



Western New York Herpetological Society

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Common Name: Madagascar Leaf Tailed Geckos

Latin name: *Uroplatus ssp.*

Native to: Madagascar, There are currently 6 species seen fairly regularly in the pet trade. They are Giant Leaf Tailed Gecko (*Uroplatus fimbriatus*), Fringed or Henkel's Leaf Tailed Gecko (*U. henkeli*), Mossy Leaf Tailed Gecko (*U. sikorae*), Lined or Lineated Leaf Tailed Gecko (*U. lineatus*), Satanic Leaf Tailed Gecko (*U. phantasticus*) and Spear Point or Eban's Leaf Tailed Gecko (*U. ebanau*). Other species are rarely seen in captivity.

Size: Leaf Tailed Geckos range in size from the 4-6 inch Eban's or Spear Point Leaf Tailed Gecko (*Uroplatus ebanau*) to the one-foot plus Giant Leaf Tailed Gecko (*Uroplatus fimbriatus*).

Life span: 3-5 years in the wild, 10-15 in captivity.

General appearance: The Madagascar Leaf Tailed Geckos are some of the most bizarre looking members of the Gecko Family. All species have to some degree frills and flaps that help to break up the body shape. This, along with the cryptic coloration, helps the geckos to rely on their primary form of defense: camouflage. Most specimens are colored in various shades of tans, browns, grays, and greens. Coloration is usually mottled, to the extreme in some species, like Mossy Leaf Tailed Gecko (*Uroplatus sikorae*) the animal seems to actually be growing moss on its back. The eyes are large, suited for the gecko's nocturnal habits. The jaws are relatively weak, with small teeth. A bite from a Leaf Tail, even the large and somewhat intimidating Giant Leaf Tail, is relatively benign. The tail is leaf shaped, especially so in *Uroplatus phantasticus*, the Satanic Leaf Tail, hence the geckos' name. The Cryptic appearance of these animals has earned them the reputation of evil spirits in their native Madagascar.

Housing requirements:

Enclosure: Enclosures for Leaf Tails are not too complicated. The size should reflect the lizard(s) size. For the smaller species, enclosures the size of 20-30 gallon aquariums are adequate. For the larger species, 40-100 gallon aquaria or larger are required. Each animal in the cage should have enough space to form its own territory. Aquaria are good cages for *Uroplatus* because they help to contain humidity, which is very important for the well being of Leaf Tails. Screen tops are adequate, however a sheet of plexi-glass or plastic should be placed over one half of the lid to help maintain humidity. Some hobbyists have had success with other plastic or glass enclosures. Note: The smaller species of Leaf Tail (Eban's and Satanic) live mostly in low bushes in the wild, so long type terrariums are preferred for these species. "High" tanks are better for the other 4 common species.

Temperature: Leaf Tailed Geckos are from cool, mountain forests and hobbyists should strive to mimic these conditions. A daytime temperature of 77-84 degrees F will keep the geckos comfortable. For The mossy Leaf tail, Eban's Leaf Tail, and The Satanic Leaf Tail, a temperature range of 66-78 degrees F is required. At night, the temperature can lower to as much as 70 degrees F. The main thing with Leaf Tails is humidity. A 75-100 % humidity range is required so that the delicate skin of these animals will not allow them to desiccate.

Heat/Light: Heat for Leaf Tailed Geckos should be provided via nocturnal reptile heat bulbs. These shy, nocturnal animals do not appreciate harsh, direct lighting. Full spectrum bulbs can be used with Leaf Tailed Geckos in accompaniment with nocturnal heat lamps. It has been documented that UVB rays are important to the health of Leaf Tailed Geckos, and will often stimulate breeding. Lower wattage is all right, as the geckos thrive in relatively cool temperatures.

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Substrate: A substrate of a forest type, soil based mix is best for leaf Tailed geckos. Peat moss, non-perlite potting soil, and soil/sand mixes are all satisfactory.

Environment: Madagascar Leaf Tailed Geckos thrive in naturalistic enclosures that mimic their native rainforest home. A soil based mix substrate can be placed over a layer of large grain aquarium gravel for drainage. Live plants can be planted either in the substrate directly or in sunken pots, as these geckos tend to leave cage decorations alone. Live plants with broad leaves such as philodendrons and pothos are better than plastic plants because they increase the ever-important humidity. Sections of cork bark will provide shelters and resting spots for the geckos as well as places for females to lay their eggs. Thick branches are a must; the geckos will rest on them in full view, depending on their camouflage for defense.

Diet: Feeding Leaf Tailed Geckos is relatively simple. Appropriately sized crickets, mealworms, and waxworms should be offered every other day to adults, daily to juveniles. Adults of the larger species will also accept pinkie mice from forceps. All food items should be coated in calcium mineral supplements. A feeding dish may be used. However these animals tend to feed with such vigor that they may damage their snouts on the bottoms of hard dishes. This can be solved by placing a sponge in the bottom of the food dish to cushion the blow of the gecko striking the cricket. A liquid bird vitamin mixed with baby food can also be fed via an eyedropper.

Maintenance: Spot clean the enclosure daily. Mist the geckos vigorously at least twice daily. A cool air humidifier can help to create the humid environment these animals require. These geckos move relatively slowly and brief periods of handling may be tolerated. These animals are not being captive bred on a large scale. Since many wild caught animals are loaded with internal parasites, de-worming is recommended. Captive bred individuals, although rare, are the better choice for a healthy animal.

Other references or recommended reading:

- Burger, R. M. 1993. "Leaftailed geckos: some notes on the maintenance and reproduction of *Uroplatus henkeli* (Bohme & Ibish)". *Dactylus*. 1(4):11-16.
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- Nussbaum, R. A. and C. J. Raxworthy. 1994. Herpetologica. 50:319-325
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