



Jackson's Chameleons

Trioceros jacksonii

ADVANCED · 9–13 IN ADULT · 5–10 YR LIFESPAN · DIURNAL · EAST AFRICAN HIGHLANDS

The three-horned Jackson's chameleon looks like a pocket Triceratops and keeps like what it is: a mountain species. Native to cool, wet East African highlands (with a famous feral population in Hawaii), it gives live birth instead of laying eggs and actively suffers in the hot, dry setups that suit desert reptiles. It is not a first chameleon; it is a rewarding third.

AT A GLANCE	
Ambient (day)	72–78 °F
Basking surface	82–86 °F
Night	60–68 °F
Humidity	50–80% · High airflow
UVB	Required: 5.0 / T5
Diet	Small insects, varied
Feeding cadence	Daily; adults every other day
Adult size	9–13 in
Lifespan	5–10 years



Jackson's chameleons are live-bearing highland chameleons; the males carry the three horns.

Photo: Marius Burger / Wikimedia Commons · CC0

01

A montane animal in a lowland world

The Jackson's rulebook inverts standard reptile advice: cooler is safer than warmer, and a heat wave is more dangerous than a cold snap. Days belong in the low-to-mid 70s with a modest basking spot, and nights should genuinely fall into the 60s. That drop isn't something they tolerate; it's required highland physiology.

02

Housing: air, height, privacy

All-screen enclosures are close to mandatory: this species needs high humidity and high airflow simultaneously, the combination glass boxes can't deliver. Build a dense vertical forest of vines and foliage, house every animal alone, and break sight-lines between enclosures. The mere sight of another chameleon reads as an invasion.

STAGE	MINIMUM	PREFERRED	NOTES
Newborn	16×16×20	16×16×30	Live-born by the dozen; fruit flies and pinheads.
Juvenile	18×18×36	24×24×36	The highland night-drop matters from the start.
Subadult	24×24×36	24×24×48	Male horns make sexing obvious by six months.
Adult	24×24×48	36×24×48	Tall screen, cool room, heavy daily misting.

Enclosure sizes in inches, L×W×H. Habitat-OS life-stage guidance.

03

Heat & UVB

Basking tops out around 82–86 °F, with ambient in the low-to-mid 70s. Genuinely hot setups cook this species. UVB is required daily, from a linear 6% (5.0) T5 tube on the screen top with the top perch set to the distance its maker publishes for UVI 3, commonly 10–14 inches. Window glass strips UVB, so a sunny window is scenery, not supplementation. Outdoor cage time in mild weather is the gold standard.

04

Water for a fog-drinker

Jackson's chameleons drink fog and drip, not bowls. Mist thoroughly at least twice daily until leaves drip, run a dripper through the midday, and let surfaces dry between rounds. The humidity floor is high, but the air must move: a stagnant wet cage breeds the mold and respiratory infections that end these animals.

05

Planting & the nursery surprise

Plant densely (pothos, ficus, hibiscus) with perch diameters matched to small feet. And read this twice if you bought a female: Jackson's are **live-bearers**, gravid for 6–9 months, and pet-trade females frequently arrive pregnant. A 'single' chameleon that suddenly becomes thirty chameleons is a known Tuesday; have deli-cup nursery plans before you need them.

06

Feeding

Small, varied, gut-loaded: half-grown crickets, small roaches, silkworms, the occasional waxworm. Newborns start on fruit flies and pinhead crickets. Supplement lightly, since highland species are sensitive to over-supplementation. Plain calcium a few times weekly and a D3 multivitamin roughly twice monthly for indoor animals (skip added D3 for chameleons living outdoors).

07

Health Red Flags

Gaping, panting, or pale color on a warm day is overheating. Cool the room first, ask questions later. Sunken eyes and skin folds mean dehydration; step up misting immediately. Closed eyes during daylight hours is the classic early sickness sign in chameleons. Watch newly acquired females for sudden girth: that's not obesity, that's a nursery deadline.

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.