

Smooth Knobtail Gecko Care Sheet

Nephrurus levis sp.

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Facts:

The scientific name for the Smooth Knobtail Gecko is *Nephrurus levis*, and are members of the Gekkonidae-- or Gecko family. Smooth Knobtail Geckos are native Central and Western Australia. They are terrestrial geckos, or ground dwelling, from varied areas from dry woodlands to arid scrubland consisting of hard-pack sandy soil strewn with rocks. They live in burrowed shelters they dig in the sand, where they will bury and seal themselves in. Smooth Knobtail Geckos are mainly "nocturnal" which means they hunt for food at night, and are generally less active during the day.

Description:

Smooth Knobtail are medium-sized lizards with dark to light brown, or hues of orange and red pigment with aberrant patterns of white to yellow raised spots. The tail is thick and broad with a round 'knob' on the tip. The average size of a full-grown adult is up to 3-4" snout to tail tip, with females larger than the males. Adult females weigh around 25-28 grams, and males at around 20 grams. They have large, cartoon-character heads and eyes, and a 'bulldog' appearance of their bodies.

Housing:

As a general rule, allow about 24 square inches of surface area per adult Smooth Knobtail Gecko. These geckos like to hide in low ceiling cave-like dwellings where they will dig in the substrate and completely seal the opening. Smooth Knobtail Geckos thrive best when housed individually, and males should not come in contact with each other or they may fight and become injured. Do NOT house adult Smooth Knobtail Geckos with babies or any other reptile species.

Heating:

All reptiles are cold-blooded and rely on the temperature of their surrounding environment to keep warm or cool. Use an under tank heater (UTH) on one side only of the Smooth Knobtail Gecko's enclosure, thus allowing them to move back and forth within the enclosure 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 Smooth Knobtail Geckos is around 88-90°F 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 in their natural habitat they utilize the heat absorbed from the sun in the soil and rocks of to aid in their digestion.

Substrates:

Use a ½" layer of non-silica sand on the warm end, graduating to about 3-4" on the cool end. The cool end should be kept slightly damp by misting with water a few times a week. Place the cave shelter somewhere in between the warm and cool sides. Smooth Knobtail geckos will burrow tunnels in the damp sand where they utilize the condensation of moisture to keep hydrated.

Lighting:

Unlike most other reptiles that bask in the sun to keep warm and to assimilate Vitamin D from natural sunlight, Smooth Knobtail 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 Smooth Knobtail Geckos' eyes are very sensitive and their eyesight is poor in bright light. Never expose your gecko to direct sunlight.

Handling:

Smooth Knobtail Geckos will only tolerate occasional handling, and are easily stressed. 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 Smooth Knobtail 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. Smooth Knobtail Geckos will eventually grow new tails, but the regenerated ones are never quite as nice as the original.

Shedding:

Reptiles shed their skin on regular basis, and Smooth Knobtail should molt about every 2-4 weeks. These geckos usually eat their molted skin, so do not be alarmed if you never see the skin. It is extremely important that *ALL* the skin comes off, especially from the eyes (eyecaps) and toes, as geckos can lose their digits to infection if the skin does not completely shed. If shedding is a problem for your Smooth Knobtail Gecko, it may be necessary to keep the substrate around their cave moist by misting it with water, or placing a damp paper towel inside. Keep in mind that Smooth Knobtail Geckos have very sensitive skin, and can develop infections if the substrate is too wet.

Feeding:

Smooth Knobtail Geckos mainly eat *live* crickets and roach nymphs, and hand-fed mealworms. Be careful not to feed them anything larger than about 3/4 the size of their heads to prevent choking. Smooth Knobtail Geckos can become stressed if too many feeders are introduced at a time. Babies should be fed 2-4 appropriate sized crickets or roaches 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 3-4 larger crickets or roaches 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. Put calcium 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 until they are coated. Vitamins should be given weekly using the same method. The health of your Smooth Knobtail 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 Smooth Knobtail Gecko it is *critical* that when you get any new addition to your 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.