

Uroplatus phantasticus
Satanic Leaf-tailed Gecko
Care Guide



*Based on the Husbandry
recommended by
MistyMountainPhants.com*

Introduction from Misty Mountain Phants

*W*e have come a long way in our effort to establish the Satanic Leaf-Tailed Gecko in captivity. The prime measure of success is the consistent availability of captive hatched individuals for the reptile community. This is the result of years of hard work by breeders to determine husbandry conditions necessary to maintain multiple individuals at a level where they will produce eggs. And, most of the husbandry information available is from this perspective. But production conditions require certain compromises that you are not constrained by.

The husbandry presented in this care guide is specifically created for the keeper of one or a few geckos and do not have the constraints of space and time that a breeder does. This is the ideal husbandry for your phant. Note that some of this will contradict the typical "breeder husbandry" in the community. So, how do we reconcile breeder care and keeper care?

I explain it this way. Animals can live in various levels of conditions. Humans, for example, can live good lives in a dirt floor hut, a small home in a rural area, a high rise apartment, or in a beachside mansion. So, too, geckos can live in a variety of acceptable conditions. Someone who grew up sharing a small room with two siblings lived and passed their medical exams as healthy. But, even if they loved their siblings, their lives would have been much better if they all had their own rooms. Geckos are not humans, but they are living beings that experience contentment, excitement, and stress. And we have the responsibility to develop our husbandry to provide them with the best life - not the minimum that they can physically survive.



The care I present here is keeper level care. Yes, you will be able to give them less than the best and, by all appearances, they are doing "just fine". But, why are you doing this if not to give your geckos the best life possible? Let me continue to work on increasing the quality of life within the breeding conditions. Don't take on that burden if you are not a breeder! We are entering into the enrichment phase of herpetoculture. I fully embrace this milestone. I love my enrichment wall with the large, naturalistic enclosures. That is the husbandry that this care guide imparts to you. I encourage you not to settle for less for your geckos.

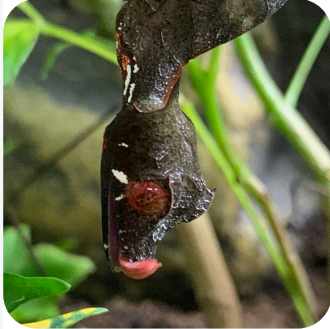
Yvette Strand

Uroplatus phantasticus

Satanic Leaf-tailed Gecko

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High Level Overview



Identification

Scientific name: *Uroplatus phantasticus*

Common name: Satanic Leaf-tailed Gecko, Phantastic Leaf-tailed Gecko

Community name: Phants, Satanics

There are no subspecies

Availability

CITES II; wild caught exports are strictly controlled

Captive bred individuals are easily found



Skill Level

Intermediate. *Uroplatus phantasticus* is hardy and easy to care for, but requires cool, humid temperatures. Usually this requires an air conditioning unit and a willingness to pay the high electric bill.

Interaction

Vivarium subject which should not be handled. Bites are unusual, but are only a pinch if they happen. The surprise of it happening is much greater than any pain.



Life behavior

Nocturnal. Arboreal. Inhabits midlevel branches. Dead leaf mimic. Uses camouflage as primary defense. Will jump or drop to escape. Can sprint short distances, will jump to item off the ground, will freeze and attempt to not be noticed. They are individuals and do not stay together as a family or form a group. They are best kept individually and have no need to breed.



Longevity

Beyond ten years. For best results, keep individually and do not breed them.

Feeding

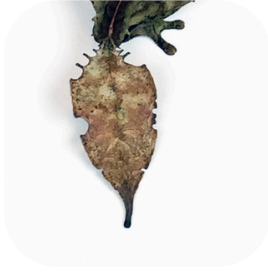
Strictly insectivorous. Are not picky or difficult eaters. Will happily live on crickets. Food needs to be live.

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Natural History



Jagged tail



Tear drop marking



Male tail base

Male distinctions often include tear drop shapes under eyes and jagged tails, but this is not definitive as both males and females can show those traits. The definitive characteristic is the hemipenial bulge at the tail base in the males.



Smooth tail



Clear cheeks



Female tail base

Range: East Central
Madagascar

Elevation: 400-1300m



Natural Habitat near Analamazaotra, Madagascar

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Enclosure

Recommended Enclosure Size

24" x 18" x 36"

61cm x 46cm x 92cm

Ideal Enclosure Size

36" x 18" x 36" or Larger

92cm x 46cm x 92cm

Cohabitation

Uroplatus phantasticus should not be kept together. Although they appear to tolerate each other, cohabitation creates unnecessary stress and risk.

