

African Fat-tail Gecko Care Sheet

Hemithiconyx caudicinctus

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Facts:

The scientific name for your Fat-tail Gecko is *Hemithiconyx caudicinctus*. They are members of the Gekkonidae-- or Gecko family, and are also part of the *Eublepharinae* sub-family which means "true eye-lid" in Latin. Fat-tail Geckos are originally from the scrublands of Western Africa, from Cameroon to Senegal.

Description:

Fat-tail Geckos are medium-sized lizards that come in a variety of colors and patterns from tan coloration to bright orange, with dark bands or patterns, and some having no pattern at all. Their bodies are covered with raised tubercles, and they have fat tails which store water and fat. The average size of a full-grown adult is approximately 6" from snout to tail tip, and 40-60 grams.

Housing:

As a general rule, allow a *minimum* of about 12 X 12 inches of surface area per adult Fat-tail Gecko. Fat-tails like to hide in cave-like dwellings kept on the warm side of their enclosure. Adult males must *never* be housed together in the same vivarium or they could fight and injure or kill each other. A single male can be kept with several females, and several females can share the same enclosure. Fat-tail Geckos housed in crowded conditions may become territorial and fight over space, and especially food. Larger, older, and more dominant Fat-tails may bully and intimidate smaller, weaker or younger ones. Fat-tail geckos seem to thrive the best when housed individually. Do NOT house adult Fat-tail Geckos with babies or any other reptile species.

Substrates:

Loose substrates that could be ingested by your Fat-tail Gecko such as sand, bark, fish tank pebbles, or walnut shells are not recommended, as they can be extremely harmful to their digestive system and may even cause death if they are swallowed. Be aware that it is a known fact that some Fat-tail Geckos, (especially babies) have died from intestinal impaction resulting from consuming too much sand while "striking" at crickets. Fat-tail Geckos are *not* good candidates for calcium-sand. Substrates such as reptile carpet, slate, or unglazed ceramic tiles can make more naturalistic enclosures, but nearly *all* breeders will agree that paper towels or newspaper are the best choice.

Lighting:

Unlike most other reptiles that bask in the sun to keep warm and to assimilate Vitamin D from natural sunlight, Fat-tail Geckos are mainly nocturnal so they do *not* require special lighting. Keep in mind that additional overhead lighting will raise the ambient temperature in the enclosure. Be aware that Fat-tail 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 Fat-tail 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 Fat-tail Geckos is around 86-88° on the floor surface of the warm side of their enclosure, and normal room temperature (around 70-74°) on the cool side. Using belly heat is recommended instead of overhead heat sources since in their natural habitat they utilize the heat absorbed from the sun in the rocks to aid in their digestion.

Shedding:

Reptiles shed their skin on regular basis, and Fat-tail Geckos should molt about every 2-4 weeks. Unlike some other reptiles, Fat-tail 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. If shedding is a problem for your 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. For severe cases of stuck shed, soaking your Fat-tail Gecko's feet in ½ inches of warm water and then using a swab, very gently remove any residual skin from their toes or eyelids in a rolling motion. Loose skin can be removed manually.

Handling:

At first, it is best to slowly offer your hand, kept low with your palm up, before picking up your Gecko. 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 Fat-tail 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. Fat-tail 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 (just like camels store water in their humps) so it is important they don't lose their tails.

Feeding:

Fat-tail Geckos mainly eat *live* crickets, mealworms, waxworms, roach nymphs, and silk-worms. Be careful not to feed them anything larger than about 3/4 the size of their heads to prevent choking. Appropriate sized mealworms can be put in a small bowl with added calcium at all times. Babies should be fed 5-7 small crickets or roach nymphs every day until they reach about 4 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 large crickets or roaches 2 or 3 times a week. Waxworms should be fed only occasionally because they are high in fat and cholesterol, and Fat-tail Geckos can become spoiled if they are fed them too often and refuse other food items. Giving your gecko a variety of foods is recommended.

Supplements:

Since Fat-tail Geckos assimilate calcium and vitamins from their diet, feeder insects *must* be "dusted" with a mixture of ultra-fine calcium powder every 2 or 3 feedings, and reptile vitamins once a week. Add calcium or 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 Fat-tail Gecko is dependent on the proper supplementation of calcium and vitamins; otherwise, serious diseases can result. Metabolic Bone Disease (MBD) is caused by calcium deficiency, and can permanently disfigure or ultimately kill your Fat-tail Gecko.

Gut Loading:

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

Quarantine:

Regardless of where you get your Fat-tail Gecko it is *critical* that when you get any new addition to your Fat-tail 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 Fat-tail Geckos and other reptiles have suffered and died needlessly as a result of one gecko infected with disease or parasites and transmitting it to other geckos.