

Rhacodactylus leachianus



Scientific Classification

Kingdom:	Anamalia
Phylum:	Cordata
Class:	Reptilia
Order:	Squamata
Suborder:	Serpentes
Family:	<i>Diplodactylidae</i>
Genus	<i>Rhacodactylus</i>
Species	<i>R. leachianus</i>

Binomial Name

Rhacodactylus leachianus
(Cuvier, 1829)

Synonyms

- *Ascalabotes leachianus*
Cuvier, 1829
- *Pteropleura leachianus*
— Gray, 1831
- *Lomadactylus leachianus*
— van der Hoeven, 1833
- *Gecko leachii*
Schinz, 1834
- *Platydactylus leachianus*
— Wiegmann, 1834
- *Hoplodactylus leachianus*
— Fitzinger, 1843
- *Rhacodactylus leachianus*
— Bocage, 1873^[1]

supplement.^[7]

Taxonomy

Historically, there have been three recognized [subspecies](#) of *R. leachianus* (including the [nominotypical subspecies](#)): *R. l. aubrianus*, *R. l. henkeli* (first described by Seipp and Obst in 1994), and *R. l. leachianus*. However, based on recent molecular data, no populations of *R. leachianus* are granted subspecies status at the present time.^{[6][8]}

Rhacodactylus leachianus, commonly known as the **New Caledonian giant gecko** or **Leach's giant gecko**, is a large [species](#) of [gecko](#), first described by [Georges Cuvier](#) in 1829, which is [endemic](#) to [New Caledonia](#).

R. leachianus is found in all of the southern and eastern portions of the main island of New Caledonia, as well as on several of the smaller islands in the group.

Etymology

The [specific name](#), *leachianus*, is honor of English [zoologist](#) [William Elford Leach](#).^[2]

Description

At 14 inches (360 mm) total length, it is the largest [extant](#) gecko in the world^[3] and is considered an example of [island gigantism](#). It has a heavy body, loose skin, and a small, stumpy tail. It is variable in color, coming in shades of mottled green, gray, and brown.^[4]

Biology

R. leachianus is an arboreal species, living in trees. It is [nocturnal](#), but may come out to bask in the sun during the day.^[4] It eats a diet of insects, spiders, small vertebrates, fruit, nectar, and sap.^[4] Adult females lay two eggs at a time, having up to 10 clutches per year.^[4] The gecko can make a loud growling noise, and local people call it "the devil in the trees."^[4]

Folklore

Some of the indigenous [Kanak people](#) of New Caledonia fear this animal. This is because of an old superstition which purports that the Giant Gecko has the ability to cling to a person's body and pull out their soul.^[5]

Conservation status

Populations of this species have likely been reduced by habitat destruction and degradation. This process is still a threat to the species. It also faces predation by [introduced species](#) such as cats and various rodents. It is also [poached](#). It can be electrocuted when it travels along power lines. This species is protected and it lives in several nature reserves.^[6]

In captivity

This species is propagated with [captive breeding](#). Wild populations are protected. This species can live up to 20 years in captivity. It can be kept in a large aquarium. Breeding pairs can be housed together, but otherwise the animal can be aggressive to tankmates. As an arboreal species, it should be provided with simulated tree holes in a tank with plenty of vertical space. A commercial gecko diet can be used. Live insects can be given as a