"Phants" hang out amongst thin branches. Wider cages better allow typical nighttime activity. Due to high humidity requirements, glass or hybrid cages are common, but ensure there are vents for air circulation.

Important Design Elements

Plants

Used to provide dappled sunlight effect to give Phants options for light exposure

Branches

Many thin branches placed around the cage interior to allow the phants to crawl, run, and leap to every corner and side of the cage.

Substrate

Substrate is not mandatory. But it does have benefits. Leaf litter substrate provides a source of humidity, eliminates light reflection from the floor, provides egg laying places, and allows an opportunity to keep isopods which can provide hunting enrichment.



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Care Parameters

Temperature

Daytime 72°F/22°C

Basking None

Nighttime 65°F/18°C

Humidity/Hydration

Daytime >50%

Nighttime 90-100%

Mist surfaces 1-2 times a day

In dry environments, high humidity is often created by restricting airflow. It is critical that there be air exchange to avoid unhealthy, stagnant air.

Uroplatus phantasticus experiences a warm, wet rainy season and a drier, cooler dry season in their natural habitat. It is important to explore the benefits of providing a seasonal change. At this time, though, we provide constant conditions throughout the year and have not seen a need to change that. But do not stop experimenting! A cool season could provide valuable rest time. We give rest time by keeping them individually and not introducing them. But perhaps we could be more effective to add six months of cooling as well?

Never stop re-evaluating your husbandry. Care guides are just your starting point - not the final word. It is merely a snapshot of our present understanding.

UVB

UVI 1 at top branches

Lighting

12 hours on; 12 hours off

Feeding

0-4 months Daily; Ad Libitum

Adults 7-10 feeders Every other day

Gravid female 7-10 feeders Daily

Supplementation

Repashy
Calcium Plus LoD
Twice a week



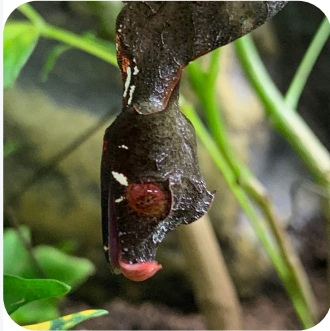
- Experiment with different feeders.
- Appropriate feeder size is the size of their mouth.
- Feeding can be done with deli cups, tongs, or feeders let loose in cage.
- Keep your feeder insects well fed, healthy, and nutritious for your gecko!

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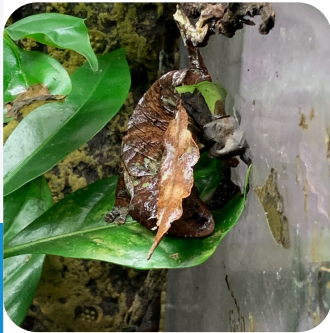
Your First Phant



Finding your Phant

Get a captive bred phant. Do not take on acclimation and de-parasitization of a wild caught. Leave that headache for the breeders. It is 100% worth it to buy captive bred.

Shop for Quality. Purchase your phant from the breeder whom you know has the best information and will be the best mentor. Do NOT price shop phants!



Before you bring home your Phant

Get the life schedule from the breeder. Before your phant comes to you, get the feeding/supplementation/hydration schedule that the phant got with the breeder. You don't have to do the same thing, but enacting changes gently can ease acclimation stress.

Have cage ready. It is best to have had the cage set-up and running to ensure daily temperature/humidity fluctuations are correct, plants are happy, and the lighting/misting automations are running smoothly.



Find an exotics vet. Hopefully you will never need one, but know the number of a veterinarian that you can call. Do not save this action item for when you need them!

Where are you getting your food? Figure out the food supply line ahead of time.



Shipping

Hold at Location. Insist on picking up your phant from the FedEx/UPS hub. Do NOT let your phant be delivered in the delivery truck. That is the most dangerous leg of the journey. Specifically, verify with your breeder that your phant will be sent "Hold at Location" and go pick your phant up yourself. Even if it is an hour away it is better than your phant being driven two hours with all the stops by a driver that doesn't care and who might just leave the box in the sun. This is not an exaggeration!

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Bringing your Phant Home



Receiving your Phant

Check on Gecko. When you receive your gecko, open the box and verify that the gecko arrived in good condition. Do not open up the deli cup they are in until you are home. Notify Misty Mountain Phants that the gecko is safely in your care.

