

**KEEPING ADVICE SHEET**

# Arboreal Geckoes

## Variegated or Tree Dtella

*Gehyra variegata*



**Variegated or Tree Dtella** (*Gehyra variegata*)  
– Maximum length 12.5 cm. Category 2.

**Northern Spiny-tailed Gecko** (*Strophurus ciliaris*) – Maximum length 8 cm (Male), 13 cm (Female). Category 2.

**South-west Spiny-tailed Gecko** (*Strophurus spinigerus*) - Maximum length 10 cm (Male), 15 cm (Female). Category 2.

**Marbled Velvet Gecko** (*Oedura marmorata*)  
– Maximum length 20 cm. Category 3.

**NATURAL HABITS:** Variegated Dtella occurs in southern WA, excluding the southwest corner and Nullarbor, in all habitats where it hides in cracks and crevices on trees and granite outcrops. Frequently found in association with human habitation, particularly on older buildings. Northern Spiny-tailed Gecko occurs in semiarid eucalypt woodlands in the northwest and central interior of WA. South-west Spiny-tailed Gecko occurs in dunes (yellow eyes), shrublands and woodlands (orange eyes) on west coast from Shark Bay (white eyes) south and east to the Bight, excluding southwest corner. Marbled Velvet Gecko occurs on rocky outcrops and adjacent trees, from the Pilbara south to about Yalgoo.

All Australian geckos are primarily nocturnal.

**HOUSING:** An adult pair will require a top-ventilated, indoor vivarium of at least 40 x 20 x 30 cm high. Small aquariums with pegboard covers are suitable. Enclosures must be secure and escape proof.

**CAPTIVE ENVIRONMENT:** Cage furnishings can consist of pieces of bark, small rocks and leaf litter, or a combination of these. Because

these geckos are arboreal it is important to include branches and twigs to allow climbing. These should be angled upwards diagonally from one side of the cage to the other. As vivarium geckos the spiny-tails are great because they perch on a stick in the open during the day and so can be seen most of the time. A favourite perching place, especially in the cooler months, will usually be in a warm position close to the artificial heat source. For a week or so before sloughing their skin off, these geckos usually like to hide. Ensure there are suitable vertical refuges provided as well as a horizontal hiding place in the form of a piece of bark on the vivarium floor.

**TEMPERATURE & LIGHTING:** To stimulate nocturnal behaviour and improve your ability to observe them at the same time, install a red or blue light globe to provide warmth at night. This can be replaced with a white globe in the day. A gradual cline of temperatures is desired, so place the globe at one end of vivarium. Experiment with different wattage globes, but if using a plastic container, ensure that the wattage is not too high nor the globe too close to melt the plastic. The warm spot should be about 28°C and the cool spot about 18°C.

**WATER:** A shallow water bowl should be provided at all times; include a small, half-submerged stone, which will provide a damp place and contribute to vivarium humidity. Lightly spray the interior once a week with a water atomiser as geckos may only drink by licking up the droplets.

**FOOD:** A variety of insects such as adequately sized mealworms; crickets, grasshoppers, cockroaches and moths will be readily taken. Many geckos will take termites too. Food should be dusted with a calcium/vitamin supplement and offered every 2-3 days in a small, shallow container.

**CAPTIVE BEHAVIOUR/BREEDING:** These geckos adjust readily to captivity despite being shy in the wild. Spiny-tailed geckos may squirt a harmless, odorous fluid from the top of tail when nervous. Keep handling to a minimum

by restricting it to that required for general husbandry. Always handle your gecko carefully by the body so that it does not drop its tail. The male is usually smaller and has two obvious hemipene bulges at the base of the tail, either side of the vent. Female Variegated Dtella may develop cheek swellings caused by calcium storage in preparation for egg production. Breeding will occur in the spring and summer if cooled off for a few weeks in the winter. They deposit one or two eggs in a clutch, with two or three consecutive clutches each season being common. When the eggs have developed sufficiently to be seen through the female's belly, create a suitable laying site for her, consisting of a small area of slightly damp soil at least 4 cm deep. By providing this, the female is less likely to become egg bound. Males may fight during the breeding season and require separation at this time to avoid damage to each other.

**DISEASES:** A clean artificial reptile environment with the appropriate husbandry mentioned above will usually result in your pets remaining healthy. Quarantine newly acquired animals for at least a month before introducing them to those already being kept.

**REPTILE MITES:** Reptile mites are the scourge of many keepers. They can rapidly multiply and quickly kill a reptile. If an infestation is found, it is imperative that you take immediate action to eradicate it. Although small (a large female may be one-third the size of a pin head) they will be obvious on white paper as miniature black tick-like animals. If you find you have an infestation, it is important to kill it *in situ*. This can be achieved by placing a Sureguard Ministrip™ within the respective cage for at least 8 hours before cleaning. Then follow-up with two 8-hour cycles two days apart. DO NOT expose your pet to the pest strip for any longer or you may kill it.

**FURTHER READING:** *Care of Australian Reptiles in Captivity* – John Weigel, Reptile Keepers Association, Gosford, NSW.