

# **Thick-tailed Gecko Care Sheet**

***Nephrurus (Underwoodisaurus) milii***

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## **Facts:**

The scientific name for the Thick-tailed Gecko is *Nephrurus milii*, and they are also referred to Barking Geckos. They are members of the Gekkonidae-- or Gecko family. Thick-tailed Geckos are communal lizards native to Southern Australia. They are terrestrial geckos, or ground dwelling, from varied areas from wet coastal areas, leaf-covered forests, dry woodlands, to arid scrubland consisting of hard-pack sandy soil. They live in sheltered crevices in rocks or under loose bark at bases of trees. Thick-tailed Geckos are "nocturnal", hunting for food at night, and are generally less active during the day.

## **Description:**

Thick-tailed Geckos are medium-sized lizards with varying body color from dark to light brown pigment, to gold and orange, with aberrant patterns of white to yellow raised tubercles, and a dense band of these spots around the neck. The tail is thick and broad tapering to a point. Juveniles are slow growers, and can take up to 6 months to accurately sex, and usually reach adult size in 18 months. The average size of a full-grown adult is up to 4-5" snout to tail tip, and 20-25 grams in weight.

## **Housing:**

As a general rule, allow a minimum 12 x 12 inches of surface area per adult Thick-tailed Gecko. These geckos like to live in group colonies and hide in cave-like dwellings kept on the warm side of their enclosure (see Heating below). Adult males should not be housed together in the same vivarium or they may fight and injure each other. A single male can be kept with several females, and several females can share the same enclosure. Do NOT house adult Thick-tailed 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 (UTH) heater on one side only of the Thick-tailed 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 Thick-tailed Geckos is around 84-86°F on the floor surface of the warm side of their enclosure, and normal room temperature (around 70-74°) on the cool side. Using UTH's is recommended instead of overhead heat sources since they utilize the heat absorbed from the sun in the soil and rocks of their natural habitat to aid in their digestion.

## **Substrates:**

Use a 1"-2" layer of a mixture of fine 50% non-silica sand and 50% sifted peat moss in the bottom of the enclosure. Keep an area of the cool side slightly moist by misting with water 2-3 times a week.

## **Lighting:**

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

### **Handling:**

Thick-tailed geckos will tolerate moderate 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 Thick-tailed 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. Thick-tailed 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 Thick-tailed Geckos should molt about every 2-4 weeks. Unlike some gecko species, Thick-tails do **not** eat their shed 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. Soaking your Thick-tailed 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 eyes. Be very gentle! If shedding is a problem for your Thick-tailed Gecko, it may be necessary to keep the cool side substrate more moist, or placing a damp paper towel inside their hide.

### **Feeding:**

Thick-tailed Geckos are voracious eaters feeding mainly eat *live* crickets and roach nymphs. Be careful not to feed them anything larger than about 3/4 the size of their heads to prevent choking. Babies should be fed 3-4 small crickets or roaches every other day until they reach about 2 inches in length, then larger prey every other day until they become full-grown in about 12 -18 months. Adults can be fed 5-6 larger crickets or roaches every 3 days. Giving your gecko a variety of foods is recommended, but Thick-tail geckos are not inclined to eat from bowls. They will lick water droplets from the walls of the cool side of their enclosure after misting. If no misting, then a water bowl should be made available.

### **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 Thick-tailed 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 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. Roaches should be fed a high-protein diet like Ferret food.

### **Quarantine:**

Regardless of where you get your Thick-tailed 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.