Open box near cage. Once you are home, remove the deli cup from the box and open it inside the cage. Your phant will either be curled up and acting asleep or else will leap out. Be ready for either!

Notify the breeder. Let the breeder know everything is well. If there is any doubt as to the health of the gecko then now is the time to notify the breeder with images and video.



Acclimation

Hydration. Mist leaves to ensure the phant can drink and rehydrate. Don't spray phant directly as this will annoy it. Spray the area to lay down a coat of water droplets. Let them drink. Repeat every 30 minutes until your phant doesn't drink.

Handling. Handle your phant as little as possible. you need to do a quick physical inspection to report back to the breeder. But then leave your phant in their cage to recover from the journey. NEVER handle their tail or they will gift it to you. (not good).

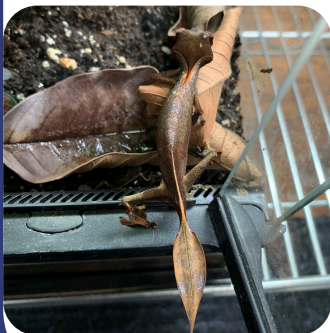
Feeding. You can offer food, but give them at least 24-48 hours to settle in before you get worried about them not eating. Some are shy eaters. The difference between phants eating and feeder insects escaping and hiding in the cage is whether poop appears.

Normal Activity Check. You know they have settled in when they sleep during the day and are bouncing around hunting at night.



BEWARE OPENING/CLOSING DOORS

Phants can snuggle into spaces which includes around the door. **ALWAYS verify where your phant is before you open the door(s) and before you close the doors.** I guarantee the one time you forget is the one time they will get pinched.



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Behaviors



Daytime Behaviors. Phants are nocturnal so they will be sleeping during the day. They sleep in the most bizarre positions and deliberately look like they are dead. It is very cool, but can be shocking the first time you see it.

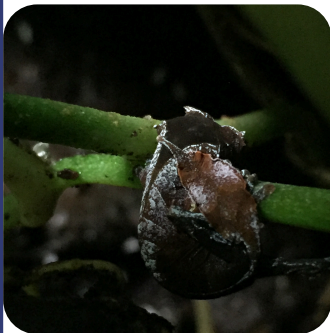
Nighttime Behaviors. Phants will be very active during the night. They may freeze in the light, but, in the dark, you will hear them actively jumping, hunting, and doing the death lunge at their food.

Jumping. Beware of sudden jumps when you are expecting them to be still. If they jump to escape they will probably not hurt themselves falling to the ground. They run a short distance and then hide. An escaped phant is not easy to find, but usually does not go far.

Biting/Hissing. Phants (especially babies) will hiss at you to scare you away. Some will not hesitate to bite with every bit of ferocity they have. Which isn't much. A phant bite is not much more than a pinch. But it can be a surprise and even scary the first time. They really play it up. **Warning: This is actually very dangerous for the phant as your surprise reaction could seriously hurt them.**



Tail waving/dropping. Phants have a dynamic tail which can wave like a cats when they are excited (hunting or mating) or it can drop when they are stressed or there is any pressure on the tail. A phant will live a long healthy life without their tail, but is holding your phant worth losing a tail?



Shedding. Phants shed off their old skin when they grow. This is a good thing. When it starts, your phant's color will be muted and may appear sickly to you. After your first time you will know exactly what is going on, but the first time can be concerning. The whitish skin will then flake off showing a bright new skin underneath. Shedding is a natural part of their life. Stuck shed can be an issue and, if it occurs, discuss this with your mentor/breeder.



Playing dead. If your phant suddenly dies, come back 24 hours later and see if they are still "dead". These guys play dead professionally.

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Tail loss is not uncommon

Medical

Loss of tail. Once the phant loses its tail it is gone. The tail will not grow back and it cannot be reconnected. Luckily, your phant will live a long and healthy life without its tail. To avoid this, be extremely careful opening and closing the cage. And if you have to hold your phant, be very careful and move slowly. If your phant loses its tail there is no need to call the vet unless there was trauma involved and an infection risk.



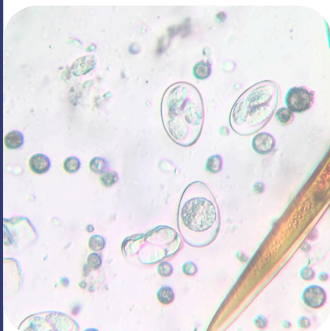
Calcium sacs around the neck (above) and the XRay (below)

Parasites. Every reptile can have parasites. Even captive bred reptiles can have parasites. And parasites can find their way back after they have been eliminated. Get a fecal check from your vet every year as a regular check-up item. Parasites are a concern to take seriously, but they are not cause for panic. Do not allow feeder insects to run "free range" if you get a positive for parasites in the fecal test.



