

# DESERT SOCIALITES

Reptiles can exert their charms on many people. A special favourite is the gluttonous leopard gecko. That's mainly because these lizards very often become hand-tame. Apart from that, they're easy to look after and therefore ideal for beginners. According to the vets from the specialist retail chain Maxi Zoo, leopard geckos feel particularly at home in a terrarium, living as a pair or in a small group.

It's not exactly common for geckos to live in groups. Nonetheless, leopard geckos are sociable animals by nature. They are to be found in India, Pakistan and Iran, among other places. There, they inhabit the dry, stepp-like areas. Correspondingly, they can manage with a relatively sparsely furnished terrarium. Sand or fine pebbles make a suitable floor substrate. Stone structures and pieces of cork bark are important as they offer climbing facilities and hideaways. You can put in a few dry climate plants for decoration - but it's not in any way necessary. On the other hand, a flat water bowl should always be available.

The ideal situation would be to keep one male together with two to three females. A female on its own becomes too severely stressed during the mating season, two males don't get on at all and a single animal will feel lonely. Because leopard geckos are twilight active, they won't be jumping around the terrarium during the day. They only come out of hiding around evening to go off in search of prey. Crickets, mealworms and wax moths all qualify. Geckos are prowlers and highly adept at snapping insects. Live food should also be selected according to the size of the lizards which can reach an overall length of



25 centimetres. Geckos are known for their greed, so they shouldn't be allowed to over-eat. Feeding three times a week (dusted with calcium and vitamin powder) is ample for a full-grown animal.

As it's significantly cooler in their homelands during winter, (healthy) leopard geckos should also hibernate in the terrarium. This is important for their well-being and readiness to mate. During the period from the end of November to the middle of February, the daytime temperature should be reduced from the normal 28 degrees to just 18 degrees. The daylight hours can also be reduced slowly and

steadily down to just six hours per day. Feeding can finally be discontinued but fresh drinking water must always be available. Change the drinking water unobtrusively as the animals should be disturbed as little as possible during this time.

## SPRING AWAKENING

As the end of hibernation approaches you can slowly increase the daylight hours again (about one extra hour per week). When the normal rhythm has been reached, you can re-introduce additional heat sources such as a warming stone. Now...a point to emphasise: pay close attention to humidity. This must not be allowed to sink too low and can be prevented either automatically by an ultra-sonic mist generator (via a timer) or by using a spray bottle daily. If you're not keeping just females, you can reckon with mating. But consider this: leopard geckos can live for 20 years so you could soon be needing a second terrarium.

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