

## **Fat-Tailed Gecko** **Hemitheconyx caudicinctus**

Ron Hatcher, Geckos Galore

Like the leopard gecko (*Eublepharis macularius*), the fat-tailed gecko, is a true eyelid gecko. From the family Gekkonidae and the subfamily Eublepharinae, the *Hemitheconyx caudicinctus*, or Fat-tailed gecko, is very similar in shape and size to the leopard gecko. But it is adapted to a far different life-style. It is a relatively docile animal, more shy and with different behavior patterns toward humans than the leopard gecko. A new owner may cause the animal some distress, but upon becoming used to to its owner, the Fat-tailed gecko is usually content to rest on a hand or arm.

The native range for the Fat-tailed gecko is West Africa, from Senegal to Northern Cameroon. They utilize savannah, rocky hillsides, dry open woodland, and river edges as habitats. In captivity, they prefer a semi-moist micro-habitat and a dry area for foraging. The easiest way to maintain Fat-tailed geckoes is by using plastic storage boxes. The opaque sides give the animal the seclusion they desire. An internal chamber, such as a small Tupperware container with a 1" hole cut into it, an extra hiding place can be provided. This inner box should have a 1/2" layer of dampened vermiculite to provide needed moisture. Remember to spray the vermiculite with water on occasion to keep it moist. The outer box should have a base of either newspaper or dry vermiculite, or orchid bark. There are several different sizes of vermiculite granules and any size can be used, but the larger size is better for egg laying and it doesn't break down as quickly.

The temperature range for Fat-tailed geckoes should be 27-35 C or 82-95 F. In egg laying boxes, and the ambient temp. should be 26.7 C, or ~ 80F. The ambient temperatures can be allowed to drop during the night to a low of 20 C, or 68 F, but the eggs cannot drop below 26.7 C,(80 F). During breeding season, it is best to keep both ambient and egg box temps. at the optimum level for the eggs.

Feeding Fat-tailed geckos is the same as for leopard geckos. Crickets are the best food source. With a calcium/phosphorous ratio of 1:1 and good mineral and vitamin supplementation, Fat-tails will stay healthy. Mealworms fed once a month, after the geckos are six months old are all right. But because they are a poor calcium source, with a calcium to phosphorous ratio o 1:14, they must be supplemented. Placing them in a bowl of mineral supplement during feeding will ensure the animals ingest the needed minerals. No wax worms should be used because they are too high in fat content and their calcium to phosphorous ratio is 1:401. Feeding baby mice to adult geckos is not necessary, but after egg laying they can quickly help rebuild the gecko's fat reserves. Mice also have a good calcium to phosphorous level of 1:1. Remember that what goes into the gecko determines what comes out as far as healthy eggs!

The breeding season of the Fat-tail is between Oct. and June, but different breeding colonies may have unique schedules. Mating normally occurs in Dec. and the first clutch of eggs can be expected from fifteen to forty-five days later. For females who are just beginning to cycle, the laying time is usually the full 45 days. After being bred once the female can continue laying good eggs for at least 5 clutches, with delayed implantation of the male's sperm. If the female is bred by a different male

after laying the first clutch, it will take at least one clutch more before the first male's sperm is purged and the second male's offspring start to be produced. Clutches of five are normal, but 13 is not impossible, with two eggs in each clutch. These occur twelve to twenty-two days apart, depending upon the temperature of the habitat. Geckos that produce many eggs one year may lay fewer the following year.

Incubation of the eggs is as easy as those of the leopard gecko. Fat-tailed eggs require less moisture and heat, 26.7-34.4 C,(80-90 F). The medium of choice is coarse vermiculite lightly dampened with the eggs half buried so they can get plenty of air. Fat-tailed gecko eggs are also Temperature Sex Determined, (TSD). Eggs maintained at 26.7 C, (80 F), will be females, those kept at 30 C, (85.6 F), will be about 1/4 male, and temps. of 32.2 C, (or 90 F), will produce all males.

One major problem with Fat-tailed geckos is that their systems are somewhat weaker than leopard geckos. A Fat-tail will direct 25% of its energy into self-preservation and little into reproductive success. Therefore, a routine worming twice yearly is required. Immediately after the last eggs of the year and just before the next breeding season, worming should be done.