Prolapse. If there is something pink coming out of the vent and it won't go back in it might be a hemipenial or intestinal prolapse which is a serious medical condition. Call the vet. And , yes, it is worth going to the emergency vet because these things usually happen on a Saturday night. Do not wait until normal business hours. Prolapse can happen for a number of reasons including dehydration. If it goes back in on its own then do not worry.

Calcium Sacs. Many geckos, *Uroplatus* especially, can develop sacs of calcium around their neck. It is very difficult to say definitively what causes them and what their effect is on the gecko. There are many ideas and hopefully we all will figure it out. We have had phants with and without sacs and both have laid healthy eggs. We have tried different combinations of dietary calcium/vitamin D3 and UVB. We, along with the rest of the *Uroplatus* community, are still working to unravel this mystery.



Eimeria Coccidia Parasite

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Breeding & Incubation



Male biting female

Should I Breed? Think long about the decision to breed. It is a wonderful experience, but it does induce stress for both the male and female involved. Make sure you are prepared for multiple babies.



Eggs on substrate

Mating. To start mating we introduce the male into the female's cage. Many people do the opposite and it works just as well. We move the male because our philosophy is to touch the females as little as possible. They have a hard enough job making eggs. They get the break. If the male is interested and the female is receptive the male will mount the female. Sometimes, he might bite her to hang on. This is not an attack and does not seem to hurt her. We leave them together for a week if they are getting along. If they start dominance play sooner we separate. Dominance signs include one staying high in the cage and one being low as well as avoidance or chasing.



Incubator

Gestation. With a successful mating the female will lay eggs 30-45 days afterwards. Two hard, calcium-shelled eggs will be laid under the leaves and on top of the dirt. Phants can retain sperm and can lay a pair of eggs every 30-45 days afterwards until their body decides to stop.



Hatchling

Incubation. We incubate eggs at 68°F/20°C with a slight nighttime drop for 120 days. We can get them to hatch in 90 days using 72°F/22°C, but the babies are smaller and weaker.

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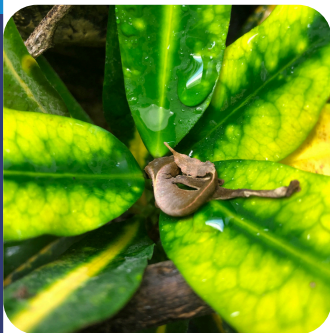
Hatchling Care



Hatchling Shed



Hatchling Housing



Hatchling



Give them a jungle

Newly Hatched. When you start getting close to hatch day either check your incubator every day or 20 times a day like the properly obsessed phant lover you are. When they hatch they are ready to go into a hatchling cage. You could put them into an adult sized cage and they would do just fine. They actively explore and will have no problem finding where ever you put the food.

Hatchling House. We create hatchling spaces in vivariums from 9" x 6" x 6.5" to 12"x12"x18". The vivariums need humidity and many thin branches for climbing. We keep our hatchlings individually from day 1 to ensure optimal health and growth.

First Shed. Your hatchling phant will shed in the first few days. It is best if they do this themselves, but they will die if they can't escape their hatch shed. if they seem to be languishing then it is worth gently helping them out of it using tweezers. Hopefully you have a breeding mentor by this time (the breeder you purchased your phants from is a prime candidate) as this is a delicate procedure that is difficult to teach/learn from a care guide.

Environmental. Temperatures and humidity are the same as with the adults.

Hydration. We use a fine handheld mister to coat the leaves with a gentle mist twice a day. Avoid puddles as Phant hatchlings might drown.

Feeding. Hatchlings can eat fruit flies and one week crickets. Crickets are good for putting on weight. We start supplement powder from the beginning, though waiting a few weeks to start has worked as well.

Sexing Hatchlings. It is hard to be definitive on the sexing of a phant until the hemipenal bulges develop. Experienced breeders can make very good guesses, but you don't know for sure until you see the hemipenal bulges.

Selling Juveniles. Before you start breeding you need to have a plan for selling the offspring. It is a good idea to start a social media account or some outreach when you get the idea to breed because it can be difficult to find buyers for a niche species. It isn't impossible, just have a plan for how you will do it and get it started before you need it.