



Chondrodactylus Angulifer

Natural Environment

This is a terrestrial gecko native to the western desert regions of southern Africa. Namely western Namibia, Botswana and South Africa. This is one of the most inhospitable regions in the world, with summer daytime temperatures in excess of 104° F and winter night time temperatures of 50° F. Annual rainfall is only 8 inches. This indicates that the animal is a hardy species and can withstand a wide range of conditions, making it fairly easy to keep.

Subspecies

Chondrodactylus only occurs as a single species, *C. angulifer*. However there are two recognized sub species, *C. a. angulifer* and *C. a. namibensis*. The differences in the subspecies is subtle and distinguishing between them problematic. The author has not run across any pictures or diagrams that clearly show the differences. Only a textual description has been found and it is difficult to understand. Quoted from Michael Knoething's Article in *Gecko*, "A clear distinguishing feature is the scalation. In the nominate form, ventral imbricate scales become larger laterally and have the same size as the dorsal tubercular scales, with which they mix laterally. In the subspecies *C. a. namibensis* the ventral imbricate scales become smaller laterally and merge with the small dorsal, granular scales between the enlarged tubercular scales." Following various threads in forums indicates some disagreement among keepers as to an exact identification. This may be due to interbreeding between the subspecies, incorrect taxonomy in declaring a true subspecies, difficulty in interpreting the physiology (from limited descriptive information) or a combination there of. In any event, one must be very careful in deciding to pay a much higher price for the rarer *C. a. namibensis* just on the say so of the seller.

Husbandry

Chondrodactylus may be kept in much the same way as Leopard geckos. They have similar environmental needs and are roughly the same size. Chondro's come from an area that is a bit hotter and more sandy as opposed to rocky. A single animal can easily be accommodated in a 10 gallon aquarium. As with most all geckos, males cannot be housed together and male female pairs, as opposed to trios and greater, are preferred.

This animal is a vigorous digger, much more so than a Leopard gecko. Unlike Leopards, this animal will not be truly happy living on a substrate that cannot be constantly rearranged. Furthermore, it needs to be able to create a burrow, and is unsatisfied to just "chill out" in a wet hide box, like a Leopard. Therefore sand is the recommended substrate, after all, that is what they are designed for. The best is a calcium carbonate sand (CaCO₃) as opposed to beach sand. You want a 1 to 3 inch layer, a 10 pound bag should be sufficient. The deeper the sand, the more fun for Chondro.



Floor Plan



Basic Set Up

The basic set up is a 10 gallon aquarium, screen top, sand substrate, water dish, wet hide box, dry hide box and work lamp on one side of the top with a red 40 watt incandescent light bulb for basking.



Wet Hide Box

This is a lidded container half full of moist potting soil. It needs to be large enough to hold the gecko in addition to the soil. A top corner of the lid has a hole cut in it for access. Keep the soil moist but not sopping wet. Replace the soil if moldy or every few months. Plastic food storage containers work well.



Dry Hide Box

This is nothing more than an open ended container that lays on top of the substrate. A flower pot cut in half is ideal.

This animal does not require misting. An ambient temperature of 75° F with a hot spot in the range of 85° to 95° F is sufficient. A 40 watt incandescent bulb in the 10 gallon setup, pictured above will yield the correct temperature range. One may need to switch to a 25 watt bulb during the summer, depending on the ambient room temperature.

Chondrodactylus is mainly nocturnal, and does not adapt to semi-diurnal behavior like Leopard geckos. It is on the shy side and is not recommended as a “hands on” animal, although most geckos can be conditioned to be fairly tolerant of handling over time. It is not an aggressive animal, but one needs to be careful, as the jaw muscles are formidable. Chondros can easily snap a zophobas (super worm) in half, and can deliver a nasty bite.

Animals dart out of their burrows to grab food items and scurry back in. The burrows are formed by excavating the sand out from under the dry hide box and piling it in a mound out front. When out foraging, they often exhibit their characteristic scorpion imitation, with their



“Burrow”

tail held raised up high. Food items consist of live insects of sizes appropriate to the size of individual animals. Crickets and zophobas are eagerly devoured. Juveniles can be fed smaller crickets and meal worms. One to two zophobas or several crickets, fed every other day or three times a week is enough. As with all animals, growing hatchlings, juveniles, and breeding females require more food. Reduce feeding if animals show signs of getting fat. Prey items are lightly dusted with a calcium plus vitamin D3 supplement (Miner-All I) at each feeding.

Chondrodactylus shows marked sexual dimorphism. All male *C. a. angulifer* have pairs of large white spots on their back, while females do not. *C. a. namibensis* males may, on occasion, lack the white spots. Females, regardless of sub-species, lack the spots. Females also have tiny claws where as the males are clawless. The author currently does not have first hand breeding experience and refers the reader to the articles quoted in the bibliography.

Bibliography

Reams, Richard. "The Namib Sand Gecko (*Chondrodactylus Angulifer*)". Reptiles March 1998: 78+.

Knoethig, Michael. Distribution Range, Captive Care and Breeding of *Chondrodactylus Angulifer*. Gekko Volume One, Issue One: 2-9.

Henkel, Fredrich-Wilhelm and Schmidt, Wolfgang. Geckoes. Biology, Husbandry and Reproduction. Malabar, Florida: Krieger, 1995.