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BIRD & EXOTIC ANIMAL MEDICINE

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Leopard Gecko Care Sheet

General Information

Leopard geckos (*Eublepharis macularius*) or 'leo' for slang, originated from the Middle East - Afghanistan, India, and Pakistan area. Adults can obtain lengths of 20-30 cm long and 60-100+ grams (g) in weight in captivity. Babies are around 10 cm and average 3g in weight. Leos are a terrestrial animal and prefer to stay on the ground and are most active at night, meaning that they are primarily nocturnal. They are one of the most popular and easiest geckos to keep in captivity. With proper care a leopard gecko can easily live over 20 years.

Housing

One or several individuals do well in a 20 gallon long glass aquarium. Colony situations can use drawer systems, and plastic/fiberglass vivariums are an excellent way to showcase your pets and provide a good, controllable environment.

Substrate

The best substrate to use is paper, newspaper, paper towel, or slate. Sand can be appropriate, as long as it is washed "Play Sand". Mason's sand is crushed and can be dangerous. If you're looking for a more naturalistic look go with slate. "Reptile Carpet" can be used, but must be changed and washed (preferably in a washing machine with detergent) at least weekly. Don't ever use aquarium gravel, walnut shells or calcium sand. These substrates can be fatal if caught in a gecko's digestive system.

Hides

In order for the gecko to feel secure in its enclosure, provide several hiding places. These can be as simple as inverted plant saucer pans, plants, wood, etc. It's a good idea to put a hide on both the warm end and cool end (discussed in heat section below) of the cage. This will allow them to hide and feel comfortable on both ends of the cage. Along with a "dark" hide they need a humid hide. The most popular is using a throw away container such as a Glad or Tupperware container. Cut a hole in the lid and fill it with moist peat moss, sphagnum moss, forest bed (Coconut fiber), or paper towel. This will provide enough humidity to allow the gecko to shed properly.

Heat & Light

Heat the warm end of the enclosure to 88°-90°F with the opposite side of the cage in the mid 70's. It is very important to provide a temperature gradient for the animal that will allow it to regulate its own body temperature. There are several different ways to provide proper heat. A common way is to use under-tank heating or using a strip of heat tape run under the cage. Another way is to provide a heat lamp with a 60 watt to 100 watt Ceramic Heat Emitter bulb (such as Pearlco brand), which will give off heat without light. This is probably the best heat

source as it is air heat and is both natural and safe. Traditional thinking believed that leopard geckos are nocturnal so there is no need for special UVB lighting; however, current research has shown that they do best with low-level UVB lighting, so a 3.0-5.0 Reptile UV bulb is recommended for 12-14 hours per day.

Handling

When holding any animal it's best to take it slow. When you first acquire a new animal it is best not to hold them for 1-2 weeks, allowing them to adjust to the new environment and get used to their new home. After this time, gently hold the gecko, letting it walk across your hand inside the cage. Once the gecko is familiar with you, you can take it out and hold it. Remember that too much holding or too rough of holding may be a stress on the animal. It is particularly important to never grab the tail, as the tail may break off. It will eventually grow back but will not look like the original.

Diet

Leopard Geckos are insectivores and the most common items used are crickets, mealworms, superworms, silkworms, and small cockroaches as a staple diet. Be cautious of crickets, as they can carry a wide range of parasites that can be dangerous to reptiles.

Only feed as many insects as the gecko will consume within 12 hours. Left over prey running in the cage can cause stress and occasionally the insects will bite and feed on the gecko. Make certain that the prey is appropriately sized for the size of gecko being fed.

Supplementation

Dust most/all insect-prey being given to the gecko, using an "ultra-fine" phosphorus-free calcium supplement. Providing a dish of calcium for the gecko 24/7 is recommended. If they want more calcium the animal can lick what they need or want. Supplementation is very important because MBD (Metabolic Bone Disease) can cause serious problems with reptiles.

Gutloading

Make sure to feed the food item (insects) a complete, proper diet prior to feeding. Gutloading, as this is referred to, is feeding very nutritious foods to prey prior to feeding. This will make a healthier insect and in the long-run a healthier gecko. Remember your geckos are what they eat.

Water

Offer a dish of fresh water at all times. Keeping the water fresh is very important; change daily. The dish used should be large enough for the gecko to climb completely into, but also easy to climb out of.