water, fat, and nutrients in their tail.

Lighting:

Unlike most other reptiles that bask in the sun to keep warm and to assimilate Vitamin D from natural sunlight, Banded Geckos are mainly nocturnal so they do *not* require special lighting. Keep in mind that additional overhead lighting will raise the temperature in the enclosure. Be aware that Banded Geckos' eyes are very sensitive and their eyesight is poor in bright light. Never expose your gecko to direct sunlight.

Heating:

All reptiles are cold-blooded and rely on the temperature of their surrounding environment to keep warm or cool. Use an under tank (UTH) heater on one side only of the Banded Gecko's enclosure, thus allowing them to move back and forth within the tank to adjust their own body temperature. This is known as *thermal regulation*, and it is critical for their metabolism, digestion and immune systems. The ideal temperature for Banded Geckos is around 90-94° on the floor surface of the warm side of their enclosure, and normal room temperature (around 70-74°) on the cool side. Using a UTH is recommended instead of overhead heat sources since they utilize the heat absorbed from the sun in the rocks in their natural habitat to aid in their digestion.

Shedding:

Reptiles shed their skin on regular basis, and Banded Geckos should molt about every 2-4 weeks. Unlike some other reptiles, Banded Geckos will eat the skin after it comes off, so don't be alarmed if you don't see any shed skin in their enclosure! It is extremely important that *ALL* the skin comes off, especially from the eyelids and toes, as geckos can lose their digits to infection if the skin does not completely shed. Soaking your Banded Gecko's feet in 1-2 inches of warm water and then using a Q-tip will help remove any residual skin from their toes, and a Q-tip with mild saline solution or warm water will help take it off of their eyelids. Be very gentle! If shedding is a problem for your Banded Gecko, it may be necessary to keep the substrate around their cave moist by misting it with water, placing a damp paper towel inside, or adding a separate, moist hide in their enclosure.

Feeding:

Banded Geckos mainly eat *live* crickets, mealworms, and occasional waxworms. Be careful not to feed them anything larger than about 3/4 the size of their heads to prevent choking. Babies should be fed 4-6 very small crickets or mealworms every day until they reach about 2 inches in length, then larger prey every other day until they become full-grown in about 10 -12 months. Adults can be fed 6-7 larger crickets or mealworms 2 or 3 times a week. Giving your gecko a variety of foods is recommended.

Supplements:

Food items *must* be "dusted" with a mixture of ultra-fine calcium powder every 2 or 3 feedings, and reptile vitamins once a week. Obtain commercial reptile calcium powder and vitamins such as *Sticky-Tongue "Miner-All"*, *RepCal*, *Zoo-Med*, or *Fluker* products. Mix 2 parts calcium powder to 1 part vitamin powder in a zip-lock bag or commercial cricket duster and "dust" live food items prior to feeding by shaking them gently in the bag or container. The health of your Banded Gecko is dependent on the proper supplementation of calcium and vitamins in their diet; otherwise, serious diseases can result. Metabolic Bone Disease (MBD) is caused by calcium deficiency, and can permanently disfigure or ultimately kill your gecko.

Gut Loading:

Live crickets and mealworms should be fed nutritious food like pieces of whole grain cereal, oatmeal, squash, pumpkin, sweet potatoes, collard greens, and a slice of red potato for moisture.

Quarantine:

Regardless of where you get your Gecko it is *critical* that when you get any new addition to your Banded Gecko colony, the new gecko(s) *must* be quarantined from any of your existing reptiles for at least 30 days, but 90 days is preferred. Countless reptiles have suffered and died needlessly as a result of one gecko infected with disease or parasites and transmitting it to others.