



African Fat-Tailed Geckos

Hemitheconyx caudicinctus

BEGINNER • 7–9 IN ADULT • 15–20 YR LIFESPAN • NOCTURNAL • WEST AFRICA

Think of the fat-tail as the leopard gecko's quieter West African cousin: same sturdy build, same gentle nature, same forgiving size. The honest difference is humidity. This is a forest-edge species, not a desert one; keep it dry like a leopard gecko and you'll fight stuck sheds forever. Meet that one need and a fat-tail is an unfussy, slow-moving companion for fifteen to twenty years.

AT A GLANCE	
Difficulty	Beginner
Adult size	7–9 in
Lifespan	15–20 years
Ambient temp	75–82 °F day, 70–75 °F night
Basking spot	88–95 °F
Humidity	50–70%
UVB	Low output, beneficial
Diet	Crickets, mealworms, Dubia roaches
Feeding	Every 2–3 days



Captive-bred fat-tails and their morphs are NARBC staples; look for clean bands, bright eyes and the plump namesake tail.

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01

Temperament & Handling

Fat-tails are docile to the point of being sleepy, but they're shyer than their leopard gecko cousins and it shows: expect an animal that watches from the mouth of a hide rather than one that struts. Handle low, slow and over a surface. Never restrain the tail; like most geckos they can drop it, and the regrown version is never as handsome. Evening is their hour; let them sleep the day away.

02

Housing by Life Stage

Floor space matters more than height: this is a ground gecko that patrols the forest floor, not a climber. Start hatchlings small so they can find food and their hides, then scale up to a 36×18×18 minimum for an adult; 48×24×18 is the comfortable target. Every stage gets three shelters: warm, cool and humid. And house fat-tails alone. Males will fight, and even pairs stress each other over hides and food.

STAGE	MINIMUM	PREFERRED	NOTES
Hatchling	12×12×12	16×12×12	Humid hide essential from day one: higher humidity needs than a leopard gecko.
Juvenile	20×12×12	24×18×12	Hold 50–70% humidity; more secretive than a leopard gecko, so give extra cover.
Subadult	24×18×12	36×18×18	Grows slower than a leopard gecko. Don't rush the feeding schedule.
Adult	36×18×18	48×24×18	Forest-floor native; 50–70% humidity with a humid hide always available.

Enclosure minimums and preferred sizes from Habitat-OS life-stage guidance; footprint beats height for this ground-dweller.

03

Heat & Light

Run a gradient: 75–82 °F across the enclosure with an 88–95 °F basking surface at one end, dropping to 70–75 °F at night. A low overhead heat source on a thermostat is the clean way to get there. Skip heat rocks entirely. Fat-tails are night-active and don't require UVB to survive, but a low-output UVB strip over the warm side is genuinely beneficial; give them shade to escape it. After dark, lights off; if the room can't hold 70 °F, add lightless heat on the thermostat.

04

Humidity & Water

Here's where fat-tails part ways with leopard geckos. Aim for 50–70% ambient humidity (a naturally damp substrate layer and a morning misting usually get you there) and **keep a humid hide available around the clock**, packed with moist sphagnum. It's where your gecko will shed, hydrate and spend half its life. Offer a shallow water dish, refreshed daily. If sheds start sticking on toes and eyelids, your hygrometer is lying to you; check it again at floor level.

05

Substrate & Cover

Pick a substrate that holds moisture without going swampy: a soil–coco fiber mix a few inches deep, topped with leaf litter, does the forest-floor job. Paper towel is the right call for hatchlings and quarantine; skip loose sand at every age. Because this is a shy species, clutter is kindness. Cork bark, low plants and leaf piles turn an exposed box into territory a fat-tail will actually cross at night.

06

Feeding

Fat-tails are strict insect-eaters. Build meals around crickets, Dubia roaches and mealworms, offered every 2–3 days. Keep portions to a few appropriately sized bugs, no wider than the gecko's head. Gut-load a day or two beforehand, then dust plain calcium, D3-free and phosphorus-free, at most feedings. With no UVB strip, a D3 calcium replaces the plain powder once or twice a week. Keep the multivitamin occasional: weekly while growing, twice monthly for adults. The tail is your fuel gauge.

07

Health Red Flags

Stuck shed is the early alarm on this species. Bands of retained skin on toes and eyelids mean the humidity has been wrong for weeks, and unshed toes can strangle and drop. Fix the setup the day you see it. The graver sign is a thinning tail: fat-tails bank their reserves there, so steady shrinkage, especially with refused food, points to parasites or worse. A wasting tail, a rubbery jaw or eyes that stay shut are reptile-vet visits, not forum questions.

Husbandry data: Habitat-OS species library. Structure follows the NARBC show handout series. Every animal is an individual — when in doubt, ask the breeder at the table or a reptile veterinarian.